



CASE STUDY

CONVERGENCE UNITING FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY COLUMBUS®

Accelerating ADU Development Through a 10-Week Sprint

In 2021, CONVERGENCE Columbus partnered with RISE Together Innovation Institute, Red 1 Realty, Healthy Homes, Huntington National Bank, and OMNI Title to lead the region's first Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Sprint — an intensive 10-week collaborative effort designed to diagnose barriers, prototype solutions, and build momentum for ADU-friendly policy and practice across Franklin County. The sprint brought together builders, government leaders, lenders, real estate professionals, and community organizations to generate practical tools, deepen shared understanding, and outline a roadmap for expanding ADU production as part of Central Ohio's broader housing strategy.

WHY ADUs AND WHY A SPRINT?

Local partners recognized that no single strategy could resolve Central Ohio's growing housing pressures. Creating more diverse housing options — including ADUs — was seen as critical to meeting families' needs at different income levels, supporting multigenerational households, and improving pathways to wealth building. With ADUs emerging nationally as a flexible, lower-cost housing option, partners agreed that a fast-paced sprint would provide the structure needed to evaluate ADU feasibility and assemble actionable recommendations.

A sprint offered a disciplined, time-bound method to move quickly from identifying barriers to developing solutions. This structure aligned well with local momentum around zoning reform and community conversations happening at the same time, allowing the sprint to deepen and accelerate those efforts.

KICK-OFF: CONVENING MULTI-SECTOR LEADERS

The sprint began with a convening of more than three dozen stakeholders representing the full housing ecosystem, builders, real estate professionals, government officials, nonprofit advocates, financial institutions, and technical experts. This group shared a common goal: identify what it would take to make ADUs more feasible, affordable, and widely understood across Franklin County.

Participants then self-selected into four working groups based on experience and interest:

- Public Outreach & Education
- Policy & Zoning
- Finance & Incentives
- Design & Construction

Each group committed to completing specific projects by the end of the 10-week period. The sprint timeframe created urgency, encouraged experimentation, and fostered collaboration among sectors that do not typically work together.

SPRINT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Throughout the 10-week period, each working group developed tangible products aimed at addressing ADU barriers from multiple angles.

1. Public Outreach & Education: Increasing Understanding and Public Engagement.

This group focused on raising general awareness of ADUs and demystifying their purpose and potential. It developed:

- A map and database of existing ADUs in Central Ohio
- A forthcoming educational webinar explaining ADU dynamics
- A video and photo-based virtual tour of an ADU to help the public and policymakers visualize what ADUs look like

These resources were designed to counter widespread unfamiliarity with ADUs.

2. Policy & Zoning: Understanding the Regulatory Landscape.

Policy and zoning experts examined how local regulations shape ADU feasibility. Their work included:

- A zoning benchmarking matrix comparing ADU-related rules across municipalities
- A utility connection guide to clarify requirements for water, sewer, and electric connections in carriage home development

This group sought to understand where regulatory bottlenecks exist and where updates could support safe, predictable ADU development.



3. Finance & Incentives: Evaluating Practical Feasibility for Homeowners.

Recognizing that ADUs are often financially out of reach, this team explored what would be required to make them attainable. They convened:

- A lender roundtable
- A builder roundtable

These conversations highlighted the promise of ADUs as wealth-building tools while surfacing structural barriers — such as financing limitations, appraisal challenges, and uncertainty about permitting timelines.

4. Design & Construction: Helping Residents and Builders Navigate the Process.

This group developed materials to help residents, designers, and builders understand what an ADU project entails. Their work resulted in:

- A step-by-step “getting started” guide outlining necessary surveys, zoning reviews, architectural plans, and construction elements
- A photo walkthrough of an ADU project with detailed specifications to serve as a practical reference for future builders and homeowners

These tools reduced complexity and made it easier for residents to visualize the process and the potential.

COLLECTIVE RESULTS

By the end of the 10-week sprint, nine discrete initiatives were launched — including public education tools, regulatory benchmarking, homeowner guides, and industry-specific roundtables. More importantly, the sprint created a foundation for ongoing collaboration across sectors and strengthened the region's ability to advance ADU-supportive zoning and policy reforms. The work culminated in the ADU Support Sprint 2025 Final Report and Community Guidebook.

LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS FOR REPLICATION

1. Diverse Participation Creates Stronger

Solutions: The sprint's success hinged on intentionally bringing together stakeholders who do not regularly collaborate. Builders, lenders, policymakers, and advocates each contributed unique insights that enriched the final outputs.

2. A Time-Bound Structure Creates Momentum:

The 10-week deadline compelled teams to focus, make decisions, and generate meaningful deliverables — preventing the drift that often accompanies long-term committees.

3. Multi-Track Work Prevented Bottlenecks:

Addressing education, policy, design, and financing at the same time allowed each area to inform the others and ensured that progress was not slowed by dependencies.

4. Education and Engagement Are Essential for Adoption:

Because ADUs remain unfamiliar to most residents, outreach materials and community conversations were critical to building public understanding and support.

5. Champions Accelerate Progress:

Having influential leaders — whether from finance, design, policy, or community organizations — lent credibility and helped rally participation within their sectors.

6. The Sprint Is Only the Beginning:

Although the sprint generated substantial outputs, participants recognized that policy change, financing innovation, and public education require ongoing collaboration and long-term commitment.

CONCLUSION

The CONVERGENCE Columbus ADU Sprint demonstrates how an intensive, collaborative, cross-sector approach can rapidly accelerate understanding and innovation around accessory dwelling units. By combining education, policy analysis, financing innovation, and practical design tools, the sprint established the foundation needed for long-term progress. As communities nationwide look for flexible, scalable housing solutions, this sprint model offers a replicable framework for moving from interest to action, and from prototypes to real, community-backed housing options.

