

Secondary Suite

The purpose of this brochure is to explain the requirements for a Secondary Suite in a Single Family Dwelling

"This information is provided for convenience only and is not in substitution of applicable City Bylaws or Provincial or Federal Codes or laws. You must satisfy yourself that any existing or proposed construction or other works complies with such Bylaws, Codes or other laws."

Other Brochures related to this topic

- [Parking Areas and Driveways](#)
- [Smoke Alarms](#)
- [In-law suites \(existing\)](#)

Overview

The City's secondary suite program provides affordable rental housing while providing for greater bylaw compliance and public safety.

It manages the inclusion of secondary suites in neighbourhoods by addressing complaints, suite size limits, the number of accessory uses, additional parking, payment of utility and other fees, and management of suites where the owner does not reside on the property.

Its objectives include:

- increased safety standards;
- protection of affordable housing options;
- to minimize the impact on neighbourhoods;
- fair and equitable fees;
- assisting property owners with legalization efforts; with
- a focus on citizen 'complaint-based' enforcement priorities

What is a Secondary Suite?

A secondary suite is defined as "an accessory dwelling unit fully contained within a single family dwelling." It is one or more habitable rooms constituting one self-contained unit with a separate entrance used, or intended to be used, for living and sleeping purposes for not more than one family and containing not more than one kitchen or one set of cooking facilities.

Zoning Bylaw Requirements

A secondary suite:

- is permitted within R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R9, R10, R11, R12, A1, A2, A3 and RM6 Zoning Districts
- must be fully contained within a single family dwelling containing only the other principal dwelling unit
- uses for living and sleeping purposes for not more than one family
- contains not more than one kitchen or one set of cooking facilities
- has a minimum area of 30 sq. m. (322.93 sq. ft.)
- has a maximum area of 40 % of the gross floor area of the principal building, whichever is less
- may be located anywhere within a single family dwelling
- will not be permitted in a single family dwelling with
 - an in-law or care-giver suite
 - boarders and lodgers
 - a personal care or child care
 - bed and breakfast
 - home occupations that include in-home client services
- cannot be subdivided from the principal into separate parcel by strata plan, air space parcel plan or otherwise.
- shall be provided with one additional on-site independently accessible parking space. Tandem parking is not acceptable.

Suite-Ready

A single family dwelling with a cellar that exceeds 30 sq.m. (322.93 sq.ft.) in floor area must incorporate the following minimum **suite-ready** requirements unless there is an existing or proposed secondary suite elsewhere within the single family dwelling.

- all requirements listed in the “Building Code Requirements” section on Page 3
- at least one bedroom window with size that meets the egress requirement
- rough-in 3 piece bathroom
- rough-in cooking facilities including rough-in wiring for future kitchen counter, fridge and range receptacles; exhaust hood fan and/or gas supply piping
- one outside access and one internal access to the floor above
- one additional on-site parking space

Suite-ready provisions should be shown on the drawings submitted for building permit with dotted lines to indicate the location of the future suite.

Suite-ready requirements apply to the construction of a new cellar, converting crawlspaces into liveable area or expansion of an existing cellar so that the cellar can be easily converted into a secondary suite in the future; however a building permit and any related electrical, plumbing and/or gas permits would be required at the time of conversion.

Building Code Requirements

All construction to accommodate a secondary suite shall comply fully with Part 9 of the BC Building Code.

The following information **highlights** some critical requirements for the construction of a new house with a secondary suite or alterations to an existing house to accommodate a secondary suite. It is **not the complete list** of construction requirements and owner/builder should consult Part 9 of the BC Building Code for complete secondary suite construction requirements.

- **Fire Separations between a Secondary Suite and Principal Dwelling Unit (including common spaces) shall have:**
 - a minimum 45 minutes fire-resistance rating is required for walls and ceilings between the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite if there is no interconnected smoke alarms between the principal dwelling and the secondary suite; or
 - a minimum 30 minutes fire-resistance rating is permitted if an additional interconnected photo-electric smoke alarm is installed in each of the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite and are interconnected; or
 - a minimum 15 minutes fire-resistance rating is permitted if ALL smoke alarms within the house are of photoelectric and interconnected.

- **Smoke Alarms** – The principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite shall have
 - interconnected smoke alarms; and
 - an additional interconnected photo-electric type smoke alarm in each of the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite and are interconnected if the fire separation between the principal dwelling and the secondary suite has only 30 minutes fire-resistance rating; or
 - smoke alarms throughout the entire house and shall be photoelectric and interconnected if the fire separation between the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite has only 15 minutes fire-resistance rating.

- **Sound insulation** - Walls and ceilings separating the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite shall have:
 - sound insulation, resilient channel on ceiling, and 12.7 mm (1/2") drywall; or
 - STC rating of not less than 43; or
 - ASTC rating of not less than 40.

- **Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent (DWV) Piping** are permitted to penetrate a vertical fire separation, provided the pipe is sealed at the penetration by a fire stop that has an F rating not less than the fire-resistance rating required for the fire separation. Combustible DWV piping are not permitted to penetrate a horizontal fire separation.

- **Heating System** – It is preferable for the secondary suite to have its own heating or ventilation system independent of the principal dwelling unit. If forced-air heating and/or ventilation ducts are serving both the secondary suite and principal dwelling unit, duct-type smoke detectors must be installed to shut down the heating and the ventilation

system. In addition, they must be equipped with fire dampers where penetrating required fire separations.

- **Central Vacuum Systems** – are not permitted to serve more than one suite.
- **Electrical panel** – The secondary suite in a new house must be provided with a separate panel or access to a panel located in a common space. This requirement does not apply to existing conditions.
- **Service room** – Shared access by the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite to a service room containing common HAVAC equipment is not required.
 - If there is fuel fired appliances located in such room it shall be separated from the remainder of the house by a fire separation having a fire-resistance rating not less than the fire-resistance rating required for the fire separation between the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite.
 - If the service room is located in the secondary suite it shall be treated as part of the principal dwelling unit and shall be fire-separated from the secondary suite.

Permit Requirements

Property owner must obtain and finalize a building permit and any related plumbing, electrical, gas or heating permits for a secondary suite.

Building permit

For application requirements for a new house with a secondary suite please refer to the brochure "[Building Permit Application Requirements for New Single and Two Family dwellings](#)".

For application requirements for a secondary suite in an existing house please refer to brochure "[Building Permit Application Requirements for Interior Finishing for existing Single and Two Family Dwellings](#)".

Applications for permits for new single family dwelling with a secondary suite or to add a secondary suite to existing single family dwelling require a Land Title covenant search for the property. This search will be completed by City Staff and an additional search fee will apply at the time of application.

Suite-ready provisions should be shown on the drawings submitted for building permit with dotted lines to indicate the location of the future suite.

All Building Permit applications are subject to the existing Building Permit [Fee Schedule](#) based on construction value.

Sub-trade Permits

After the issuance of a building permit for the secondary suite the licensed electrical, plumbing and gas contractors can obtain their own sub-trade permits if required. Home owners cannot carry out sub-trade works in a house with a secondary suite.

Inspection Requirements

The electrical, plumbing and gas contractors have to call for inspections and obtain acceptance of their rough-in work from the inspectors before the general contractor can request a framing inspection.

The building inspector will not conduct a final inspection unless all the sub-trade final inspections have been accepted by the electrical and plumbing & gas inspectors.

Supplementary Utility Fees

All residential properties identified with a secondary suite may be charged with supplementary utility fees. For more information about utility fees, please contact the City's Tax office directly at (604) 294-7350 or visit their [website](#).

Decommission a Suite

If the owner wants to remove (decommission) a suite the owner must:

- engage a licensed electrical contractor and obtain permit to:
 - remove the 40 amp range receptacle and install a box cover
 - disconnect and remove the range breaker from the panel and install approved panel fillers
 - remove the hood fan and disconnect and safely terminate the range hood wiring in an electrical junction box
- engage a licensed gas contractor and obtain permit to remove the gas supply to gas stove under permit
- reinstate an access door between the decommissioned suite and the principal dwelling
- call for electrical and gas final inspections

Business License Requirements

A Business Licence is required for property owners who rent out both the principal dwelling unit and the secondary suite in the single family dwelling. The license is subject to the conditions of

the “House Rental Business Licence” Bylaw that includes community standards and practices to assist in enforcement of any issues that impact adjacent properties or neighbourhoods.

For more information about licence requirements please contact the City’s Business Licence Office directly at (604) 294-7320 or visit their [website](#).

Further information

For further questions regarding secondary suites please contact the Building Department at (604) 294-7130.

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