

When Jim and Ann were ready to retire from their respective careers, they decided to leave the hustle of Cambridge, Massachusetts, behind, in favor of living nearer to their son, daughter-in-law and their soon-to-be-born daughter, Rowenna.

Fortunately for everyone involved, New Hampshire's state legislature had recently passed a law that gave Ann and Jim a compelling new option. RSA 674:71, which went into effect on June 1, 2017, requires any town to permit the construction of an "accessory dwelling" onto an existing home.

The law provided an ideal opportunity for Ann, Jim and their family. They found a two-story home in Epsom, on a wooded 30 acres and with a view of a horse farm across the road. And the home, built in the 1990s, had adequate septage and electrical capacity to accommodate an addition.



The family closed on the home in May of 2017, putting them in position to be among the first to make use of New Hampshire's new law. A year later, Jim and Ann were enjoying their own living space, which is just a doorway away from the home occupied by their son, daughter-in-law and baby granddaughter.

RSA 674:71 limits the size of the addition to 750 square feet, and requires that a door separates the addition from the existing living space. It requires that the property owner occupies at least one of the two dwellings, but doesn't specify which one, and doesn't require a familial connection for the occupants of the other dwelling.



For Ann and Jim, who contracted with Gilford-based architectural firm KOAL, PLLC, for the project, the resulting addition and lifestyle are better than they had imagined. The addition provides them with a kitchen that flows into a living space, a bedroom and a private bathroom.

A door connects the kitchen in the addition to the kitchen of the original home. Ann said that when she and Jim are ready to begin their day, they simply open the door and the two dwellings merge into one; at the end of the day, they close the door and enjoy a private space for just the two of them.

"It's really nice. We were not sure how it would work, sharing and privacy," Ann said. "It's working out a lot more smoothly than I thought."

Ann said that KOAL helped them to achieve their design priorities. Large windows provide ample natural light and an airy feel in the addition, and also provide views of the surrounding horse farm to the north and woods, populated by coyotes, turkeys, bobcats, bears and deer, to the south. It's a welcome respite from the jangle of Cambridge.

The addition's design has many details that will allow Ann and Jim to comfortably occupy the space for many years to come. They're active and mobile now, but they've learned from older family members to prepare for when that won't always be the case. One of their relatives had to work for months to be released back to his apartment after a heart attack. Another fell and broke her hip, and had a similar challenge.

Jim and Ann's addition is built at all one level, and is universally accessible. Someone in a wheelchair could access all features of the addition, including use of the bathroom – which is tiled with high-friction flooring to prevent a slip and fall.

Their kitchen features an induction range built into the counter top and a wall-mounted oven, which are both friendlier to someone in a wheelchair and safer for when Rowenna starts toddling. There are currently cabinets below the counters, but the cabinets could be removed to make the kitchen even more wheelchair-friendly.

Ann has a relative who developed dementia, and the design of their new home would help soften such a development. None of the interior doors has locks, so no one will become locked in the bathroom, and the ceiling fan is operated by a wall-mounted control instead of a remote which could easily be misplaced.

