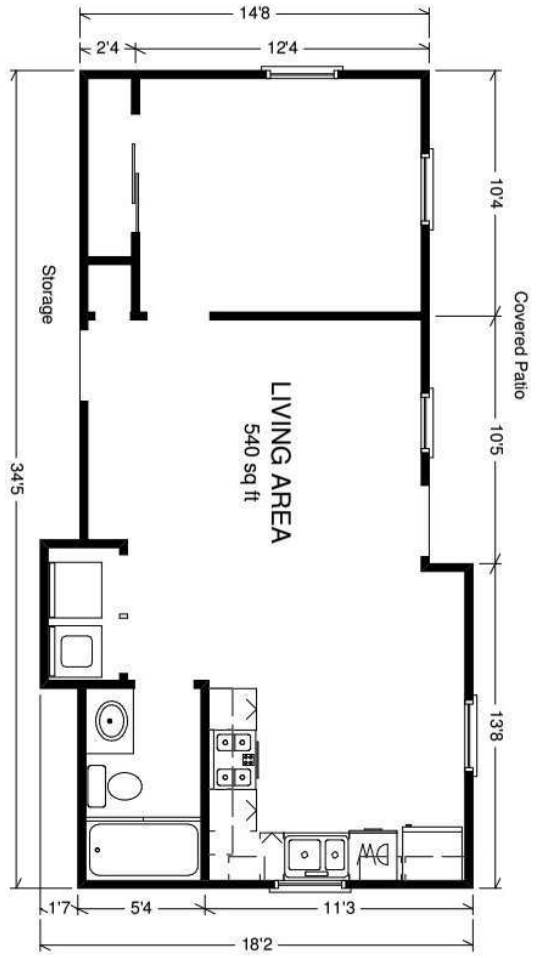
Common Roots

Homes of the Future

Design Competition



Hermanson ADU in Portland *Source: AccessoryDwellings.org*

Chamberlin & Lohman ADU in Portland *Source: AccessoryDwellings.org*

Halpern ADU in Oregon Source: *AccessoryDwellings.org*

2026 ADU Design Competition Guidelines

AARP

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Homes of the Future
Design Competition

Introduction:

Common Roots is launching an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Design Competition! Also known as backyard cottages, carriage houses, or in-law suites, ADUs are residential homes.

The City of Meadville recently adopted new zoning ordinances to allow ADUs and Common Roots is using this opportunity to design and develop future homes with your help.

Backyard cottages can increase the housing opportunities in Meadville and create accessible, affordable options for residents. We believe these cottages play an important role in increasing housing choice and improving options for Meadville residents.

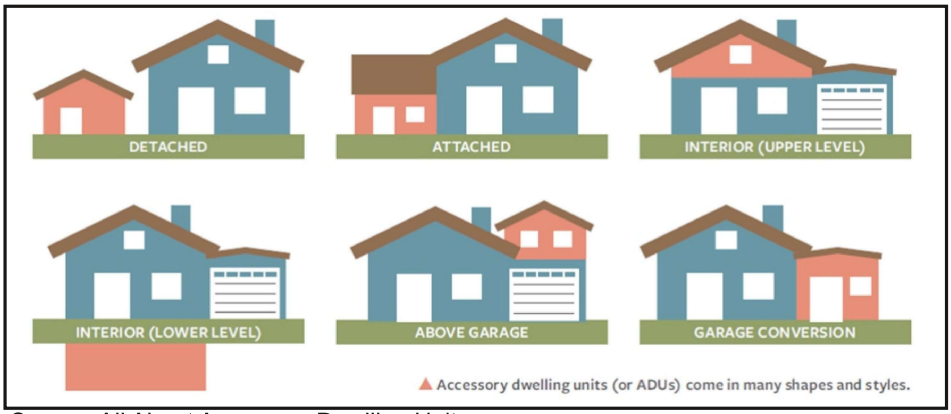
This competition is designed to encourage a broad vision for the future of homes in our area.
Residents of all ages and abilities are invited to showcase their talents and submit their ideas in the competition.

Why have a design competition?

The goals of the competition are to:
• **Explore and Design:** Encourage the public to envision new, affordable types of housing for Meadville. We all have a say in our community and this is one way to share our ideas.

• **Create Awareness and Education**: Cottage houses and ADUs are uncommon here. They have potential to transform living environments and create new opportunities for homeowners and tenants.

• **Affordable Designs and Construction:**
Common Roots will work with the City to develop one of the winning designs into a permit-ready design to help decrease building expenses.



Source: All About Accessory Dwelling Units
https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2019/accessory-dwelling-units-adus.html

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Homes of the Future

Design Competition

Design Categories

Illustrative & Conceptual Design

The Illustrative and Conceptual Design category invites participants to explore innovative ideas and possibilities for accessory dwelling units. Experimental, innovative, and visionary elements are encouraged and don't need to focus on the buildability or practicality of the design.

This category is intended to inspire community conversation, demonstrate a variety of housing possibilities, and showcase how ADUs can support changing household needs, intergenerational living, aging in place, neighborhood revitalization, and creative use of residential properties.

This category will have multiple prizes that highlight various visions of housing in Meadville.

Submissions may include conceptual designs, visualizations, sketches, renderings, or other illustrative materials that communicate a compelling vision for ADUs in Meadville.

Conceptual entries are encouraged to explore themes such as:

- Innovative & felixible housing solutions
- Intergenerational and multigenerational living
- Aging in place
- Sustainability and resilience
- Adaptive reuse and garage conversions
- Innovative material use
- Flexible living arrangements
- Neighborhood enhancement & placemaking

Technical Design

The Technical Design category seeks high-quality, buildable Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) designs that can be further developed into permit-ready and potentially pre-approved building plans for use within the City of Meadville.

Entries in this category should demonstrate thoughtful design, affordability, universal accessibility, and construction feasibility. Designs should be realistic and capable of being constructed by local builders using commonly available materials and building methods.

Technical Design submissions are expected to include detailed drawings sufficient to demonstrate the project's feasibility. Selected entries may be advanced for additional architectural and engineering development to create permit-ready or pre-approved ADU plans for future public use.

The Technical Design category focuses on technical elements of an ADU and the requirements to move the design towards a pre-approved status. Technical Design submissions have a longer list of requirements and a longer list of suggested submission elements.

Submissions should prioritize:

- Affordability and cost efficiency
- Universal Design and aging-in-place principles
- Compliance with zoning & building codes
- Construction feasibility and ease of permitting
- Compatibility with Meadville's neighborhoods and lot patterns
- Sustainability, durability, and long-term performance

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Homes of the Future Design Competition

Evaluation Criteria
Illustrative & Conceptual Design

Vision of Housing & Community Benefit: 25
- Illustrates how the design addresses multiple facets of housing, community, and neighborhood connections
- Demonstrates an understanding of and sensitivity to the challenges facing Meadville housing
- Integrates thoughtful themes, such as affordability, intergenerational living, shared environments, and community goals, into the design

Creativity & Innovation: 20
- Demonstrates a creative or innovative approach to housing challenges
- Introduces new concepts or approaches to address challenges and reveal opportunities
- Presents innovative and unconventional solutions to existing or anticipated challenges

Visual Communication & Storytelling: 20
- Effectively communicates the design, vision, and thoughtfulness through drawings, renderings, other visual materials, and the narrative submission
- A clear voice and compelling argument are made to the reader and audience
- Challenges and dilemmas are addressed and resolved with clarity or further examination

Universal Design & Accessibility: 20
- Incorporates Universal Design principles (demonstrated in narrative or clear drawing details)
- Demonstrates thoughtful designs for aging in place, placement and choice of furniture, and flow and access of the space
- Design includes features for various housing uses and occupant ages and abilities

Environmental Stewardship & Resilience: 15
- Includes details and elements that reduce energy and water use/expenses
- Demonstrates a thoughtfulness of materials and lifecycle use considerations
- Demonstrates elements and concepts that can adapt to future environmental changes

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Homes of the Future Design Competition

Evaluation Criteria

Technical Design

The below criteria will be evaluated by the jury. Both the technical drawings and the narrative will inform the jury on each criteria section. Details and references do not need to be duplicated in the drawing and the narrative if clearly described or demonstrated. Writing style and structure are not evaluated, only the information described and explained in the narrative.

Permit Readiness: 25

- Submission complies with existing zoning and regulations e.g., square footage, setbacks, dwelling requirements etc.
- Designs and Submissions are accurate and legible and easily deciphered.
- Materials, Sections, and Structural Components are available, buildable and meet generally accepted conventions (International Existing Building Code, Uniform Construction Code etc.)
- Demonstrates construction feasibility, code awareness, and potential for development

Affordability and Cost Efficiency: 20

- Applies practical construction methods to the design
- Thoughtful use of materials – considerations to neighborhood character, energy efficiency, durability, and embodied energy and value
- Includes thoughtful decisions for life long maintenance and utility expenditure

Universal Design and Accessibility: 20

- Incorporates Universal Design principles (demonstrated in narrative or clear drawing details)
- Demonstrates thoughtful designs for aging in place, placement and choice of furniture, and flow and access of the space
- Design includes features for various housing uses and occupant ages and abilities

Neighborhood Character: 15

- Reflects and melds the character of the neighborhood
- Consideration for relationships to existing structures and surrounding uses
- Demonstrates a cohesive visual and functional design for the surrounding neighborhood

Innovation: 10

- Introduces creative and innovative themes and concepts to housing in the neighborhood
- Demonstrates future adaptability in the design to changing demographics or landscape
- Is a thoughtful solution to housing in Meadville

Graphic Communication and Completeness: 10

- Drawings, symbols and language use a common, legible convention
- Submission materials meet the requirement standards
- Information and submissions are clearly presented

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Homes of the Future
Design Competition

Prizes and Important Dates

Illustrative & Conceptual Design:

- People's Choice Award - Selected by public voting
  (1) - $250
- Illustrative & Conceptual Design Award - Selected by the Jury
  (3) - $350 for each category winner*

Technical Design

- Technical Design Award - Selected by the Jury
  (1) - $1500

July -
Public Events and Q&A Sessions

August -
10th - Submission Portal Opens

September -
Jury Selections Finalized

October -
7th - Submission window closes
15-25th - Public voting
25th - Jury Evaluations
30th - Winner Announcements & Celebration

November-
Technical Design Winner is converted to City permit-ready plans

* Categories in the Illustrative & Conceptual cateogry will be decided by the jury and based upon submissions. Examples include: Materials Innovation, Neighborhood Connector, Reimagined Spaces, Future Family, Backyard Revolution and any others that align with the competition and highlight notable submission narratives and themes

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Homes of the Future Design Competition

Illustrative & Conceptual Design Submission Requirements

The proposed ADU may be detached, attached, a conversion of an existing structure, or another innovative housing concept that functions as an accessory dwelling. There may be more than one ADU per lot in this category.

The design should include the following elements with approximate square footage or dimensions:

- Kitchen or kitchenette area
- Bathroom(s) including toilet, sink, and shower/tub facilities
- Sleeping area(s)
- Entrance to the outside
- Approximate overall dimensions

Additional required materials for the Illustrative and Conceptual category:

- Site sketch, site plan, or conceptual placement diagram
- Floor plan, conceptual layout, or space diagram
- Exterior perspective rendering, illustration, or sketch

  or
- Exterior elevation drawing/rendering

  or
- Interior rendering or perspective

A Narrative Description is required. The Narrative should help jurors understand the concept, explain design decisions, and describe how the proposal addresses housing needs in Meadville.

Strong submissions will clearly connect the design concept to the Judging Criteria outlined below and address topics such as:

- Intended occupants and household type
- How the design aligns with Universal Design Principles and aging in place qualities
- The relationship of this design to the surrounding neighborhood
- Innovative and unique design features

The Narrative Description must include:

- A Project Title
- 250-1,500 words

Design Criteria	Competition Requirement
ADU Size	Min - 401 sq ft of habitable area Max - 2200 sq ft gross or not more than the habitable floor area of principal structure
Height	Maximum of 35 feet or height of the principal structure - whichever is less
Parking	No additional parking required from the Principal Structure
Setbacks	6 ft minimum from any existing structure on the lot 10 ft minimum from the rear of the lot 6 ft minimum from the side of the lot Cannot encroach on the front yard of the principal structure

The Illustrative and Conceptual category has a more flexible requirements standard. Any of the above elements should be considered strong suggestions for judging criteria but shouldn't exclude potential submissions to the competition for consideration and display purposes. All submissions are welcome that include a visual and narrative component.

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Design Competition

Technical Design Submission Requirements

The ADU design must be detached from the principal structure and meet the site conditions below. The design must include the following elements with square footage and dimensions:

- Kitchen - to include food storage (fridge, pantry, etc.), food prep space, sink with water access, and cooktop
- Bathroom(s) - must include toilet, sink, and shower/tub with water access
- Sleeping area - at least one sleeping area to include bed
- Entrance (separate from principal structure)

Additional required materials for the Technical Design category:

- Site plan with Principal Structure and ADU placement and Setbacks dimensions
- Universal Design Features and Accessibility Details (can be described in the narrative component)
- Floor Plan with total Habitable Floor Area calculation
- 2 Exterior Elevation drawings/renderings

A Narrative Description is required. The Narrative should help jurors understand some of your decisions, highlight key features, and promote your design based on Universal Design Concepts, Energy Efficiency, Neighborhood 'Fit' and other features outlined in the Evaluation Criteria. Competitive submissions will use the Narrative to address the Evaluation Criteria clearly with detailed examples.

The Narrative Description must include:

- A Project Title
- 250-750 words

Design Criteria	Competition Requirement
ADU Size	Min - 401 sq ft of habitable area Max - 2200 sq ft gross or not more than the habitable floor area of principal structure
Height	Maximum of 35 feet or height of the principal structure - whichever is less
Parking	No additional parking required from the Principal Structure
Setbacks	6 ft minimum from any existing structure on the lot 10 ft minimum from the rear of the lot 6 ft minimum from the side of the lot Cannot encroach on the front yard of the principal structure

The Technical Design category will be further developed into a permit-ready design for the City of Meadville. The following elements will help achieve that goal. These are not requirements for submission but will be considered during judging to facilitate the pre-permit process.

- Elevation Materials List and Details
- Floor Plan
  - Door Location
  - Plumbing Location & Fixtures/Hook-up
  - Stair/Landing geometry
- Section Drawing
- Interior Elevation with Materials List
- Structural Details
  - Foundation/Slab/Footings
  - Framing
  - Wall Assembly
  - Floor Assembly
  - Roof Plan - Framing, Pitch, Materials,
- Site Plan Drainage
- Cost Estimate
- Material List
- Energy Code/Efficiency Detail
  - Walls, Roof, Floor R-value
  - Air Sealing Details

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Questions, Contact Information and Partnership

Over the course of the competition we will hold information sessions where you can bring your questions and meet other participants and partners in the competition. The schedule for information sessions will be posted at **www.CommonRootsPA.org**. All other information and materials for the competition can also be found at **www.CommonRootsPA.org**

You can also reach out via email to **futurehomes@commonrootspa.org** We're happy to answer any questions or help with any issues around your submission.

Organizations and individuals interested in partnering or promoting the competition to can also reach out to **futurehomes@commonrootspa.org**

The Homes of the Future Design Competition is made possible through a grant from the AARP Community Challenge. In June of 2026, Common Roots was awarded funds to make this project a possibility and we're happy to be partnering with AARP to help enhance housing solutions in Meadville.

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Homes of the Future Design Competition

How to Submit Your Design:

All submissions will be made by email.
Send submission materials to **FutureHomes@CommonRootsPA.org**

Use your last name and the design categor in the subject line.
For example: Subject Line: Zimmer - Illustrative & Conceptual

Each item on the checklist should be its own file in the submission email.

October 7th 2026 11:00 PM is the Deadline for Submissions

Illustrative & Conceptual Checklist:

- ☐ Cover Page
- ☐ Narrative Component
- ☐ Originality and License Agreement
- ☐ Site Plan or similar
- ☐ Floor Plan or similar
- ☐ Exterior Perspective, Exterior Elevation, Interior Perspective or similar

Technical Checklist:

- ☐ Cover Page
- ☐ Narrative Component
- ☐ Originality and License Agreement
- ☐ Site Plan
- ☐ Floor Plan or similar
- ☐ 2 Exterior Elevations

Cover Page should include: Participant/Team name(s), any additional organizational information, primary contact with email, design category, project title and a short biography (no more than 200 words) that introduces yourself and your team with background information and what inspired you to participate or inspired your design. Professional or social links can be included.

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This competition is made possible with the support and partnership of AARP and Common Roots of Meadville.

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