

Thames Centre Guide on Additional Residential Units

In 2022, the Province of Ontario published the Housing Affordability Task Force Report which provided several recommendations to increase the supply of housing. One of the key recommendations encourages the development of Additional Residential Units (ARUs) as a housing option.

What are ARUs?

ARUs are separate units with their own kitchen, bathroom and sleeping area(s). ARUs are different from other residential uses because they are clearly secondary to the main dwelling on the property in terms of use and appearance. ARUs come in a variety of forms including granny flats, in-law suites, secondary suites, basement apartments, coach houses and tiny homes. Up to three (3) units on each residential lot including the primary unit may be permitted subject to compliance. They can be located in a main dwelling including a single-detached, semi-detached or townhouse dwelling, and/or in a detached structure like a garage.

When a Planning Approval is Required

What kind of ARUs are permitted in the Urban Boundary?

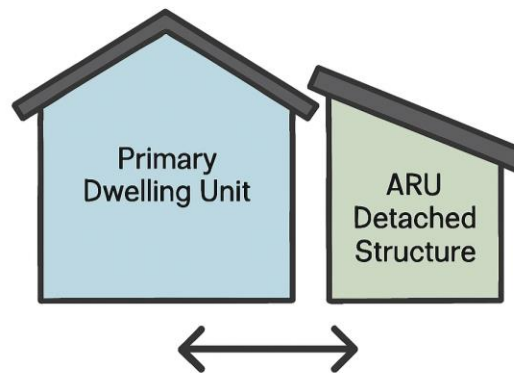
If your property is serviced by municipal water and sanitary sewers, no planning approval is required to establish an ARU provided you can meet all applicable law, such as zoning and building code requirements. If your property is not serviced by municipal water and sanitary sewers, an Application for Zoning By-law Amendment is required. Should Council pass a Zoning By-law Amendment to permit an ARU, their decision is final in that there is no right of appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

What kind of ARUs are permitted in Rural/Agricultural areas?

Although Thames Centre does not currently have a policy supporting ARUs in Rural/Agricultural Areas, applications are welcomed by rural area residents where the appropriate site conditions can be met given the following criteria.

In both areas, Thames Centre encourages ARUs that consider the following:

1. Clustered



Clustering Additional Residential Units (ARUs) close to the primary residence is a widely supported planning principle, especially in **rural and agricultural areas**, because it:

Protects Agricultural Land and Open Space

- In agricultural areas, clustering the ARU minimizes the footprint of development.
- This preserves more land for farming, natural heritage, or rural character.
- It avoids creating scattered, residential-style fragmentation across the lot.

Reduces Infrastructure and Servicing Costs

- ARUs that are close to the primary residence can more easily and affordably share existing private servicing (e.g., well and septic), driveways, and utilities.

Limits Visual and Land Use Impacts

- Clustering helps concentrate built form in one area, which:
 - Reduces visual sprawl from roads and neighbouring lands
 - Maintains rural and agricultural views
 - Helps ARUs remain clearly secondary to the main dwelling

Enhances Safety and Supervision

- When ARUs are located closer to the main home:
 - There's better natural surveillance
 - Emergency access is quicker and clearer

- There's improved ability for the owner to manage tenants or relatives living in the ARU (e.g., aging parents)

Aligns with Provincial Policy Objectives

- Ontario's planning framework encourages efficient use of land and services, particularly in agricultural areas.
- The 2024 Provincial Planning Statement supports compact rural housing and discourages scattered residential development on prime agricultural land.

2. On Shared Servicing

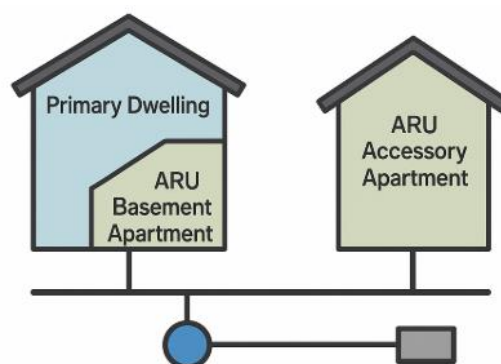
This is often preferred or required to:

- Lower servicing and maintenance costs by tapping into the existing well, septic, and utility connections.
- Protect active farmland and natural soils by concentrating any digging or trenching in one serviced area.
- Prevent a scatter of individual wells and septic fields, reducing environmental risks and keeping infrastructure from sprawling across the property.
- Preserve the rural, open character of the landscape by keeping additional buildings and systems clustered near the primary residence.

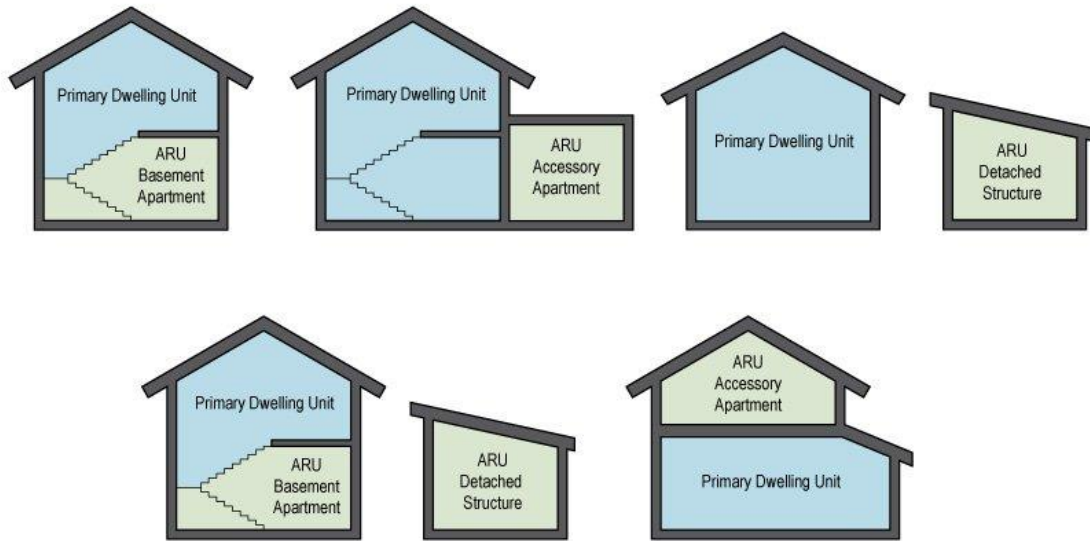
However, the **existing private services must be proven capable** of handling the additional load. This often requires:

- A **professional septic review** or design (e.g., to confirm capacity or need for upgrades)
- **Well water quality and quantity testing**, especially if both units rely on a single source

If new septic systems are required to support the ARU, that must be shown on the proposed plans.



3. Subordinate in Size and Scale



ARUs are encouraged to be subordinate in size and scale to:

Preserve Neighbourhood Character

- Subordinate ARUs help maintain the established look and feel of residential and rural areas.
- This avoids overdevelopment and ensures that ARUs blend into existing built form rather than dominate it.

Minimize Land Use Conflicts

- Keeping ARUs smaller reduces potential impacts on privacy, shadowing, and overlook for neighbours.

Support Gentle Density

- ARUs are intended to provide modest, incremental housing options—not to act as full secondary homes or duplexes.
- Subordinate scale reinforces the ARUs role as an accessory use.

Ensure Compatibility with Servicing Capacity

- In agricultural or rural areas with private services (wells and septic systems), large ARUs can overwhelm system capacity.
- Limiting the size helps ensure both units can be serviced safely and sustainably.

FAQ

What permits are required?

To establish an ARU, at minimum, you will need a building permit from the Municipality including a permit from the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA). Additional permits that may be required: Section 28 Permit from the Conservation Authority should the subject property contain regulated lands, Entrance Permit from the County or Municipality should an entrance not be permitted or required to be relocated.

Is an ARU subject to development charges?

The *Development Charges Act* exempts the first 2 ARUs added to an existing or new development.

What are the requirements for parking?

No more than one (1) off-street parking space is required for each ARU.

Can I rent out an ARU?

The Municipality has generally no authority over the occupants of a dwelling including whether the ARU is owner occupied, or tenant occupied should the ARU meet all applicable laws and regulations.

How will my property taxes be affected?

An increase in property taxes would be generally based on the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation's (MPAC) assessment of your property.

Need more information?

The Province has provided a guide to help homeowners plan and build ARUs and is available through the following link: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/add-second-unit-your-house>