



Lilypad Homes

Junior Units - Frequently Asked Questions

What exactly is a Junior Unit / Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit / JADU / Junior Second Unit / JSU?

- These are all different terms for the same thing. Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit is the formal name for a special type of accessory dwelling unit that is created specifically from an existing bedroom or bedrooms. The footprint of the house cannot be expanded to create a Junior Unit. The unit can have a private bathroom or can share a bath (except in the few towns that require a private bathroom). It must have its own exterior entry and an efficiency kitchen, and the door that connects the Junior Unit to the rest of the house must remain in place. A second interior door can be added, as in adjoining hotel rooms, with sound insulation between the doors. The door(s) would be locked from both sides to ensure privacy. Retaining the connecting door makes the home more flexible – over time as needs change, the homeowner could rent out the Junior Unit, or live in it and rent out the rest of the house or open the connecting door(s) and utilize the entire house.

Are Junior Units legal everywhere?

- At this point, Junior Units are legal in most towns in the North Bay. The current list of jurisdictions that allow Junior Units can be found [here](#). [AB 2406](#), a bill passed in 2016 by the California state legislature, makes it easy for any jurisdiction in California to adopt Junior Unit code, and [SB 1469](#), which will be considered in the 2017-2018 legislative session, would require that all jurisdictions allow Junior Units.

How much does it cost to create a Junior Unit?

- The cost can vary widely. It depends on what amenities the bedroom already has, whether any repairs are needed, and what type of finishes are selected. A master suite that already has an exterior door and access path would be less expensive to turn into a Junior Unit than a room that needs an exterior door and path. If the homeowner plans to live in the Junior Unit, he or she may want to select special finishes that have personal appeal, and that could increase the cost. Very rough cost estimates are between \$10,000 and \$50,000, but it could cost more depending on the situation.

What fees will I have to pay?

- Some municipalities have planning permit fees, and some don't. All municipalities have building permit fees, which are based on the value of the project. Recent California state legislation eliminated fire and utility agency fees for Junior Units.

What if I want to create a unit but don't have the money?

- If you live in Marin County, the Marin Housing Authority offers two loans that might be available to you to create or legalize a unit. The [Residential Rehabilitation Loan](#) is for lower income homeowners, and the [Rental Rehabilitation Loan](#) is for homeowners of any income who agree to rent to the holder of a Housing Choice Voucher. In some cases, these loans need not be repaid until your home is sold. Other counties may have similar programs
- If you are at least 62 years old and have significant equity in your home you may be able to qualify for a reverse mortgage.

What is the process once I decide I want to create a Junior Unit?

- Understand the code: The first step is to become familiar with the Junior Unit code for your town. You can see the requirements by clicking on your town's link [here](#).
- As-Built Plans: You will need a set of plans that show your property and house as they are now. These plans are used during the design and permitting process.
- Design: You'll need to determine where to put the door, the kitchen, additional storage, etc. There are many design tricks for optimizing small spaces – you can do some research and design the unit yourself, or hire a design professional to assist you.
- Junior Unit Planning Permit: Once you have the layout figured out, you are ready to submit an application for a planning permit if your town requires one. You'll need to submit the as-built plans and the plans for the Junior Unit along with the application.
- Select a Contractor: Once you have confirmed what you want, it's time to talk to a number of contractors and get bids and references. You can work with the selected contractor to make sure your design is cost-effective.
- Construction Drawings: You will need a standard set of construction drawings that show the proposed changes in more detail and provide additional required information.
- Building Permit: You or your contractor will submit the building permit application and construction drawings.
- Shopping: You or your design professional or contractor will need to select and purchase cabinets, appliances, fixtures, and more, depending on your project requirements.
- Construction: Once you receive the building permit, construction can begin.

What if I want to create a bigger unit, such as a cottage in my backyard?

- If you want to create a unit by doing anything other than converting an existing bedroom, then your project will fall into the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) category. These units can be detached, such as a backyard cottage, created from “unconditioned space” such as a garage or attic or walk-out basement, or carved out of existing “conditioned” space such as a family room. ADUs can have full kitchens and can be larger than Junior Units.

Is there any way to create a Junior Unit if all of my bedrooms are on the second floor?

- This configuration makes it more challenging, but in many cases when all of a home’s bedrooms are on an upper floor, an exterior stairway and entry deck can be built to provide access.

Are there minimum and maximum sizes for a Junior Unit?

- Some towns have set a minimum size of 150 or 220 square feet for a Junior Unit, and the maximum size is 500 square feet. Any space that is shared by occupants of the main house and occupants of the Junior Unit, such as a bathroom, laundry room, or garage, is not included in the calculation.

Can I make a Junior Unit bigger by including more than a bedroom and bathroom?

- As long as a Junior Unit includes one bedroom, in most towns it can incorporate other rooms as well. For example, you could combine two bedrooms and a bathroom to create a unit, or a bedroom, family room, and bathroom. Just remember that the private space can’t exceed 500 square feet.

What are the rules for Junior Unit kitchens?

- In most jurisdictions, there are limits on the size of the Junior Unit kitchen, which will have a small sink and outlets for [plug-in kitchen appliances](#). No garbage disposal, gas, or 220 v electrical outlets are allowed. Typically, a Junior Unit kitchen will have an under-counter refrigerator, and a number of small electric appliances such as an induction cooktop, a microwave or convection/microwave, or a toaster oven. Homeowners should provide the appliances to ensure they are energy-efficient and in good repair.

Does a Junior Unit have to have a washer and dryer?

- Washers and dryers are not allowed in Junior Units, but if the home’s washer and dryer are in a garage, the homeowner may be willing to let the renter use them.

Does a Junior Unit have to have dedicated yard space?

- In most jurisdictions, there is no requirement for a Junior Unit to have dedicated outdoor space, but providing access to shared or private outdoor space will make your unit more attractive to most renters.

Does a Junior Unit need a dedicated parking space?

- Effective January 1, 2017, towns are prohibited from requiring additional parking for a Junior Unit. Among the towns that adopted a Junior Unit ordinance prior to January 1, 2017, some now require parking in certain situations, and it's unclear how they will interpret the applicability of the new law to their existing codes.

How much rent could I get for a Junior Unit?

- The rent on Junior Units can range from \$0 to whatever the booming rental market will bear. Because Junior Units are a small, non-traditional form of housing, they tend to be less expensive than apartment rentals. They can be offered free of cost, such as to family members, childcare providers, or healthcare providers. They can be offered at a reduced rate to someone who provides the homeowner with services such as gardening or driving, or they can be offered at a market price that works for both the tenant and the homeowner. The rent that a specific Junior Unit would command is based on size, location, amenities (view, outdoor space, storage, access to transit, washer/dryer access, etc.), and its appeal to potential renters. Craigslist can give you an idea of the rents in your area.

What if I want to create a Junior Unit but my town has not yet adopted a Junior Unit ordinance?

- You should contact the planning department and ask if you can create a Junior Unit under current ADU code. Some towns are being very flexible. If that's not the case in your town, contact the planning commissioners and city councilmembers and urge them to adopt code to permit Junior Units. Let them know that there is no need for the Planning Department to research and develop an ordinance since [AB 2406](#) provides model code that they can simply adopt.