

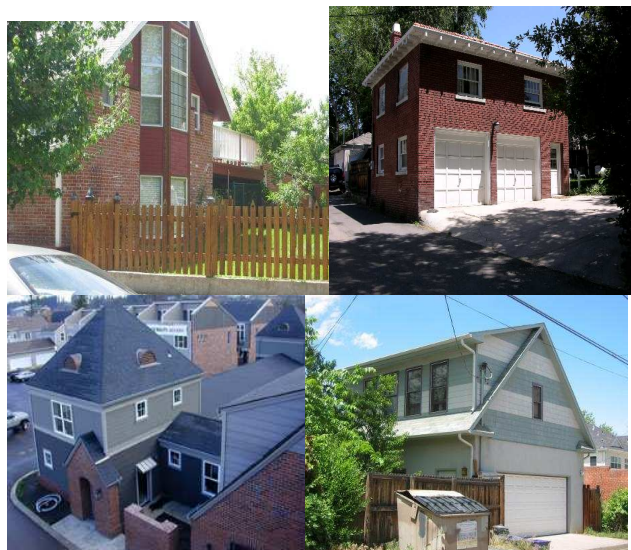
Carriage Houses Will Offer More Choice for Homeowners

Friends of Granny believes Carriage Houses can slow the rush to scrape-offs

Urban planners nationwide are including the re-introduction of the traditional Carriage House in their quest to revitalize older urban city neighborhoods.

Carriage Houses, are also called Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) or Granny Flats. Whatever the name, they've been around for generations, especially in Denver's older, established neighborhoods, and now are part of the newly minted Stapleton area as well.

Back in the 1950s, Carriage Houses fell out of fashion because of the sprawl the metro area experienced. Now that sprawl is seen as a mistake, Carriage Houses are being reborn. Why? Because Carriage Houses offer homeowners more choice on how to best use their property and help stabilize changing neighborhoods.



Carriage Houses in all styles add value to property

Under present zoning law, homeowners are limited in what they can do with their property when the time comes to accommodate elderly parents, companions or boomerang kids. They can add on, pop the top, or scrape and rebuild. But these are expensive, strenuous

choices often beyond homeowners with limited resources.

As a result, a number of homeowners have chosen to sell and move, often to developers who then scrape the house and put up a mega-mansion or duplex. The proliferation of duplexes is a growing concern to many residents in established communities. Many worry that the trend is altering the character of their neighborhood.

So, many people are supporting the Carriage House as a tool to help preserve neighborhood character. Carriage Houses can help because they are a less expensive alternative to scraping a property. Allowing a habitable, second-floor space to be tastefully constructed above a backyard garage dims the need to scrape the main house.

Carriage Houses also help homeowners cope with financial and family realities. When an elderly parent is out of options, who wants to be the one to say: "Sorry, mom, the zoning code won't let you do what you want."

A Carriage House solves that by offering choices. These detached dwellings can be used for storage, an art studio, a home office, a getaway for out-of-town guests, a refuge for a family member either elderly or youthful, or even a tenant.

Which choice makes more sense?

Imagine two 1890 Victorian homes side by side on the same street. The owners of both properties want to improve their homes, but they are retired and on reduced incomes.

One homeowner decides to scrape his property and replace it with a duplex. He plans to end up with two modern side-by-side homes on the same lot where his Victorian once stood. He intends to sell one unit and live in the other. Neighbors worry that the character of their street will suffer.

The other homeowner chooses to build a Granny Flat above a detached garage in the back yard and rent the flat to his daughter, who is studying to become a surgeon. Her rent will pay the relatively modest cost of building the structure and may also finance improvements to the Victorian. Neighbors praise him for preserving the character of the street.

Only one trouble. Existing city code permits tearing down the Victorian to build a duplex, but it won't allow a second story on a garage. Two dwelling units can be attached side by side on a lot, the city says, but not detached front and back. The homeowner says that's crazy. Neighbors agree. The city says its hands are tied by current law.

Aging in Place

Houses reflect the way people live in varying stages of their lives. Families arrange their homes to accommodate kids and express youthful vigor. Empty-nesters organize their homes to reflect peace and tranquility. And retirees set up their homes to cope with physical limitations and the necessities of assisted care.

More than 250,000 Americans are retiring every month and the number will grow as Baby Boomers age. AARP research suggests that the overwhelming number of these retirees prefer to age in the place they know, the neighborhoods where they've lived their lives.

Add this to the fact that nationwide retiring boomers are increasingly less and less inclined to move to the Sun Belt and prefer to stay in communities they know and love.

Why should zoning restrict seniors' options when the need for a caregiver or companion is at hand? A Carriage House can provide a solution to those struggling to "age in place."

Experts on aging are blunt: There aren't going to be enough retirement homes. People are going to have to modify the houses they're living in now to accommodate their needs to come. And these people are going to need every tool possible, including detached Carriage Houses.

Convert your back yard to a lovely courtyard

Carriage Houses give the green space between the detached dwelling and the main house new purpose.

That patch of crab grass that was your back yard can become a lovely courtyard that's safe and inviting.



Lovely courtyards appeal to multigenerational families

The fact is that large open yards are difficult to decorate and tedious to care for. They also demand copious quantities of water, a most precious resource.

Compact spaces can be more easily maintained and designed to serve the needs of our growing number of multigenerational families.

Let's take back the alleys that belong to us all

Why are backyard garages so often tagged with graffiti? Because hardly anyone is ever back there paying attention to what goes on.

Most homeowners live in the front part of their properties and watch what goes on in the front of their house. Which is why front yards are safer, cleaner and better-maintained.

What if the alley behind the house was another front yard? Would the area be better kept up? There's no reason our city's alleys have to be dumping grounds for trash and highways for vagrants and taggers. Carriage Houses put eyes in the alley.

Sustainability isn't optional any more

It isn't pleasant to have to undo the mistakes of the past, but that's what a sustainable world requires.

Building communities of single-use homes that are dependent on automobiles was a planning blunder America is only beginning to wake up to. Correcting the situation will mean transforming urban areas into places where housing, employment and transit are integrated into mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods. America can no longer afford McMansions, sprawl and Hummers.

Carriage Houses are a positive step in a sustainable direction. They can accommodate a growing population with little disruption and help preserve the legacy and richness of older neighborhoods. They are an attractive alternative to the mid-rise or high-rise.

They give homeowners new and exciting choices. They are safe, affordable, versatile structures that can benefit young and old. They offer a reasonable answer to competing family needs that respect personal privacy and independence. They encourage investment in homes and add value to property.

They are a "green" way of embracing change without being a difficult departure from the past. They can make a real difference in America's struggle to become a sustainable society. Best of all, they are the right thing to do.

In the words of Denver's Manager of Planning, Peter Park, *"When cities stop changing, they start dying."* By any standard, Denver is an attractive city, and attractive cities attract people.

All of us know our neighborhoods are also changing and that cannot be stopped. But what we would like to do is slow that rate of change to a more comfortable level. Friends of Granny doesn't think that is too much to ask; and Carriage Houses as another alternative for homeowners is one way that can happen.

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