

Creating a home for your extended family

By Leslie Mann

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As more families are welcoming their parents into their home, we're seeing an increased demand for in-law apartments.



Leslie Mann

Whether they're planning for extended visits from relatives, or are preparing to care for elderly parents, homeowners are looking for the best way to accommodate the needs of their extended family.

Sometimes the existing house can be reconfigured for additional living space, and in other cases the family will decide to look for a new home that's already set up for these needs. Here are several considerations to keep in mind as you seek the best option for your family.

► Check into town laws

If you're considering creating an additional living space in your home, or buying a home with an in-law apartment, it's prudent to talk with the local building inspector to gain an understanding of local zoning rules that apply to this space. In some communities, in-law apartments are not allowed at all, but in many towns you can obtain a permit for one if the space will be occupied by a relative or guest.

Regulations for in-law apartments vary from town to town. For example, homeowners in Hudson can apply for a special permit for what's called an "accessory dwelling unit" if they have space that meets certain criteria, such as having a separate entrance, providing parking for two vehicles, and taking up 25 percent or less of the entire living space of the home. Hopkinton also allows homeowners to apply for similar permits specifically to accommodate a family member who is 60 years of age or older. For more details visit the individual town websites to read their bylaws.

► Check the septic system

If you're planning to add bedrooms or baths to a home, check into the



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Be sure to check your local building inspector before making any modifications to your home.

size of the septic system to see if you can legally make these changes without having to upgrade the septic system (which can be costly to do).

► Consider the living level

For parents with mobility issues, having a bedroom and full bath on the first floor is most desirable. In some cases, it may be possible to adapt first floor living space into a guest suite. For example, I had a client who turned a first floor office, laundry room, and powder room into a first floor bedroom suite. If you're looking at a new home, it may also be a good idea to find one with a fairly level driveway so that your parents can safely enjoy walking through the neighborhood.

► Add safety features

Nearly one in four adults in America provide care for an adult family member, according to the AARP. If you will be caring for a relative who is elderly or infirm, you'll want to take extra steps to make sure the space is safe. Tammy Pozerycki, owner of Pleasantries Adult Day Services in Marlborough, shared these

handy tips.

- Add grab bars in the shower and beside the commode.
- Install anti-scald devices on showers and faucets, and be sure the water heater temperature is 120 degrees or less to prevent burns.
- Be sure the home is well lit, inside and out.
- Get an easy-to-use phone with large numbers.
- Consider a Lifeline or personal emergency response system.
- Remove scatter rugs that could cause trips.
- Be sure everything your relative needs is within reach to prevent stepping up on ladders or chairs.
- Consider installing a microwave oven instead of a stovetop.
- Verify that the smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are in working order and have regular battery checks. (If your relative is hearing impaired, you can get special smoke detectors that flash or vibrate in case of emergency.)
- Consult an expert. For more tips on preparing your home for an older relative, check out the Home Safety Checklist at www.eldercare.gov or call the Administration on Aging at

800-677-1116 to find local resources. You may also want to contact the National Association of Home Builders (www.nahb.org). Their certified aging-in-place specialists can consult with you about making appropriate structural changes to your home to help your parent remain independent.

► Check into funding sources

Some long-term care policies allow a set amount of benefit dollars to be used for home modifications that would allow a relative to remain in the home, instead of paying for care at an assisted living facility. The Department of Veterans Affairs (800-827-1000) also offers home modification benefits to qualifying disabled veterans. For more information visit www.homemods.org.

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