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## 'It helps everybody': Habitat for Humanity embarks on San Gabriel Valley ADU 'blitz'

A three-bedroom, two-bathroom home was built in 10 days in Baldwin Park. Officials say more is in the pipeline.



Habitat for Humanity staff and volunteers work on a 10-day build of a three bedroom, two bathroom ADU in Baldwin Park on Wednesday July 17, 2024. (Photo by Keith Durlfing)



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As California grapples with its [ongoing housing crisis](#), a local nonprofit is rolling out a different type of approach to addressing the problem in a pint-sized package.

[San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity](#) partnered with the city of Baldwin Park to build an accessory dwelling unit in 10 days. The 999-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bathroom home in the backyard of a 5,300-square-foot lot was completed last week.

Baldwin Park Mayor Emmanuel Estrada said the city has had a longterm partnership with Habitat. He said it benefits the city by taking much of the burden off members of city staff, provides affordable housing and revenue for homeowners, who can then rent out the small units – known shorthand as ADUs.

“It helps everybody,” Estrada said. “It’s just wins all around.”

It is the second ADU Habitat for Humanity has helped build in recent years but will not be the last, San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity CEO Bryan Wong said. More than 300 volunteers helped with the project, dubbed a 10-day “blitz.”

“The reason we wanted to do it in 10 days was to show that when cities are behind the programs — and [many cities are getting behind these ADU programs](#) — that it doesn’t have to be a one- or two-year process,” Wong said.

The ADU program builds off Habitat’s longstanding central mission to build affordable homes through partnerships with volunteers and local communities.

He said the goal is to build 20 more ADUs in San Gabriel Valley in the next 12 months as part of an ADU program that offers 0% interest construction loans to homeowners who meet the income requirements.

As part of the loan agreement the homeowner pledges to keep rent affordable, Wong said.

To qualify, a person must own a single-family residence for the last three years as their only property, be current on mortgage, property taxes and homeowners insurance, have no open collections, charge-offs or bankruptcies in the last seven years and have a minimum FICO credit score of 620, according to Habitat.

In addition, maximum household income restrictions depend on household size. The maximum for a one-person household size is \$70,650 and for a five-person household, the maximum is \$109,000. Interested homeowners can apply for the program at [sgvhabitat.org](http://sgvhabitat.org).

The [prevalence of local ADU ordinances has grown exponentially in the state](#), according to the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Since the first statewide ADU law passed in 2017, Los Angeles County has seen local ordinances follow suit and lead to an increase in the number of ADUs, sometimes called “granny flats,” being built.

L.A. County passed the first local ordinance in 2019 codifying the 2017 state law. That year the county approved 932 ADUs to be built in unincorporated areas and ADUs made up 46% of the residential units that were permitted.

Zoe Axelrod, a senior regional planner with the L.A. County Department of Regional Planning, said amendments to state law nearly every year since have made it “easier and easier” to build ADUs.

Apart from a slight drop from 2020 and 2021, the overall number of the units approved for entitlements by the planning department has increased since 2019 with 1,500 approved in 2023, according to the county.

“We kind of anticipate that will keep increasing,” Axelrod said.

She said changes to state law opened the door to maximize single-family residence zones, which make up more than half of the county.

[State Senate Bill 9](#), passed in 2021, for instance, did not change ADU law but provided more flexibility in lots zoned single-family by allowing two single-family residences on a single family lot with or without a lot split, Axelrod said.

“It is a significant amount of land where now there’s that opportunity to add more units where before you could just have one lot, one house,” Axelrod said.

L.A. County ordinances do not apply to incorporated cities, which each have their own rules about ADUs.

Axelrod said some communities have voiced concern about ADUs attracting new people to a neighborhood.

[Whittier city officials, for instance](#), have criticized laws such as SB 9, saying that the law would create housing lots “which are substantially smaller and incongruent with the community character of various communities.”

They also argued that SB 9 is also a threat to the public health and safety by requiring “cities approve additional dwelling units in locations and in manners which are inharmonious with community character and can create parking, congestion and noise problems in communities which are otherwise zoned to prevent those exact problems.”

But Axelrod noted that oftentimes ADUs are used by homeowners’ family members and easily integrated into the neighborhood.

Habitat has partnered with Baldwin Park, the San Gabriel Valley Regional Housing Trust and the state to provide the 0% interest loans and has about \$3 million available for upcoming ADU projects.

Habitat’s first ADU project with a city partner came in Pasadena. In 2020, the city approached Habitat to build a one-bedroom unit on about 300 square feet of unused space next to a 1,400-square-foot, single-family residence that Pasadena purchased from Caltrans the previous year.

The \$220,000 project was completed after four months of construction in August 2021. Habitat secured grant funding from the Pasadena Community Foundation for the project, according to the city.

Pasadena has its own program to help residents [construct ADUs on their property](#).



Wong said cities would be wise to add ADUs to their housing portfolios as they try and meet the requirements from the state about housing availability.

Habitat housing and ADUs are designed to blend in with its surroundings, compared to how high-rises can change the make-up of a community.

“We really stake our name on the fact that we don’t look to change neighborhoods,” Wong said.

Axelrod described ADUs as “naturally occurring affordable housing” because they are smaller units even if they are not income restricted.

“It really empowers homeowners to be part of the solution of providing housing,” Axelrod said. “It doesn’t just have to be affordable housing developers or multi-family developers who are building new housing.”

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