



Lilypad Homes

Jr. Units - Frequently Asked Questions

What exactly is a Jr. 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 Jr. 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 Jr. 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 Jr. 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 Jr. Units legal everywhere?

- At this point, Jr. Units are legal in several towns in the Bay Area, many of which are in Marin and Sonoma counties. Several additional Bay Area towns are planning to adopt Jr. Unit ordinances or are in the process of doing so. The current list of jurisdictions that allow Jr. 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 Jr. Unit code.

How much does it cost to create a Jr. Unit?

- The cost can vary widely. It depends on what amenities the bedroom already has, whether any renovation is 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 Jr. Unit than a room that needs an exterior door and path. If the homeowner plans to live in the Jr. 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 \$40,000, 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. The fees are listed when you click on your town's link [here](#). 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 Jr. 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.
- Lilypad is working to develop other sources of financing.

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

- Understand the code: The first step is to become familiar with the Jr. Unit code for your town. You can see an overview of 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.
- Jr. 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 Jr. 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.

How can Lilypad Homes help me through the process of creating a Jr. Unit in Marin, Sonoma, or Napa County?

- Education: Lilypad offers [classes](#) that can help you to determine if your home is a good candidate for a Jr. Unit.
- Phone Consultation: Lilypad staff members are available to answer your questions – please schedule a call by sending a request to info@lilypadhomes.org.
- Feasibility Assessment: Lilypad staff can visit your home to assess its Jr. Unit potential and provide some ideas on optimal layout and design. The fee for this service is \$250. A grant will cover the cost of the assessment for Marin County homeowners who will use their new unit for long-term housing.
- Plans and Construction Drawings: For a fee, Lilypad can measure your home and create the plans you need.
- Design: Lilypad staff members will use their small-space expertise to develop a design for your unit that optimizes the space and meets your needs. The design fee is \$100/hour.
- Shopping: Lilypad can also help you select materials and finishes for your project. The fee for this service is \$100/hour.
- Leasing: A [rental / lease agreement](#) specifically designed for Jr. Units and ADUs is available for purchase on the Lilypad website.

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 Jr Units. Lilypad can help you to determine if you could create an ADU on your property.

Is there any way to create a Jr. 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 Jr. Unit?

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

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

- As long as a Jr. 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 Jr. Unit kitchens?

- In most jurisdictions, there are limits on the size of the Jr. 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 Jr. 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 Jr. Unit have to have a washer and dryer?

- Washers and dryers are not allowed in Jr. 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 Jr. Unit have to have dedicated yard space?

- There is no requirement for a Jr. 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 Jr. Unit need a dedicated parking space?

- Effective January 1, 2017, towns are prohibited from requiring additional parking for a Jr. Unit. Among the towns that adopted a Jr. 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 Jr. Unit?

- The rent on Jr. Units can range from \$0 to whatever the booming rental market will bear. Because Jr. 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 Jr. 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.

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

- You should contact the planning department and ask if you can create a Jr. 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 Jr. 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. There may be changes you can make in your home to move toward a Jr. Unit even before code is adopted in your town. [Email us](#) to request a phone consultation.

If you have general Jr. Unit questions or specific questions about the suitability of your property for a Jr. Unit or ADU, please email us at info@lilypadhomes.org.