

DRAFT ZONING PROPOSAL WOULD LEGALIZE DETACHED ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS IN SOME OUTLYING BOSTON NEIGHBORHOODS

On July 17, 2026, the City of Boston released [proposed zoning changes](#) that would apply to Hyde Park, Roslindale, and West Roxbury. Part of the city's [Neighborhood Housing Zoning Initiative](#), the changes are designed to make it easier to reconfigure or add more living space to existing homes, install external features [like wheelchair ramps](#), and build separate dwellings on the same lot, including accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

The proposed new zoning sets clear dimensional regulations for attached and internal ADUs so that many more such projects will not require discretionary approval from the [Zoning Board of Appeal](#). It also allows detached ADUs by right in three residential zoning districts in Boston's outlying neighborhoods and allows them as a conditional use in four others. The new zoning also [subsumes "non-detached ADUs"](#) into the regular unit count of a building, an attempt to "simplify regulations and definitions for ADUs," in the words of the red-lined version of the draft zoning. Lastly, the new zoning would allow ADUs in non-owner-occupied and short-term rental arrangements.

“

States need to start having a conversation about the gross inequity between what renters pay in taxes for local services and what homeowners pay. Homeowners often get some kind of discounted rate—a homestead exemption. And renters are paying, through their rent, at a commercial tax rate, which is often twice or more what the homeowner is paying for the same city [or] county real estate services.”

National Multifamily Housing Council President
[Sharon Wilson Géo](#)

A MassINC survey conducted in April and May 2026 found that Massachusetts homeowners who didn't complete a first-time homebuyer course were twice as likely to report that their home has ever been at risk of foreclosure.

[Source: [The Boston Foundation](#)]

FACT OF THE MONTH

Currently, most types of ADUs—which often take the form of backyard cottages, attic or basement apartments, and attached additions to existing homes—are functionally illegal in Boston. The state legalized them in 2024 as part of the Affordable Homes Act, but because Boston isn't subject to the statute that the AHA amended, the state's "protected use ADU" framework doesn't apply to the city.

Instead, Boston has embarked on its own effort to legalize ADUs, which has proven piecemeal. A 2017 pilot program to build ADUs by right in Mattapan resulted in [just two new ADUs](#). In 2019, the city legalized ADUs citywide, but [only in internal reconfigurations](#) of existing homes. ADUs that are detached from the primary dwelling, which [accounted for 48 percent](#) of ADUs permitted statewide in 2025, remain illegal.

According to the [Mayor's Office of Housing](#), 212 ADUs were permitted in the city between 2019 and July 2025. By comparison, the City of Seattle, with a population that is about 20 percent larger than Boston's, [permitted 4,770 ADUs](#) over a similar timeframe.

The main obstacle to making ADUs workable in Boston is the baseline zoning code, which would require approximately [99 percent of residential property owners](#) in Boston to seek a waiver or discretionary approval before building one. The proposed new zoning would begin to address this, allowing more ADU projects to be built by right.

The city has already hosted [at least half a dozen](#) in-person and virtual public meetings to educate residents about the proposed zoning. The public comment period for the new zoning [lasts until October 31st, 2026](#), after which it will need to be approved for adoption by the city's Zoning Commission. Still on the docket in Boston are similar zoning reforms in other neighborhoods, which likely won't get underway until 2027.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

WITH DUPLEXES AND YIGBY ON THE TABLE, LEGISLATURE BUYS ITSELF MORE TIME ON MASS WINS ACT

Historically, July 31st in election years has been a strict deadline for the Massachusetts Legislature to push bills to the finish line. In 2024, the Legislature extended its own deadline to pass a major housing bond bill, which [it did](#) in early August. But in 2026, it could take not days but months after the original deadline before some important legislation makes it to Governor Healey's desk.

That's because the Legislature formally changed its own rules to allow negotiations and votes [as late as January 2027](#), as long as each chamber passed a version of the legislation during the formal session. Thus, one high-profile economic development bill that includes several housing reform provisions is still in the mix.

Known as the "[Mass Wins Act](#)," the bill passed the House and the Senate in July, with some key differences. Only [the House version of the bill](#) would allow religious organizations to build multifamily housing by right on their properties, a policy dubbed "Yes in God's Backyard," or YIGBY. Only the Senate version would make it legal [to build duplexes](#) statewide in areas currently reserved only for single-family homes.

Some housing reform ideas made both versions of the bill, including [codifying site plan review in state law](#) as a technical process with clear standards. The vast majority of Massachusetts municipalities already use site plan reviews to ensure that new developments have adequate utility connections and vehicle circulation. But proponents argue that defining the procedure in state law may help maintain objectivity and avoid [unnecessary politicization](#).

Both versions of the bill also provide an optional framework for municipalities to use to facilitate commercial-to-residential property conversions.

Still other provisions address the same topic, but the House and Senate versions take vastly different approaches. For example, the House bill would allow municipalities to give tenants a window to [collectively purchase their homes](#) upon sale of the property. The Senate bill would create a limited pilot program that does the same in no more than five municipalities, with additional guardrails at the state level.

The Mass Wins Act follows a FY27 budget bill signed earlier in July that has already enacted several notable housing reforms. The budget bill makes it easier to [issue use variances](#), which upon municipal discretion could allow multifamily housing in areas where it was previously prohibited. It also [protects development rights](#) in cases



A duplex in Rockport, Massachusetts. A pending bill would make duplexes legal in most residential areas statewide.

where zoning changes mid-process and allows electronic (rather than physical) notifications for public hearings related to zoning.

Between YIGBY, duplex legalization, and other provisions, the Mass Wins Act contains even more tangible reforms than the budget bill's mostly process-based tweaks. With housing consistently [topping Massachusetts voters' list of concerns](#) in public opinion polls, some observers have suggested that the Legislature will be [highly motivated](#) to pass the Mass Wins Act and other bills before Election Day on November 3.

RECENT OP-ED

[Rent Control Proposal Should Be Wake-Up Call to Real Estate Industry](#)

[Banker & Tradesman](#)

COMING SOON

Upcoming issues of *The House Call* will include segments on:

- A comparison of production outcomes with the state's housing goals
- Takeaways from the midterm election
- And more!