



## Board of Health

Kathleen Ward Brown, ScD  
Member

Edward Cosgrove, PhD  
Vice Chair

Stephen Epstein, MD, MPP  
Chair

# Policy Position: Accessory Dwelling Units

The Needham Board of Health believes changing the Town's bylaws to allow accessory dwelling units is aligned with the Board's mandate from the Massachusetts General Court to protect the public health and wellness of the Town of Needham and all its residents. <sup>1,2</sup>

Needham lacks affordable, available, accessible, age-friendly housing. Over 50% of Needham seniors state that they would consider moving out of Needham due to the high cost of housing, while over 90% state it is somewhat, very, or extremely important for them to remain in Needham as they age. <sup>3</sup>

Affordable, high-quality housing is linked to improved health. For example, when living in an affordable home, individuals can put more money towards nutritious food and health care, rather than housing. Additionally, stable, affordable housing reduces stress and improves mental health. <sup>4</sup>

One approach to mitigate this issue is allowing accessory dwelling units. Accessory dwelling units – also known as “in-law” apartments – are defined as “a self-contained apartment in an owner-occupied single family home that is either attached to the principal dwelling or in a separate structure on the same property”. <sup>5</sup>

Accessory dwelling units can be beneficial because they:

- Increase housing options while maintaining the physical character of the town
- Provide moderately-priced homes
- Help young and older adults and people with disabilities stay in town as their needs change
- Increase revenue: for homeowners through rental income; for the Town through greater tax revenue generated by added value to existing homes
- Decrease isolation and depression as older adults remain in the town where they have connections and live close to others <sup>6</sup>

The Needham Board of Health recognizes the 68 cities and towns around Boston that have allowed ADUs in some capacity and stands with the Center for Housing Policy, AARP, and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, among others, in support of accessory dwelling units.<sup>6</sup> The Needham Board of Health agrees with a report for Needham’s Public Health Division which states accessory dwelling units “are a low-impact, high-value way to address the problem of diminishing housing options”.<sup>7</sup>

This Policy Position was discussed at a public meeting on October 18, 2018 and was formally adopted following a unanimous vote during a noticed public meeting, November 16, 2018.



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<sup>1</sup> M.G.L. ch. 111, s.31, available at: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVI/Chapter111/Section31>

<sup>2</sup> M.G.L. ch. 111, s.122, available at: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVI/Chapter111/Section122>

<sup>3</sup> Needham Council on Aging and Needham Public Health Department. Assessment of Housing and Transit Options for Needham Seniors. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Maqbool N, Viveiros J, Ault M. The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Health: A Research Summary. Center for Housing Policy. 2015. Available: <https://www.rupco.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/The-Impacts-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Health-CenterforHousingPolicy-Maqbool.etal.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Smart Growth/ Smart Energy Toolkit: Model Bylaw for Accessory Dwelling Units. (n.d.) Available: [http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart\\_growth\\_toolkit/bylaws/ADU-Bylaw.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/bylaws/ADU-Bylaw.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Dain A. The State of Zoning for Accessory Dwelling Units. Pioneer Opportunity. 2018. White Paper No. 184. Available: [https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic\\_opportunity/study-boston-area-communities-should-loosen-restrictions-for-accessory-dwelling-units/](https://pioneerinstitute.org/economic_opportunity/study-boston-area-communities-should-loosen-restrictions-for-accessory-dwelling-units/)

<sup>7</sup> Miara C. Accessory Dwelling Units: A Report for Needham Public Health Division. 2017.