

# Kent ADU Community Engagement Summary

City of Kent ADU Code Update | April 2023

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## Introduction

This Community Engagement Summary provides an overview of the work completed by the ADU project team (Kent staff, BERK, and CAST Architecture) to inform updates to the ADU code. Engaging the community is crucial to any planning process, particularly for a topic as personal as housing. It was essential that Kent residents’ perspectives were sought, heard, and integrated into the policy direction for the City. In order to effectively reduce barriers, the project team listened to issues through the lens of the public, residents, and professionals who have attempted to build ADUs.

Outreach for this project was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of research into the existing landscape of ADUs in Kent, including interviews with individuals who have attempted or successfully complete ADU construction in the city. Phase two was a community survey to test concepts for proposed changes to reduce barriers in existing code language. These survey findings build upon information gathered during the robust engagement process that informed the Kent Housing Options Plan creation in 2020 and 2021.

# Key Takeaways

Engagement for this project included targeted interviews with homeowners who have built ADUs, a staff workshop at the City of Kent, and a community survey. **This engagement highlighted openness to change in many existing policies related to ADUs.** A summary of findings from these engagement efforts identifies particular areas for consideration for decreasing barriers to the construction of ADUs in Kent.

## Phase One: Interviews & Staff Workshop

Interviews with six people identified existing barriers that could be removed to encourage more ADU construction in Kent. Takeaways from these conversations include:

- Code language related to **fire separation** was a barrier identified in multiple interviews.
- The **owner occupancy restriction** was also identified as a barrier.
- **Extensive requirements and conflicting codes** could be frustrating.
- **Parking requirements** are cost-prohibitive or impossible to comply with, eliminating the potential to construct an ADU.

A two-hour workshop was held with Kent staff actively involved in permitting and construction. This discussion focused on identifying elements of the code that create barriers to constructing and permitting ADUs. Takeaways from this discussion include:

- There was a general consensus that **impact fees could be reduced** due to an ADU's nature as subordinate to a single-family home.
- Staff agreed that changes to **design standards should allow for more flexibility** with alternate unit types. Design standards included height, size allowances, materials, and roof pitch guidance.
- **Development standards for site design could be studied for changes**, including topics such as curb cuts, subordinate entrance requirements, lot placement guidelines, and setback standards.
- The **owner-occupancy restriction is too difficult to enforce.**
- **Parking restrictions could better adapt** to the nuance of project location and details. Limiting garages from counting as parking spaces was a significant barrier.

## Phase Two: Community Survey

A community survey related to ADUs in Kent received 307 responses. Respondents were predominantly single-family homeowners who live in Kent. They represent a range of age groups, primarily ages 25 and older. Those identifying as White are overrepresented in survey responses (68% of respondents versus 37% of the overall population), while Asian, Hispanic, and Black residents are underrepresented (22% of survey respondents versus 52% of the total population).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Total population estimates based on 2020 Census results, Table P2, for the City of Kent

- **56% of respondents are neutral or support allowing ADU residents to use street parking** to make it easier for homeowners to add ADUs to their property.
- **57% of respondents support or are neutral toward removing the existing height limits for detached ADUs** to allow ADUs taller than the primary home.
- **60% of respondents are neutral or support allowing homeowners to build two ADUs** on a single property (one attached and one detached).
- When asked about maximum square feet for ADU units, **50% of respondents support up to 800 SF, 45% support up to 1,200 SF, and 30% support up to 1,500 SF.** 13% reported being unsure.
- 23% of respondents said they would consider **converting their garage** into an ADU.
- Top reasons that respondents say they would consider having an ADU are rental income (44%) to offset increased housing and property tax costs and to provide housing aging family members (42%).

# Phase One: Interviews & Staff Workshop

The first phase of engagement for this project included interviews with residents and professionals who have built or attempted to build ADUs in Kent, followed by a staff workshop to discuss current processes, identify known barriers to ADU production, and identify implementation concerns for various potential changes.

## *Interviews*

The City of Kent records identify 33 existing ADUs in the community. These include garage conversions or additions (18), units attached to the main home (8), basement conversions (4), and separate backyard units (3). Permits for these units date from 2003-2022. There are an additional 17 homeowners who started the permit process for an ADU but ultimately did not complete the build. These 50 addresses were the pool of potential interviewees contacted for feedback on their experiences and ideas for process improvements to encourage more ADU construction in Kent. Ultimately, five interviews were held:

1. One homeowner who has been unable to complete their ADU build successfully
2. One homeowner/architect pair who was finishing an ADU build
3. One homeowner with an existing converted basement unit with the desire to build an attic unit in a new home
4. One homeowner with a mother-in-law suite-style ADU
5. Habitat for Humanity staff who work in Kent and surrounding communities

These interviews occurred in the fall of 2022 (September – December). Questions identified project length and costs, motivation for building an ADU, barriers encountered during the permitting and building process, and ideas for improving existing code.

Key takeaways include:

- **Requirements for fire separation and confusion between an ADU vs. duplex was a barrier identified in multiple interviews.** Suggestions for improvement highlight the desire for clearer guidelines and better/faster communication from the City. In one case of incomplete ADU plans, the homeowner desires to structure their house as a caregiver to adult disabled children. Still, the cost and complexity of required fire separation have made the project infeasible.
- **The owner occupancy restriction was identified as barriers that should be considered for removal.** These restrictions were called out as unresponsive to the various life circumstances that might surface for a homeowner. Specific examples cited: owning a home with a basement ADU but moving out due to divorce; being unable to rent the ADU while downsizing to move into a retirement home; wanting to incorporate an attic unit for a caregiver; and as a detached unit for family visitors.
- **Extensive requirements and conflicting codes** could be frustrating. There are inconsistencies between building and zoning code. For example, a plans examiner might comment on improving the construction of an ADU, but then their recommendations might conflict with zoning code language. This added time, back-and-forth, and frustration to the building process.

- **Parking requirements** are cost-prohibitive or impossible to comply with, eliminating the potential to construct an ADU. While ADU residents may desire parking spaces, the cost of adding them to meet code requirements often kills the ADU project. Additionally, since Kent does not count garages towards parking requirements, there is often insufficient space on lots to add additional parking and comply with all other requirements (such as stormwater, impervious area, etc.).

### *Staff Workshop*

In October 2022, a staff workshop was held to establish a shared understanding of the ADU project and to discuss code elements that may create barriers to constructing and permitting ADUs in Kent. Nine staff members attended, representing various aspects of permitting and construction review process.

The two-hour workshop was preceded by a survey to identify areas where staff were in alignment and topics with identified concerns to help focus the conversation. The topics raised at this workshop included clarifying definitions for various structure types, impact fees, the design review process, zoning code language for site planning, policy restrictions such as owner-occupancy and multiple ADUs on a property, parking, and how tiny homes are considered in the ADU code.

Key takeaways from this group discussion include:

- **There was a consensus that impact fees should be further reviewed.** Staff pointed out the imbalance that a large single-family home addition does not increase impact fees, while an ADU addition to a small home adds a high level of fees. Considerations for any needed fee backfills and conversations with partners were identified as the next steps.
- **Staff agreed that changes to design standards should allow for more flexibility with alternate unit types.** This includes height, size allowances, materials, and roof pitch guidance. Kent City Code has the same requirements for ADUs and accessory structures, which results in problems. Staff agreed it is important to distinguish between ADUs and accessory structures. There was a desire to clarify differences between safety standards and aesthetic-oriented language, with more flexibility to reduce aesthetic design barriers.
- **Zoning code language for site design could be carefully revisited.** Curb cuts, subordinate entrance requirements, lot placement guidelines, and setback standards were all discussed as potential areas for changes. A look at code requirements from peer communities was desired to help this process.
- **The owner-occupancy restriction is too difficult to enforce.** If it is removed, staff recommend identifying a process to remove existing covenants on previously approved ADUs. Other restrictions, such as only one ADU per property, may require more research to galvanize public support for change.
- **Parking restrictions could better adapt to the nuance of project location and details.** Due to existing state law, projects within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of transit are not allowed to require parking for ADUs. As previously mentioned, Kent does not allow a garage to count as parking, which is a unique requirement that surrounding cities do not have. Additional considerations related to parking include differences for properties with multiple ADUs, allowing garages to count toward parking totals, and a desire to compare Kent's policies with neighboring communities.

# Phase Two: Community Survey

The City of Kent conducted a survey to gather feedback from the community about a suite of code revisions affecting the siting, construction, and permitting of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Surveys were available online and in paper format in English and Spanish. Three hundred seven (307) participants completed the survey from February 24 to April 3, 2023. The promotional methods for the survey included:

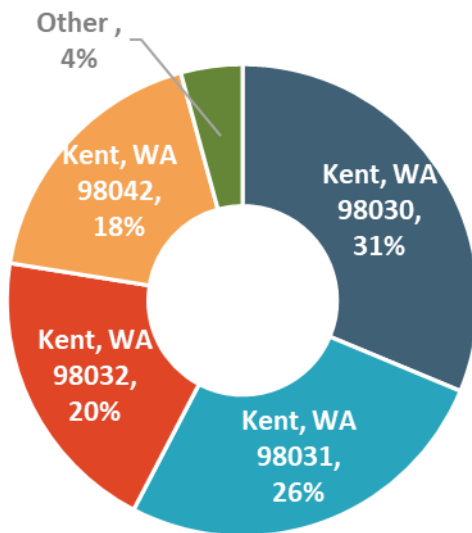
- The Downtown Kent Nerd Party,
- Postcard mailer,
- Social media ad buys,
- Tabling at the Kent Commons and Kent Senior Center,
- Listserv emails and strategic outreach to local community organizations,
- Previous ADU permit applicants and all persons who sent emails about ADUs to the planning inbox within the past year, and
- In-person outreach with the Hispanic Advisory Team.

Education on what an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) is and how they can be used was integral to success during outreach events. Staff discovered many misconceptions about ADUs in the community, what they are used for, and how they impact the community.

## *Location of Respondents*

96% of respondents are based in Kent, across the four zip codes of the City. “Other” responses include areas in Auburn, Seattle, Spanaway, Renton, and Lacey.

Survey Question 1: What Is Your Zip Code? (306 responses)



### Current Residence Type for Respondents

The majority of respondents (84%) reported living in a single-family home. In Kent, only 51% of housing units are single-family.<sup>2</sup> Given these figures, multifamily dwellers are underrepresented in this pool of respondents.

Survey Question 2: What Type of Housing Do You Live In? (306 responses)

Housing Type	Count	% Total
Single Family Home	257	84%
Apartment	22	7%
Townhome	8	3%
Mobile or Manufactured Home	7	2%
Duplex or Multiplex	6	2%
Other	4	1%
Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	3	1%

Source: BERK, 2023

### Housing Tenure of Respondents

Respondents were asked about their housing situation; 269 (88%) reported owning their home, while 33 said they rented. City-wide, only 56% of households are owner-occupied.<sup>3</sup> Three respondents reported not having housing currently, and two reported "Other" as their housing status.

### Off-Street Parking

Parking was one of the most compelling issues to address with the survey, as during phase one outreach, we heard that the requirement for extra parking could be a limiting factor to the completion of an ADU project. The City has enforced a Director's Interpretation that garages cannot count towards parking spaces. Research indicated that this is a unique requirement in Kent, and no other cities in the region have this same standard. To determine whether the parking requirements were truly a barrier, CAST Architecture analyzed multiple neighborhoods, revealing that under the city's current parking regulations, 95% of single-family properties would be unable to build an ADU if required to **provide one additional parking space**.

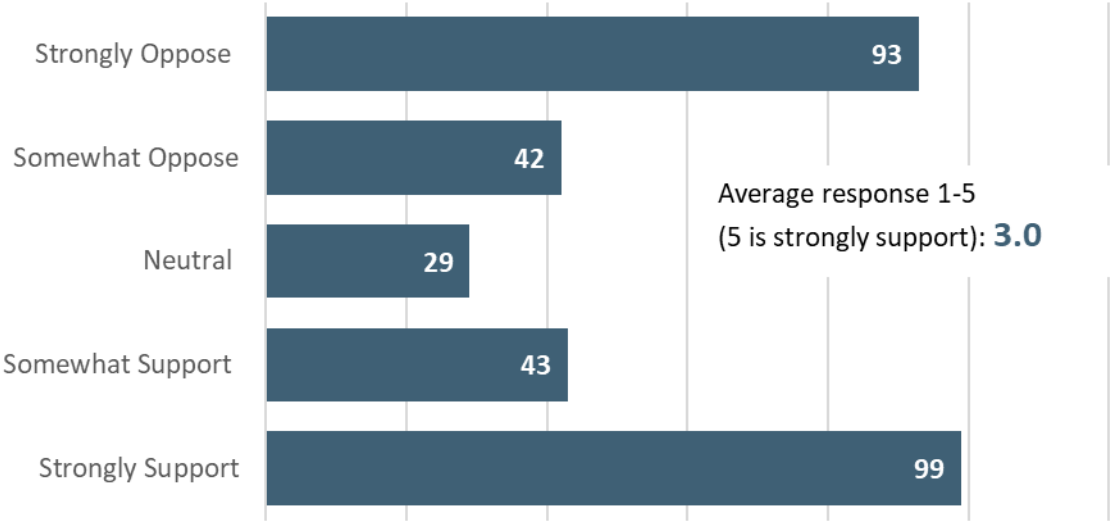
Aside from addressing the garage inconsistency, it was also important to ask residents about on-street parking as a viable option due to potential changes in the state legislature and sites that would still have difficulty meeting the parking requirement due to lack of onsite space. Respondents were asked whether they would support allowing residents who build an ADU on their property to use street parking. On a scale of one to five (with five indicating strong support to allow on-street parking), the average (mean) response score was 3.0.

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<sup>2</sup> ACS 5-year Estimates, Table DP04, 2021

<sup>3</sup> ACS 5-year Estimates, Table DP04, 2021

Survey Question 4: Kent requires homeowners who build an ADU to include one additional off-street parking space for every ADU constructed. Many residents have told us they do not have the space on their property to fit an additional parking space. Would you support allowing ADU residents to use street parking to make it easier for homeowners to add ADUs to their property? (306 responses)



Source: BERK, 2023



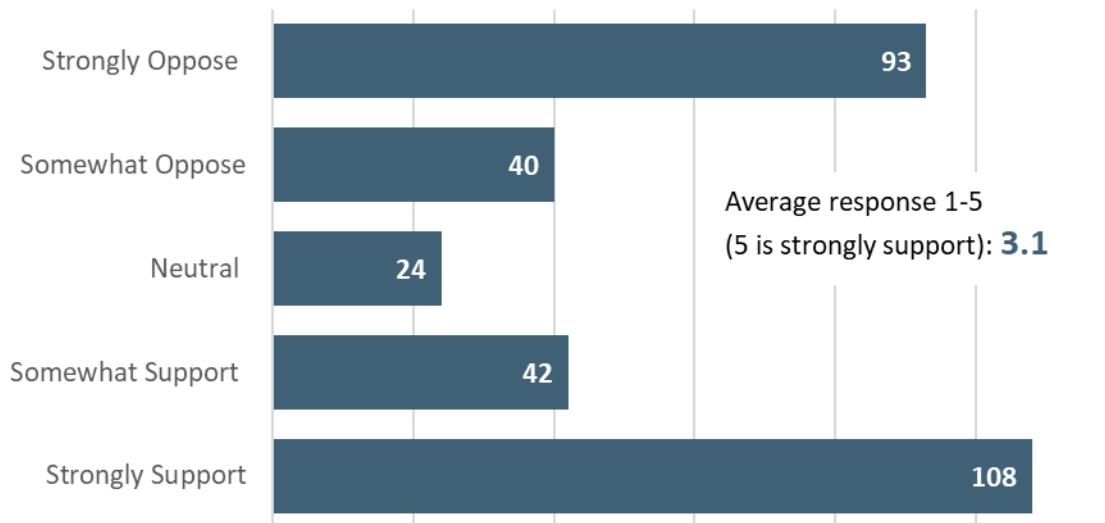
## Policy Questions

### Structure Height

**Kent's current regulations prohibit any accessory structure from being taller than the main home,** which can be problematic for single-story homes and older ramblers with an overall shorter roof pitch. The survey asked respondents whether they would support removing the existing height limits for detached ADUs in Kent up to two stories.

On a scale of one to five (with five indicating strong support to remove existing height limits), the average (mean) response score was 3.1.

Survey Question 5: Kent's regulations prevent property owners from building detached ADUs taller than the main house on the property. This means that ADUs that share a site with one of Kent's many single-story homes could not be taller than one story. Would you support removing the existing height limits for detached ADUs to allow ADUs taller than the main home (up to two stories)? (306 responses)

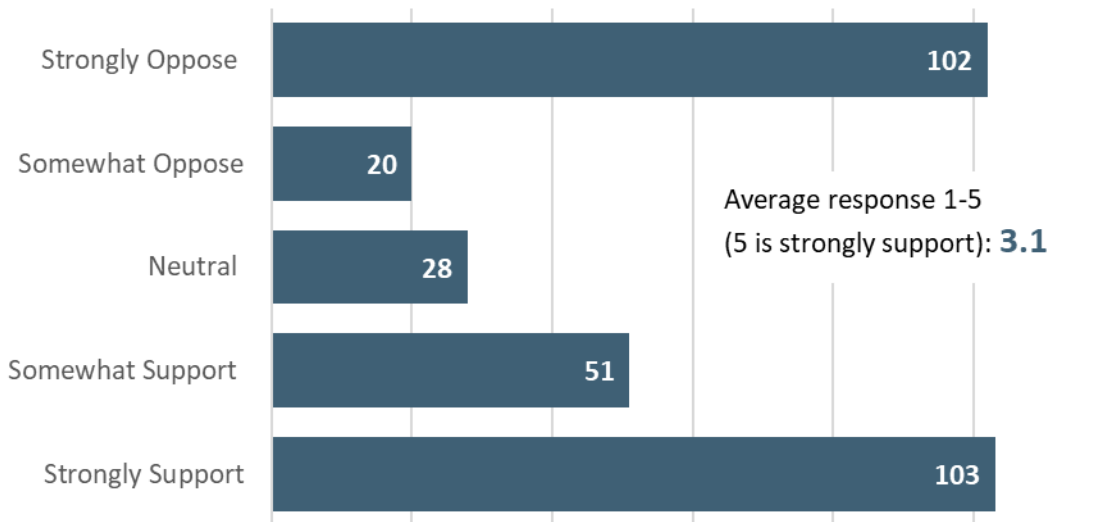


Source: BERK, 2023

### Multiple ADUs per Lot

Kent City Council and Land Use Planning Board supported the allowance of two ADUs per lot, but stipulated that should apply to large lots. Respondents were asked whether they supported potential state legislation which would allow homeowners to build two additional dwelling units (ADUs) on their property, one attached and one detached, as opposed to Kent's current regulation that only permits one ADU. On a scale of one to five (with five indicating strong support to allow two ADUs per lot), the average (mean) response score was 3.1.

Survey Question 6: Kent only allows homeowners to construct one ADU on their lot, regardless of whether it is attached to or detached from the primary home. There is potential state legislation that will require Kent to allow homeowners to build two ADUs on their property. Would you support allowing homeowners to build TWO (2) ADUs on a single property (one attached and one detached)? (303 responses)

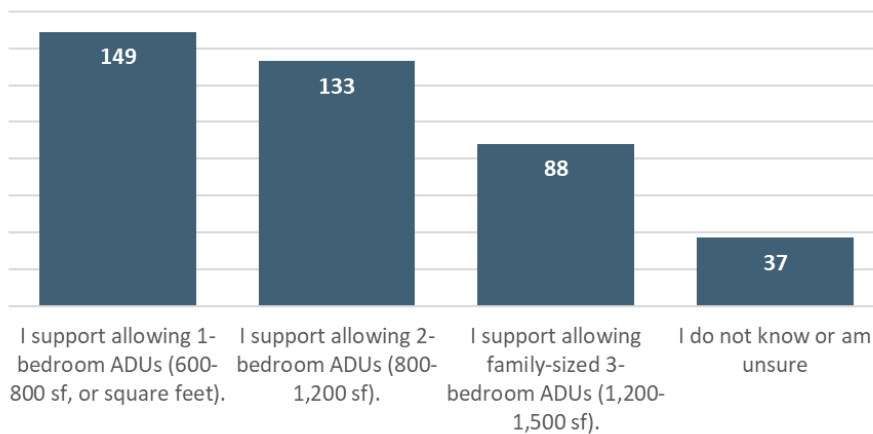


Source: BERK, 2023

### Size of ADUs in Square Feet

Respondents were asked about their support for changing the maximum size allowed for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Kent's current regulations limit the size of an ADU contained within or attached to an existing single-family dwelling to no more than one-third the size of the main house on the property. The size of a detached ADU, for either new construction or an existing home, shall be up to 800 square feet or 33 percent of the size of the principal unit, whichever is smaller. For this question, **respondents could choose multiple options** for the provided size ranges.

Survey Question 7: Kent's regulations limit the size of ADUs (in square feet) to no more than one-third the size of the main house on the property. Homeowners have told us this can be so restrictive that building an ADU is not worth it in many cases. What size ADU would you support allowing? **Choose as many as apply.** (296 responses)



Source: BERK, 2023

### Desired Resources

While most of the questions were geared toward development regulations, collecting feedback on items the city could pursue for implementation or future efforts after code updates were adopted was important. Respondents were asked which resources from the city would be helpful if they were deciding whether to build an additional dwelling unit (ADU) on their property. This helps City staff prioritize implementation efforts. The majority of respondents, 85%, said documents that clearly explain the process for permitting and building an ADU would be helpful. The second most popular resource was a pre-approved ADU design, which would reduce architecture costs and expedite permitting (79% support). Just over 10% of respondents chose "Other" as a potentially helpful resource. Themes of 'other' responses range from more timely communication from city staff, assistance with utility hookups, and preapproved ADU plans.

Survey Question 8: Which of the following resources from the City of Kent would be helpful if you were deciding whether to build an ADU?

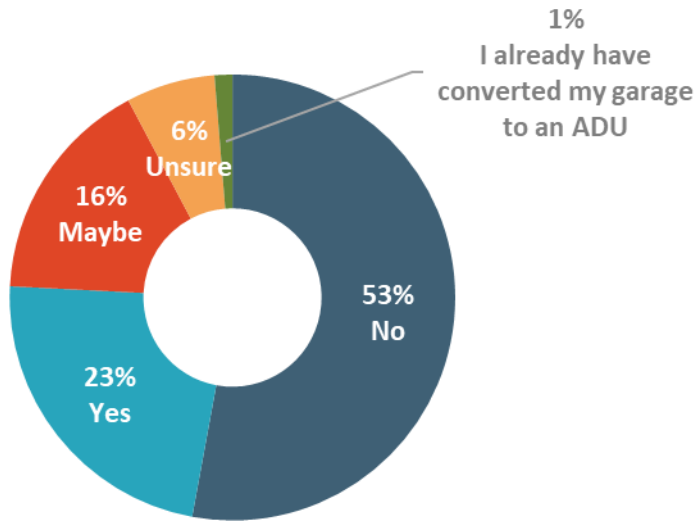
Resources that would help build an ADU	Count	% Total
Documents that clearly explain the process for permitting and building an ADU	241	85%
A preapproved ADU design to reduce architecture costs and expedite permitting	224	79%
A handout with estimates of potential fees and timelines	209	74%
Technical assistance from city staff (for example, to create a site plan and permit materials)	197	69%
A list of companies that have prefabricated and modular (ready-to-place) ADUs	176	62%
Other	32	11%

Source: BERK, 2023

### Garage Conversion for Survey Respondents

Respondents were asked whether they would consider converting their garage into an additional dwelling unit (ADU). This question was of particular interest to the project team, since a majority of the permitted ADUs over the past twenty years have been garage conversions. Additionally, garage conversions are the most cost-effective option for creating an ADU.

Survey Question 9: Would you consider converting your garage into an ADU? (302 responses)

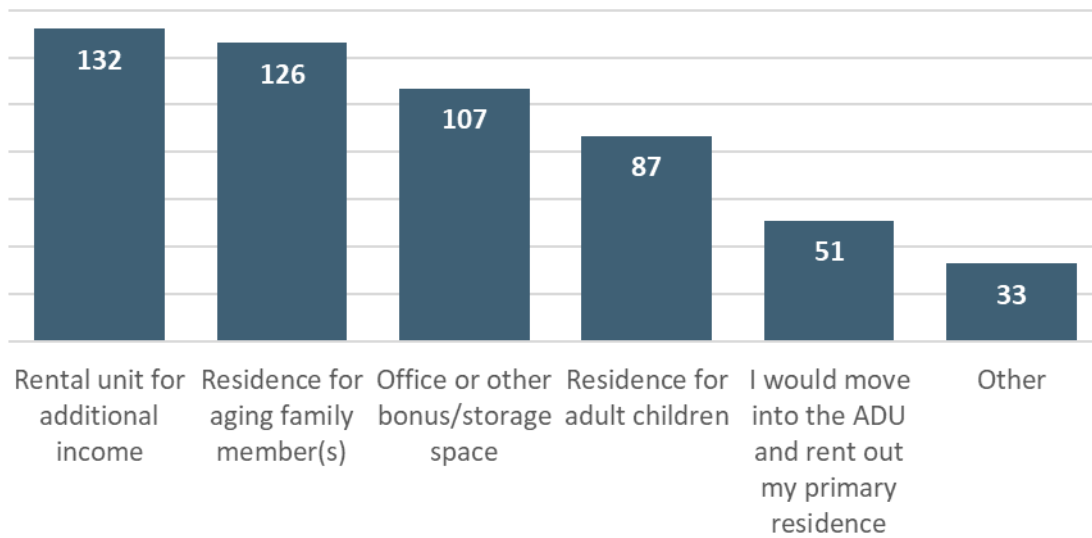


Source: BERK, 2023

### Imagined uses for ADUs

The last question asked respondents to imagine they have an ADU tomorrow so that staff could determine what these would most likely be used for. Given the feedback received at in-person events, it was clear to staff it was assumed ADUs would be a major impact on their neighborhoods. To accurately respond to these concerns, staff needed to know what most people would use these for. Respondents were asked what they would use an additional dwelling unit (ADU) for if they had access to one tomorrow. Over half of respondents indicated they would use the ADU as a residence for a family member- either for parents or their adult children. 44% of respondents indicated that they would use the ADU as a rental unit for additional income, especially to help offset increased costs of housing and property taxes. 11% of respondents reported using the ADU for "Other" purposes, including situations for home caregivers and renting at a discount to friends.

Survey Question 10: If you had access to an ADU tomorrow, what would you use it for? **Select all that apply.** (300 responses)



Source: BERK, 2023

## Respondent Demographics

Understanding the demographic profile of respondents helps the City understand who is paying attention to the issue of ADUs in Kent, whom they are effectively reaching with implemented outreach efforts, and which groups may need to be a focus for additional project engagement to ensure community-wide education and communication related to the project.

### Age

Survey respondents were fairly balanced across age groups of 25 and older. Compared to citywide population cohorts, residents 55 and over were proportionally much more likely to participate in the survey.

### Survey Question 13: How Old Are You? (297 responses)

Age	Survey Respondents	Kent Population Overall
Prefer not to answer	3%	
Under 18 years old	0%	27%
18 to 24 years old	2%	7%
25 to 34 years old	11%	17%
35 to 44 years old	22%	14%
45 to 54 years old	19%	12%
55 to 64 years old	20%	12%
65 years or older	22%	11%

Note: ACS age cohorts break at age 19 rather than 18. As a result, the above percentages for the 'under 18' group will also include those aged 19 for the Overall Population estimate.

Source: ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S0101, 2021; BERK, 2023

### Gender Identity

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender identity.

- 44% of respondents identified as male
- 50% identified as female
- Two respondents (1%) identified as non-binary
- One respondent identified as transgender.
- None of the respondents chose to self-identify
- 14 respondents preferred not to answer the question.

### Employment

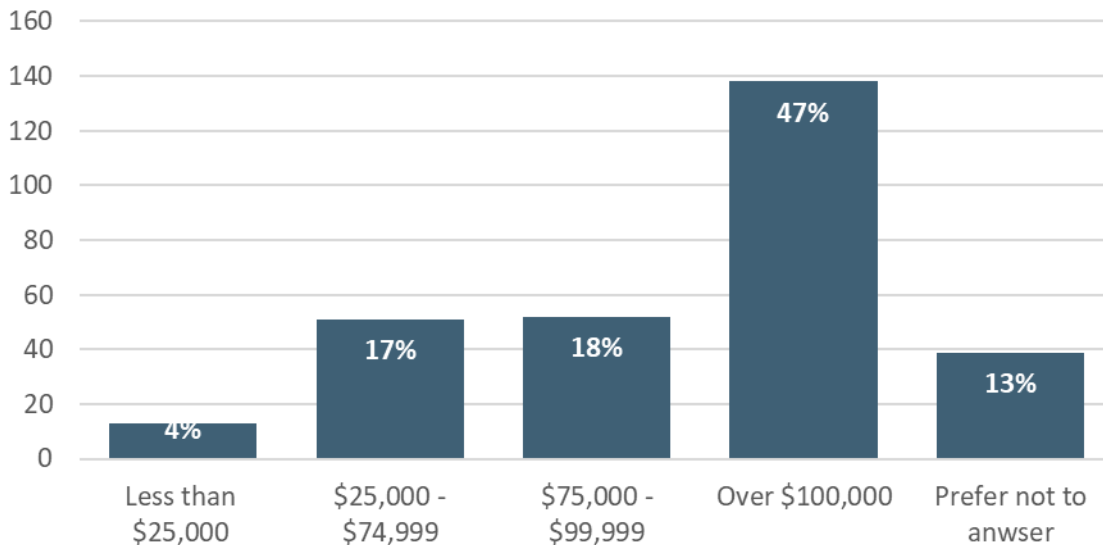
Respondents were asked to indicate their employment status. 64% are actively working and 24% are retired.

- 37% of respondents work outside of Kent
- 27% work in Kent
- 24% are retired
- 5% are not currently employed
- No students
- 7% 'other.'

### Household Income

Respondents were asked about their household income, which refers to the total income for all people they live with. 47% of respondents report household incomes over \$100,000. Citywide, 40% of Kent’s population makes incomes over \$100,000.<sup>4</sup> This indicates a higher income skew for respondents to this survey.

Survey Question 16: What is your household income (the total income for all people you live with)? (290 responses)



Source: BERK, 2023

### Race and Ethnicity

When asked about race or ethnic identity, 68% of respondents selected ‘White.’ This compares to the Kent-wide 37% White population, demonstrating an overrepresentation of White respondents. American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander respondents roughly track with their citywide proportions. All other identified groups (Asian, Hispanic, and Black) appear underrepresented in this survey.

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<sup>4</sup> ACS 5-year Estimates, Table S1901, 2021; BERK, 2023

Survey Question 17: What is your race or ethnicity? (289 responses)

Race or Ethnicity	Survey Respondents (%)	Kent Population (2020)
White (of European ancestry)	68%	37%
Asian	10%	23%
Hispanic, Latina/Latino/Latinx ethnicity	6%	16%
Self-identify	6%	
Black or African American	5%	12%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	0.5%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	2%	3%

Sources: 2020 Census Table P2; BERK, 202.

*Language*

Respondents were asked to indicate the primary language spoken in their homes. The majority of respondents indicated that English is the primary language spoken in their homes. Four responded in Spanish, four respondents reported Vietnamese as their primary language, and two reported Punjabi. One respondent reported that Korean and Mandarin/Cantonese were the primary languages spoken in their home.

*Disability*

Respondents were asked about their disability status. Out of the total sample, 28% report having one or more disabilities. Among these, 33 respondents reported a physical disability, 12 reported a mental disability, and 9 reported hearing and visual disabilities. Six respondents reported having an emotional disability, and four reported a cognitive disability. Additionally, there were nine ‘other’ responses.