Before you buy

An ADU, addition or rebuild

Start with the part of your plan that makes the purchase worthwhile. Record the source of each answer and who can confirm it before your decision is due. Use N/A where a question does not apply.

Your plan and the paper trail

Property question	What we know	Still unknown	Who verifies it
1. Your purchase decision What use, unit count, size and permit timing does your purchase depend on? Who supplied those assumptions?			
2. Jurisdiction Is the parcel inside a city or in unincorporated county territory? A mailing address doesn't settle it. Which office handles zoning, and which issues permits?			
3. What the records show What use, rooms and floor area do approved plans and final records show? Ask for archived files if the online record is incomplete.			
4. City report at sale Does the city require a report or certificate when a home is sold? Has the seller delivered it, and what use does it show?			
5. Garage and parking What was approved, what is there now, and where is the parking? Check enclosed doors, bathrooms and cooking areas.			
6. Open permits or cases Which permits lack final sign-off, have expired or remain open? Are there open code cases or orders, and what deadlines come with them?			
7. Current and past rental use Has any unit been rented, now or in the past? Ask the local housing office which tenant protections apply to your plan.			
8. Rent your budget counts on Is that kind of rental allowed here, including short-term rental? Would adding a unit change which rent rules cover the house?			
9. Plans included in the sale What do the approvals cover, and when do they expire? Who can release the files, authorize their use and transfer the application?			

For agents

Share this sheet while your buyer still has time to request records and review the answers.

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These answers come from the planning and building counters. Ask for the code section behind each one.

Rules that limit the project

Property question	What we know	Still unknown	Who verifies it
10. Zoning and special areas What uses fit the zone? Check each map that covers the parcel. Ask what a fire hazard zone and a hillside area together mean for your plan. ☐ Hillside ☐ Historic ☐ Coastal ☐ Specific plan ☐ Community standards ☐ Fire hazard zone			
11. Recorded restrictions Which deed restrictions or HOA design rules apply to your proposal? Who can confirm the review process?			
12. The existing building Does the building meet today's setbacks, height and parking? If not, how much work is allowed before it has to be brought up to current rules?			
13. Size the lot still allows How much floor area and lot coverage does the lot still allow after what is already built?			
14. What the project's size triggers Will the project trigger fire sprinklers for the whole house, more parking, or street and sidewalk work?			
15. If you plan to rebuild What documents establish the former use, size and footprint? How old is the building? Which changes would put your proposal under a different review?			

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Use a site plan or survey to mark the proposed work, access routes and recorded easements. Record which details the city, county or utility still needs to confirm.

What fits on the lot

Property question	What we know	Still unknown	Who verifies it
16. Parcel and boundaries What recorded map or deed establishes the legal lot? Does the seller own an adjoining lot? Does a survey locate the boundaries, fences and walls?			
17. Easements and utility access Where are the easements, wires and poles? Do wires cross where you'd build? What access route does the utility need past the proposed work?			
18. Room for the project Can the home or ADU, driveway and required access fit together on a scaled plan once slopes and easements are shown?			
19. Mapped hazards and reports Is the site mapped for fault rupture, liquefaction, landslide or methane? Are there soils or geology reports for this lot?			
20. Drainage, walls and trees Where does runoff go? Which retaining walls, protected trees or roots could affect construction? Were any trees removed recently?			
21. Sewer or septic Is a public sewer within reach of the lot? If not, where are the septic tank and drain field, and is space needed for a replacement field?			
22. Water service Who serves the parcel? Can they confirm service capacity and any fire-flow information needed for this project?			
23. Fire access Which route can responders use from the street to the proposed building? Confirm street width, obstructions and hydrant location.			

Who can verify it?

Planning or Building counter / surveyor / title company / HOA / utility / fire authority / housing office
Building designer / geotechnical engineer / real estate agent for seller documents and transaction dates

A feasibility review can check the available records and identify which questions need an agency or specialist.