



## HelloADU - Marin Septic System Guidance

Step #1 – Getting your existing documents together:

You will need to collect any files that exist on your system, such as plans and public records, including permits. To find out if there are any documents for your current system that are publicly available, you can follow this link and the attached, “Public Access Viewer Instructions” that show you how to navigate the online system.

If no documents for your property appear online, that could mean your septic system was permitted prior to digital public records. The next step will be walking into Environmental Health Services (EHS) to see if you can find your files in their microfiche library. You will find their physical address and hours below. If you are still not able to locate files, then you have an undocumented system.

Environmental Health Services General Mailbox  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 236  
San Rafael, CA 94903  
(415) 473-6907  
M – Th 8am – 4pm  
Friday 8am – noon

Step #2 – Evaluating your system:

Once you have your documents in hand, or know that no documents exist, you can hire a county approved, Qualified Professional (see attached) to come out and evaluate your system. Reach out to two or three and request a proposal. They will help you determine if you have a Class I, II, or III system and the number of bedrooms your system is designed to support. Note: if your system is Class IV, that means it is failing and will have to be repaired so it is functioning satisfactorily. Failing systems must be reported to EHS.

Testing may require a site evaluation that includes your Qualified Professional (i.e., engineer) and an EHS inspector to determine the percolation rate and check the ground water level on your property. This can be scheduled by submitting a Site Evaluation application, which you can do by following this link and then online instructions. There will be a fee for this service, however, please note other no-charge services available, including an Office Consultation and Pre-Application Meeting to get you successfully through the process if additional help is needed.

Together with your completed application, you will need to include a parcel map with a simple sketch of your home’s footprint, as well as the septic system’s location. You can find your parcel map here by putting in your address, please note that sometimes you need to abbreviate street (St) avenue (Ave) etc. for your address to pop up. Then just click on “Assessor Parcel Map” and it will send you to a window that allows you to download the document.

As an alternative, you can have your Qualified Professional do the system check and site evaluation first and then bring in the county once they have indicated that your site and plan for repair, upgrade, or

replacement of the system appears to be permissible. This will add to the cost because the site evaluation will effectively happen twice, but you can decide if you want to move forward once you have the evaluation in hand. Be aware, however, that the county has the final word on whether the system is permissible.

#### Step #3 – Getting a proposal for septic design:

Your Qualified Professional will provide a report and perhaps drawings of your existing system. This report will stipulate your systems “Class” and the number of bedrooms your system is currently capable of supporting. They can also provide you with a proposal for analyzing and drawing up the system that will be needed to develop your desired ADU. This could mean an upgrade to the existing system to handle the additional effluent, a system replacement, or a second system to support the ADU.

I have attached the County’s “Residential Improvement Policy, for properties served by septic systems” for your review. It indicates what evaluations need to be done and what “Class” of system you will need to allow for the ADU you wish to build. It also defines the attributes for each “Class” of system, so you can understand the standard your Qualified Professional will need to design for, based on the size and type of your ADU project.

Special note: JADUs that include a bedroom with no exterior work are classified under “Minor Maintenance and Repairs” and do not need a EHS permit. Changing out a window to a door and adding a porch or deck to provide access to a JADU, however, qualifies as a “Minor Remodel” and will require an EHS permit and an inspection report by qualifying provider. Creating a J/ADU out of habitable space within the existing residence as a “Bedroom Swap” that effects less than 50% of the home, can also count as a “Minor Remodel” requiring only a septic permit and an inspection report by a Qualified Professional. While creating an ADU using existing non-habitable space, or by doing an addition of less than 500sf, can count as a “Minor Expansion” if it is done as a “Bedroom Swap” and will therefore require a Class 2 system assuming it does not exceed the allowable square footage per bedroom. See “Residential Improvement Policy” for chart. This strategy can bring down cost but be aware you will need to make alterations to permanently open the swapped bedroom to the living area.

#### Step #4 – Getting bids from contractors:

Once the plans from your Qualified Professional are complete you can begin sending them out to septic contractors. Contractors do not have to be approved by the county; however, the county has provided a list of contractors that they have worked with before, who know how to navigate the Marin EHS system (see attached). If you still want to move forward, after reviewing the bids you receive from contractors then you can start the permit process with Marin EHS by filling out an online application [here](#).

#### Possible short cut to getting pricing:

We understand the process for evaluating and designing upgrades to your septic system are costly. One short cut might be stopping after the evaluation and getting bids from Qualified Professionals on the drawings needed to upgrade your system to what is required to develop your desired ADU. Once you know what upgrade is needed and confirm you have the space and appropriate site conditions, you can go straight to contractors for an early estimate on building the system. It won’t be a hard bid, but it should provide you with a reasonable understanding of the project costs.

#### Step #5 – Overall costs:

Please note that for new detached ADUs you will want to budget for at least \$600/sf all-in for your project, in addition to the cost of upgrading your septic system. Given that total, you can decide if you wish to move forward. If you decide you don’t want to move forward, you are under no obligation to

make changes to your septic system, assuming it meets the basic qualifications for a Class I, II, or III system. And assuming you do want to move forward, you will need to submit (3) copies of the septic plans to EHS, with the appropriate permit fees. Our suggestion is to submit the septic plans to EHS and get comments back prior to applying for your ADU Building Permit.

Once you have completed the evaluation process and know that you can move forward with your septic upgrade, you can circle back to us at HelloADU and we will get you onto next steps for designing and permitting your ADU. Please let us know if you have any questions. We hope you will be able move forward on your dream and that we will have the pleasure of working with you on the project.

To learn more, please reach out by email  
[helloadu@hellohousing.org](mailto:helloadu@hellohousing.org)

Or visit our site  
[www.helloadu.org](http://www.helloadu.org)

