

## Questions arising about the ACC Planning Department proposed text on Secondary Dwellings and Minimum Home Size

Cedar Creek Civic Association, July 2026

Allowing owners of single family residential homes to construct a secondary dwelling unit on their property is not always bad or unwarranted. Adding a guest house or cottage to your backyard might be great way to support old or sick relatives for example. The current rezoning proposals by the ACC Planning Department leave so many unanswered questions as to suggest that their proposal is not ready for implementation. The proposed text has seen very little public comment and the time line for implementation seems accelerated. Below are some of the questions we have about the proposals.

*If your neighbor adds a secondary dwelling unit, does this increase your home's value or decrease it?* Property values are based on sales of comparative homes in your neighborhood. Experts are uncertain about the impact of adding a secondary dwelling unit on the value of a property and, just as important, to what extent it impacts neighborhood property values. Clearly its value depends on how the addition is done – something poorly specified in the ACC proposal. Detractors of the proposed change worry about decreased neighborhood property values (among many other concerns). Supporters of this change see this as a way to increase available housing for smaller and lower income families, and potentially provide some revenue to the owner of the primary residence. Regardless, no one seems able to provide assurances that neighborhood property values will not decrease.

*If the secondary dwelling unit differs dramatically from the design of the primary residence or from the design of homes in the neighborhood will that affect property values?* The text does not specify that the secondary dwelling unit be constructed with materials and exterior design the same or similar to the primary dwelling unit. For example, if the primary residence has a street-facing brick facade must the secondary dwelling unit also have a brick street-facing facade?

*How does adding multiple secondary dwelling units to a residential subdivision impact county infrastructure?* Why is there no accompanying report on how this proposed major zoning change will impact infrastructure and emergency services in the county? Requests for zoning and/or land use classification changes are typically accompanied by a report from Planning Department staff that includes an assessment of impacts on public utilities, streets and access to fire and emergency services. The resulting increase in population density in residential neighborhoods will change the demand for fire and emergency services as well as strain current infrastructure. Does the county have the capacity to handle the water, sewer, and storm water management needs in the near term resulting from this zoning change?

▶ *How does adding more hard space to residential yards impact **storm water management**?*

Storm water management fees are calculated on the hard surface square footage on your property. Do storm water fees increase proportionally to the added hard surface coverage added by the secondary dwelling?

▶ *Will **sewers** be able to handle the increased loads?* Our county sewer systems are already inadequate and in need of extensive repairs in many locations.

▶ *Can residential streets handle the additional **traffic**? Handle it safely?*

▶ *How does more on-street parking change accessibility to **emergency services**? **Postal delivery**? **Pedestrian and bicyclists safety**?* The proposed text states “Guest houses, secondary suites, or backyard cottages may include but are not required to provide one (1) additional off-street parking space in conformance with all other additional standards set forth in the Title.” Thus, residential neighborhoods are guaranteed to see more on-street parking and streets experience more

traffic. The few Georgia counties that allow secondary dwelling units typically also require at least one off-street parking space for the unit's residents.

*How close to property lines could secondary dwelling units be built?* The proposed zoning change does not specify minimum side or rear setbacks but references back to existing setbacks for primary residential units and accessory structures. It looks like a secondary dwelling unit could be built as close as 3 feet to side and rear property lines. Other Georgia counties that allow secondary units have established minimum rear and side setbacks that are a function of the size of the property (see for example the Guinnett County municipal code section 210-140.1). The ACC proposed text includes no such minimums.

*Can a structure manufactured off-site be used as a secondary dwelling unit?* Clearly the proposed text excludes buildings commonly referred to as "mobile homes" (class A and class B manufactured homes). It says nothing about the acceptability of "prefabricated kit homes," that is, structures that arrive in pieces on a truck, not as a finished dwelling, and not as a pile of raw lumber, but as a complete set of manufactured components, pre-cut to size, engineered to fit together, and ready to assemble. County codes make no reference to this kind of structure, but it is quite possible that many homeowners would prefer to use a home kit in constructing a secondary dwelling due to shorter build times and less disruption associated with kits.

*How do we ensure that just one family occupies the secondary dwelling unit?* It is expected that a single family and not several unrelated adults would occupy the secondary dwelling unit. We already have issues with rentals to unrelated adults in RS communities that county code enforcement seems unable to police. Doesn't allowing rental of secondary dwelling units without some assurance of who is living there simply increase this problem?

*Is a primary or secondary dwelling unit of 150 to 250 square feet of habitable floor space realistic as a family home?* The current Clarke County municipal code limits guest homes and accessory buildings to 1000 square feet. The proposed modification to Section 9-15-15 Minimum floor area requirements - resets the minimum habitable floor area required for a single family home, primary or secondary, to that set by the [International Property Maintenance Code](#). First, this is confusing since a "maintenance code" used to specify how a property is to be maintained is being used to specify a "building code," that is, how a building is to be constructed. Secondly, this code document must be purchased from its publisher and hence these "public code specs" are not really public. Finally, this code is primarily designed to control and limit overcrowding in city neighborhoods, for example by specifying minimum apartment sizes, and is not typically used to specify acceptable square footage for a new "single family home". The ACC proposal only requires that the "Subordinate dwelling has less habitable square footage and fewer bedrooms than the principal dwelling." So, could a 2,500 square foot primary residence on less than a half acre add a 2,400 square foot secondary dwelling unit? Most people would not consider this as a "secondary" dwelling. Note that the few Georgia counties that do allow secondary dwelling units place greater restrictions on the size of the building. A typical restriction might specify that "The accessory dwelling unit shall not exceed 50% of the principal residence's heated floor area." or "If in a separate building, the height of the building containing the accessory dwelling shall not exceed the height of the principal dwelling. " *Shouldn't the size of the secondary dwelling unit be also tied to the lot size?*