

Montclair offers unique option to age in place



Celine Choice and her son Wally have proposed converting her garage into a parent suite so that her son's family can live with her.

PHOTO BY JAIMIE WINTERS/STAFF

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A Montclair law, around since 1980, creates another housing option for seniors. But few know about it, and only three families have taken advantage of the law so far.

The planning board can grant a conditional use for an addition of separate living quarters within a single-family home for a parent or parents of the occupants.

On March 26, the planning board did just that. They granted Celine Choice of 5 Pierpont Drive her request to convert her garage into living quarters for herself. Her son and daughter-in-law will move into the main house.



The garage at this home will transformed into a parent suite.

COURTESY PLANNING BOARD

“My husband and I have lived there for 25 years, but unfortunately my husband passed in September. And now I live there alone,” she told the board. “I have asked my son and daughter-in-law and grandson to move in, and in order to do that we would like to make a mother suite on the property so we can live together, but still have independent lodgings.”

The accessory dwelling will contain a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen and living room. The move would also allow Choice to be on the ground floor as well rather than having to climb stairs to get to her bedroom.

A new entrance is proposed into the living room from the front of the building, and a second entrance is proposed to the kitchen from the new parking area. The accessory dwelling will also have access to the main house.

The existing driveway will be expanded to the east to provide access to a new parking area located along the east side of the building. The side yard is 15 feet wide and two stacked parking spaces, measuring 9 feet in width by 35 feet in length, is proposed.

In 2014, the planning board allowed Judy Hoffstein and Joel Patenaude to convert a former doctor's office attached to their home at 183 Park Street into a parent suite for Hoffsteins' parents. No additional parking was required, as the couple did not drive.

A parent suite was created for Joan Bortzomat's mother at 16 Lenape Trail in 1999. Both couples still own their properties.

The exception can be granted for no more than two parents of one of the owner-occupants or tenant-occupants of the single-family home. The parents must be of such an age or of such condition of health as to require special consideration.

No rent or fees can be collected by the owner.

No structural alterations can occur, with the exception of a bathroom and kitchen.

"The resulting arrangement must not be such as to divide the dwelling or give the appearance of dividing the dwelling into two separate dwelling units capable of independent occupancy," the law reads.

The owners enter into a written agreement with the Township of Montclair, which is filed with the office of the Register of Essex County. The owners agree that the parental-suite use will end if the property is sold or the parent or parents no longer occupy the space.

The certificate of occupancy for the conditional use must be renewed annually in January. An affidavit must be presented that the circumstances for which the conditional use was granted have not changed.

Construction of the suite can not begin until the owners, parents and township have signed the agreement.

Choice's husband, Wallace "Wally" Choice Jr., was a veteran, NBA basketball player and Harlem Globetrotter, and local

public advocate.

In 1968, Choice and a small group of Montclair residents formed an organization called Montclair Grass Roots, Inc. to meet the recreational and educational needs of youth in the community. They met at Glenfield Park House. In 2008, Essex County named the Glenfield Park House the "Wally Choice Community Center" in his honor.

Housing commission co-chair William Scott said the law gives seniors and their families another option to senior-only housing and also creates cross-generational living, which is a "good thing."