



## ADU Competition Brief

### Introduction

Montclair Gateway to Aging in Place (**mGAP**), a non-profit 501 (C) (3), along with partner sponsors, is organizing an architectural design competition to encourage the adoption of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to help address the local housing shortage.

Our newspapers are rife with stories about the shortage of financially sustainable housing for diverse populations in American communities. Historically, suburban housing development has focused on the single-family dwelling designed for an idealized family of two parents and two children. This design no longer reflects the true demographics of our society. In fact, in the next decade older adults will out-number children for the first time in our nation's history. And, typically, more than 75% of senior households live alone or with only one other person. More than 60% of these households have three bedrooms and the property taxes, home repair, and insurance costs needed to keep up these households place severe financial burdens upon their fixed incomes.

A trend is emerging across the country, construction of 'Tiny Houses,' or Accessory Dwelling Units on parcels of land originally zoned for single family units. Four NJ municipalities, including Montclair NJ, have now passed local ordinances to allow homeowners to construct ADU's on their properties.

Here are the immediate advantages of ADU construction for the older homeowner:

1. Rental income from ADU unit if senior remains in original house
2. Rental income from original house if senior moves to a barrier-free ADU

3. Ability to *age-in-place* where retention of independence and consistency of community support networks qualitatively improves health outcomes.
4. Ability to barter with the tenant for needed services like snow removal, garbage pick-up, and maybe even transportation.

New Jersey is the most densely developed State in the nation. NJ first-ring suburbs like Montclair do not have sufficient open land for developers to build both age-friendly and financially sustainable housing for independent aging in place. ADU construction promises to be a viable alternative to offset these challenges.

All of these advantages are offset by ADU construction costs, especially for older residents who are already burdened with the highest property taxes and the highest home repair costs in the Nation. For that reason, additional credit will be awarded if the designer demonstrates how the project cost can be capped at \$300 per sq ft. (See competition details below)

### **Project Direction/Management: Montclair Gateway to Aging in Place**

- Montclair Gateway to Aging in Place (**mGAP**): **mGAP** is an advocacy and service organization seeking solutions to the challenges faced by those of us of retirement age who wish to remain in our communities as we age. The organization's principal activities are to address the deficiency of suitable housing opportunities for our age group and to provide skills training and access to the on-line digital domain and its services.

**Project Sponsors:** Tungsten Architects, The Partners for Health Foundation.

### **The Competition**

The **mGAP** ADU Design Competition is an ideas-driven, constructible design challenge that invites emerging designers to consider how architecture can

address one of today's most pressing housing issues: enabling seniors to age in place while exploring new approaches to suburban density.

This is an invitation to explore the intersection of human needs, spatial design, and community life.

The competition is about more than aesthetics. It challenges participants to design ADUs that:

- Provide safe, barrier-free housing for older adults on the same property as family or caregivers
- Support multigenerational living, integrating families in ways that preserve autonomy, privacy, and dignity
- Offer viable, buildable solutions that respect zoning, setbacks, and neighborhood scale
- Demonstrate how thoughtful architecture can enhance streetscapes and open up suburban lots without overwhelming infrastructure

Participants are encouraged to approach the challenge with an architect's mindset, considering site, light, materiality, circulation, and human experience alongside technical constraints.

Designs should be constructible within a reasonable construction budget of \$250,000, context sensitive, and spatially inventive, illustrating how a modest footprint can generate meaningful impact in both social and urban terms.

The competition begins with a case study based on a real property scenario (see Appendix), providing a frame for exploration. Competitors are tasked with designing a detached, barrier-free ADU for one or two residents. Submissions should investigate how a small, independent unit can:

- Generate supplemental income for the homeowner
- Provide accessible, dignified housing for seniors
- Respond to and enhance the character of the surrounding neighborhood
- Comply with all the zoning ordinances

Ultimately, this competition is a platform to demonstrate how architectural thinking can solve human and urban problems simultaneously. Through small-scale interventions, designers can explore new ways for seniors to remain in the communities they know, for families to live together in supportive arrangements, and for suburbs to evolve gracefully and sustainably.

### Evaluation Criteria

Designs submitted to the **mGAP** ADU Design Competition will be evaluated based on the following priorities:

- Logical Organization of Space  
How efficiently and thoughtfully the interior program is arranged to support daily living, accessibility, and functional flow
- Clarity of Circulation  
The intuitiveness of movement through and between spaces
- Innovation  
Creativity in spatial solutions, form, and integration with the site
- Quality and Appropriateness of Exterior  
Relationship to neighborhood context, streetscape, and aesthetic integration
- Adherence to Universal Design Principles  
Barrier-free planning, accessibility, and inclusivity
- Buildability  
Practicality of construction, material choices, and structural feasibility

- Cost

Designs should be constructible within a reasonable construction budget of \$250,000, context sensitive, and spatially inventive, illustrating how a modest footprint can generate meaningful impact in both social and urban terms.

**Designs should also demonstrate:**

- Cost-effectiveness

Practical strategies for realistic budgets

- Environmental responsibility

Thoughtful material selection and minimal environmental impact

- Energy efficiency

Passive design strategies, insulation, and sustainable systems

**Program Requirements**

Comfortable accommodations must include:

- Sleeping Area
- Living/working area
- Cooking Area
- Bathroom with walk-in shower
- Small Storage
- Mechanical/Utility Closet/Laundry Area designated space for laundry, HVAC, hot water heater

Additional recommended elements to consider:

- Entry/Foyer with Covered Access:  
small vestibule or porch for weather protection, security, and ease of access
- Outdoor Access:  
patio, deck, or small garden space to promote natural light, outdoor connection, and accessibility
- Flexible Space:  
for hobbies, exercise, or occasional visitors

**Prizes: Total Prize Fund: \$5000**

**There will be monetary prizes for 4 winning entries.**

First Prize:	\$2500
2 <sup>nd</sup> Prize:	\$1500
3 <sup>rd</sup> prize:	\$1000

**Honorable Mention: Owner’s Best Choice**

**Winning designs will demonstrate:**

- show imaginative solutions for comfortable-to-live-in interior solutions which adhere to competition specifications, and
- show materials and methods of construction for cost estimates.

Winning entries will not be considered for construction. The jurors will be looking for attractive projects that focus on universal design and cost-effective building techniques. The goal of the design project is to develop viable design ideas. **mGAP** and its partners will also research, collate and produce a free booklet: *ADU's and You: How to Get What You Want When Building an ADU*, a step-by-step Handbook for homeowners who desire to begin and oversee an ADU construction

project. Winning designs will be showcased in that Handbook and also shared widely with planners and public policy leaders.

### **Competition Schedule**

- **May 15:** Public Announcement
- **July 26:** Early Bird Registration - Upon registration, registrants will receive a copy of the homeowner's Owners Project Requirement (OPR) that our actual project homeowner has filled out. These results can be used to inform design decisions, ensuring the space is practical, personal, and tailored to the homeowner's needs.
- **July - Oct 15:** Design Development
- **Aug 13:** 1st Question & Answer - Zoom orientation sessions with potential applicants.
- **Aug 17:** 2nd Question & Answer - Zoom sessions with potential applicants.
- **Sept 14:** 3rd Question & Answer - Zoom sessions with potential applicants.
- **Sept 25:** Registration Deadline
- **Oct 2:** Closing Date for Questions
- **Oct 15:** Deadline for Submission
- **Oct 30:** Deadline for Juror Scoring
- **Nov 5:** Juror Meeting (select winners)
- **Nov 9:** Announce Winners
- **Nov 16:** Awards Ceremony

**Notification to Competitors Regarding Award Ceremony:** You will be notified by email if your design is considered for a prize and if your attendance at a ceremony will **be** necessary. Notification will be on November 9, 2026. Details will follow.

**Competition Entry Fee: \$30.00**

Publicity is the responsibility of **mGAP** who will:

- use social media advertising /Instagram/email/
- target Architectural Schools in Northeast Quadrant

### **Submission: Technical Requirements**

Participants are required to upload one digital landscape presentation which must not exceed 10 MB in pdf, and the 10 MB will be inclusive of sketches, variations, plans, sections, elevations, diagrams, and/or other presentation tools to explain their proposal.

- No video files are accepted
- All information provided must be in English
- All Submissions must be uploaded via the **mGAP** Submission Form. A Submission link will be provided to all registered contestants
- Presentation must not indicate any information related to an individual's/team identity
- Competitors will use assigned group number only
- Participants who do not comply with the requirements will be disqualified

**Project Preview:** Required to upload one project preview image from the presentation that best describes the project.

- At least 2000x1680 pixels large, oriented horizontally, no more than 10MB in size, and in pdf format
- Will be used for promotional materials to showcase project in case project is selected as winner
- Competition jury will not see the selected project preview image

**Deliverables Set:** (Please note that the presentation below is a suggestion only. Participants can choose to use a selection from it or, alternatively, propose a completely different set that would explain their design in the most efficient manner.)

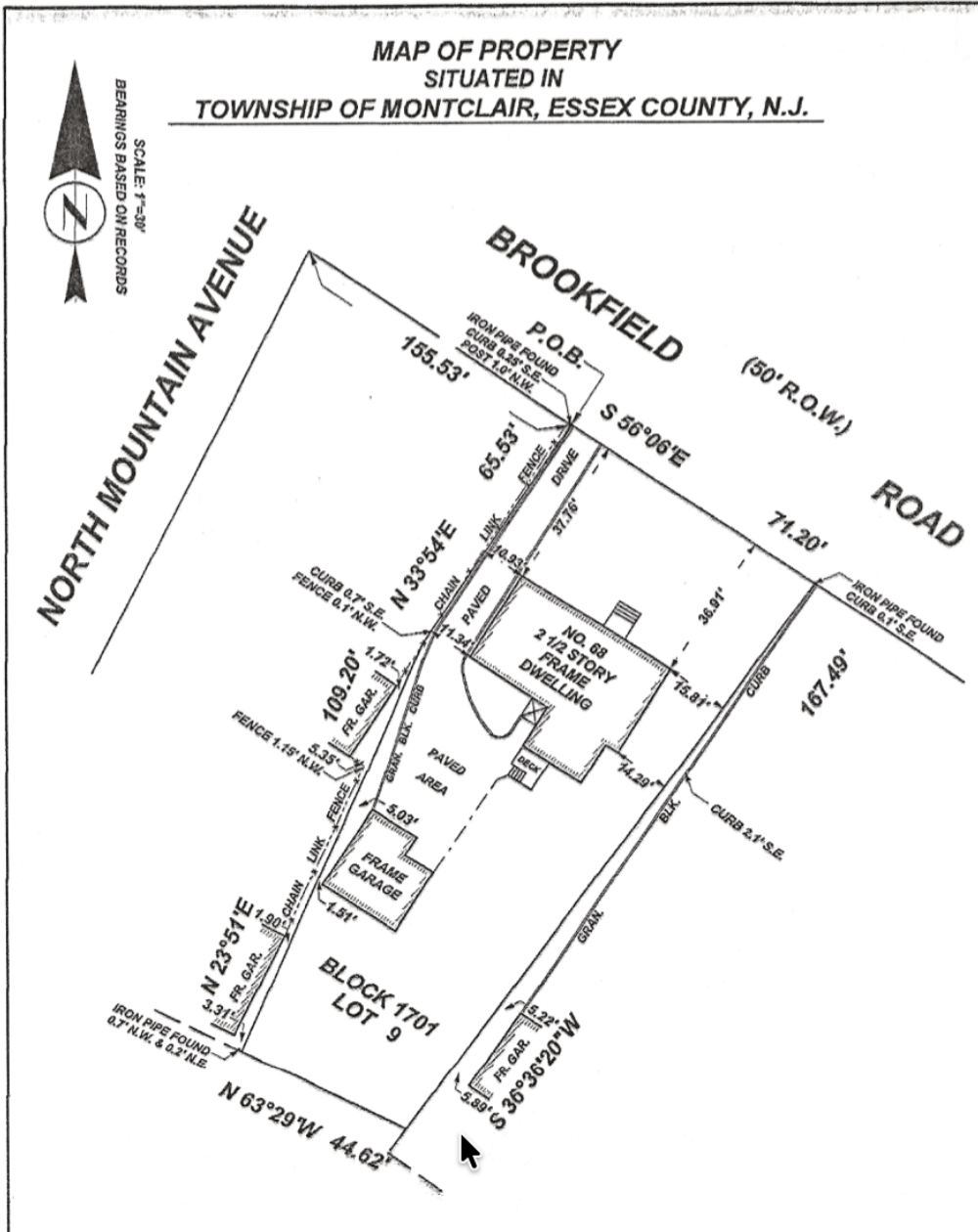
*Layouts conceived as two (2) design boards in graphic scale (1/4" = 1 ft) with minimum restriction of 300 dpi plus for renderings (renders) for each ADU submission at one floor-print size of 800 sq. ft. Line Drawings and Plans (including elevations, sections) and renderings (renders) required.*

- Site Plan
- Perspective views (interior perspective and exterior perspective)
- Elevations
- Primary Sections
- Floor plan (presumed ground floor plan)
- Details
  - Envelope: exterior
  - Methods of construction
  - Interior finishes
  - Key Materials
- Axonometric drawings providing information on building and architectural concepts
- Diagrams
  - Circulation
  - Lighting
  - Energy Systems
    - heat pump(s) required
  - Accessibility Diagram

Appendix includes:

- Case survey
- Case street views
- Case elevations

APPENDIX



REF: DBK 4597 PG. 789

A WRITTEN "WAIVER AND DIRECTION TO SET CORNER MARKERS" HAS BEEN OBTAINED FROM THE ULTIMATE USER PURSUANT TO P.L. 2003 c.14 (N.J.S.A. 45:8-36.3) AND N.J.A.C. 13:40-5.1(d). SAID CORNER MARKERS, WHERE ACCESSIBLE, WILL BE SET AT A FUTURE DATE.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORIZATION NO. 24GA28046000

SCALE: 1"=30'
DATE: OCT. 13, 2014
DRAWN: G.M.
CHECKED: R.J.H.
TAX MAP: 1701-9
SURVEY: 14-22900
OFFICE FAX: (973) 509-8802

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 TITLE NO. 92490

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