



Rashi Kesarwani
Councilmember, District 1

CONSENT CALENDAR

January 20, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Councilmember Rashi Kesarwani (Author), Councilmember Igor Tregub (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Mark Humbert (Co-Sponsor)

SUBJECT: Referral to the City Manager to Allow Tiny Homes on Wheels as Permissible Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager to create a permitting process to allow a Tiny Home on Wheels as a legal Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU). Tiny homes on wheels are generally considered to be detached dwellings less than 400 square feet in floor area, providing independent living quarters, including basic functional areas for cooking, sleeping, toileting, and bathing. They can retain their wheels and rest on pads instead of a foundation, and are connected to water, electric, and sewer utilities through RV-style hookups.

The referral should:

- Amend Berkeley Municipal Code Chapter 23.306, Accessory Dwelling Units, to incorporate tiny homes on wheels as an allowable type of ADU¹;
- Facilitate coordination among City Departments, such as Planning (Land Use and Building and Safety) and Fire to establish a clear set of guidelines, including code requirements and standards for installation; and
- Create online resources for homeowners, including a full list of requirements related to fire, safety, and installation as well as potentially pre-approved prefabricated tiny homes on wheels.

¹ City staff may want to consider using San Jose's amendments to their municipal code as a model: San Jose Municipal Code, 20.200.327: Dwelling, Tiny Home on Wheels.
https://library.municode.com/ca/san_jose/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT20ZO_CH20.200DE_20.200.327DWTIHOWHTH

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Are Naturally More Affordable Than Other Home Options. Innovations in constructing ADUs, such as modular (fully pre-fabricated) designs that can be installed with a crane or panel kits that allow the walls, roof, and sometimes floors to be delivered to the site as ready-to-assemble sections (panels), are bringing down the cost to construct an ADU. Further, a 2022 report from the Association of Bay Area Governments found that 19 percent of ADUs statewide are rented to family members at no cost, and another 16 percent statewide are rented to family and/or friends.² Tiny homes on wheels are even more affordable than other types of ADUs, taking just weeks to install (for permitting and hookups), rather than six months or longer for a typical ADU. Many come certified from a factory instead of having to be built from scratch and thus require fewer inspections.³

Other California Cities Have Permitted Tiny Homes on Wheels. The effort to legitimize use of tiny homes on wheels to address housing needs in California began as early as 2016. Fresno was the first city to permit tiny homes on wheels as a permanent, rentable additional unit,⁴ followed not long after by San Luis Obispo.⁵ The City of Los Angeles began permitting tiny homes on wheels in 2019⁶ with San Jose and San Diego close behind in 2020. In 2022, the City of Santa Cruz adopted an ordinance to allow tiny homes on wheels as both a type of ADU and as primary dwellings.⁷ This widespread appeal throughout California and other states to legally permit tiny homes on wheels is understandable given the current housing crisis. These units are quicker, easier and cheaper to install, saving both owners and renters time, effort and costs.⁸

² Association of Bay Area Governments, Final Affordability of Accessory Dwelling Units, June 13, 2022: https://abag.ca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-04/ADU_Affordability_Report_June_13_2022.pdf

³ Peters, Adele, What's better than a tiny house? A tiny house on wheels?, 09 November 2020, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90572129/whats-better-than-a-tiny-house-a-tiny-house-on-wheels>

⁴ KQED California Report: "Fresno Passes Groundbreaking 'Tiny House' Rules," Sasha Khokha, January 19, 2016: <https://www.kqed.org/news/10833592/fresno-passes-groundbreaking-tiny-house-rules>

⁵ The San Luis Obispo Tribune: "Tiny Homes are now Legal in SLO. What the New Rules Say About Building One," Nick Wilson, November 28, 2018: <https://www.sanluisobispo.com/news/local/article222318655.html>

⁶ Tiny House Blog, January 2019, "Tiny Houses NOW Legal in Los Angeles: <https://tinyhouseblog.com/announcement/tiny-houses-now-legal-in-los-angeles/>

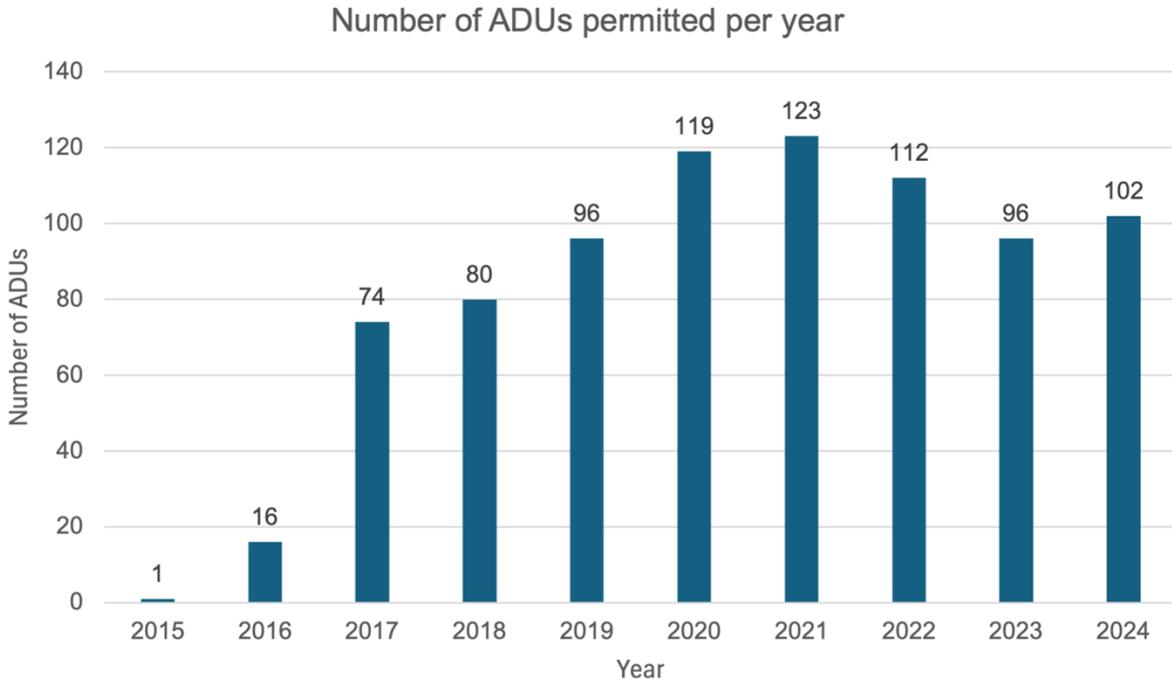
⁷ Santa Cruz County, Board of Supervisors Amending ORD-5413, December 6, 2022 <https://sccoplanning.com/Portals/2/County/Planning/policy/Tiny%20Homes%20on%20Wheels/Ordinance%205413%20Tiny%20Homes%20on%20Wheels.pdf>

⁸ "Sightline Institute: Homes on Wheels are Filling a Big Gap in Portland," Katie Gould, September 11, 2025: <https://www.sightline.org/2025/09/11/homes-on-wheels-are-filling-a-big-gap-in-portland/>

BACKGROUND

Permitted ADUs in Berkeley Have Steadily Increased Over Time. In Berkeley, the number of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) permitted by the City has steadily increased over the past few years, as shown in Exhibit 1. A total of 16 ADU construction permits were approved in 2016, rising to 102 in 2024—more than a sixfold increase.⁹ The consistent and sizeable number of ADUs being built each year highlights their importance as a more affordable alternative to traditional housing types.

Exhibit 1: Number of ADUs Permitted in the City of Berkeley Has Steadily Grown



Source: City of Berkeley staff, and Housing Element and General Plan Annual Progress Reports (2023-2024)¹⁰

⁹ Note: While the number of ADUs permitted in 2023 was lower than in 2022, 91 units received certificates of occupancy compared to the 72 in 2022. This significantly higher number indicates continued progress in the completion and availability of ADU units despite a slight decrease in new permits issued.

¹⁰ Note: The numbers for ADUs per year from 2015-2022 were provided by staff, numbers for 2023 and 2024 were extracted from the respective Housing Element and General Plan Annual Progress Reports.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposed recommendation for adding tiny homes on wheels as a type of ADU is intended to make it easier for property owners to add a legally permitted tiny home on wheels on their property in a timely manner at a competitive price.

FISCAL IMPACT

Time-limited staff time from relevant departments (Planning, Fire, and Public Works) to develop a standard set of requirements to satisfy all building codes and safety regulations. Additional staff time from the Planning Department would be required to incorporate tiny homes on wheels in any ADU-related permitting process online and bring staff members up to speed on information about tiny homes on wheels.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Encouraging the creation of more ADUs enables the City to make more efficient use of residential land that is generally located in close proximity to public transit. Studies show that infill development is an effective strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by reducing vehicle miles traveled when compared to homes created in outlying undeveloped areas.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rashi Kesarwani, District 1

(510) 981-7110