



Secondary Suites

A secondary suite (e.g., basement suite) is a separate dwelling unit within a house that can be used as an independent residence. A secondary suite provides self-contained living spaces, including sleeping facilities, a bathroom and cooking facilities, that are designed for the exclusive use of the occupant(s) of the suite.

Secondary suites are an important part of the City's housing stock. They provide affordable, ground-oriented rental housing and contribute to the amount and diversity of housing available in the city, while still preserving the character of residential neighbourhoods. They can be used for family or as rental units, but cannot be strata-titled, sold or used for short term rentals.

Is my secondary suite authorized?

Since 1998, the City has allowed property owners in most single detached dwelling districts to create one secondary suite (or authorize one existing suite) per property. The City's official definition of a secondary suite is available on the following page. Only one secondary suite per house is allowed.

A secondary suite is only authorized if it was created with a Building Permit. If there are no City records indicating that a Building Permit was issued for the creation of a secondary suite, then the suite is unauthorized. Note that payment of secondary suite utility charges to the City does not mean a suite is authorized. To find out if a suite was created with a permit, contact the Planning Division.

What happens if my secondary suite is unauthorized?

If an unauthorized secondary suite comes to the City's attention due to health or safety concerns, negative impacts to the neighbourhood, or a Building Permit application is submitted, the City will investigate and pursue appropriate enforcement action. This action may include the requirement to bring the suite into compliance with City bylaws or to remove the suite. See our guide titled [Removing Secondary Suites](#).

Laneway Houses

A secondary suite is not the same as a laneway house or carriage house. A secondary suite is located within the primary building on a property, whereas a laneway or carriage house is a separate residential unit located in the rear yard of a property.

A laneway or carriage house *and* a secondary suite is allowed in most single detached residential zoning districts, provided each unit can meet the requirements of the Zoning Bylaw and the Laneway and Carriage House Development Permit Area.

To find out more, visit:

www.newwestcity.ca/housing/laneway-and-carriage-houses.



Secondary Suites: New Westminster's Official Definition

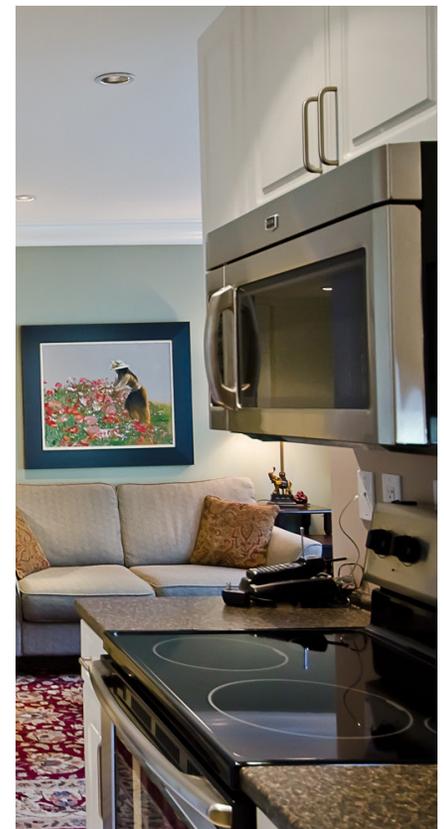
A secondary suite is an accessory dwelling unit in a house that consists of one or more rooms that are designed, occupied or intended for use, including occupancy, by one or more persons as an independent and separate residence in which a facility for cooking, sleeping facilities and sanitary facilities are provided for the exclusive use of such person or persons.

The City would likely consider an area in a house to be a secondary suite if the following apply:

- The area can be separated from the main house and any common areas (such as a shared laundry room) by a wall or doorway.
- The area contains a bedroom (i.e. a sleeping facility), a bathroom (i.e. a sanitary facility), and a kitchen.
- The area contains a stove or microwave, or a stove plug (220 volts) or a gas line that would enable the quick and easy installation of a stove.

Second Kitchens

Second kitchens are not permitted unless they are part of a authorized secondary suite. The only exceptions are “wok” or “spice” kitchens accessed directly from the main kitchen in the house. These accessory kitchens are created to have a separate space for frying. Typically these kitchens have a small stove, a sink, a small amount of cabinetry and counter space and a high-powered hood fan to extract greasy vapours and smells.



Creating or Authorizing a Secondary Suite

In order to build or authorize a secondary suite, the property owner must first confirm that their property is eligible to have a secondary suite.

Where are secondary suites permitted?

Secondary suites are permitted in most single detached dwellings in New Westminster, if the house is located in a single detached or duplex zoning district designated in the [Zoning Bylaw](#). Secondary suites are not permitted in duplexes.

Before making plans to build or authorize a secondary suite, please contact the City's Planning Division to confirm that the house has the appropriate zoning.

Mandatory Requirements

Any new or authorized secondary suite must meet the requirements of the Zoning Bylaw, the Building Code, the Tree Protection and Regulation Bylaw, and the Secondary Suite Design Standards and Guidelines.

ZONING BYLAW REQUIREMENTS

The Zoning Bylaw sets out essential regulations that every secondary suite must meet:

1. Only one secondary suite is permitted per house (although a property may have both a secondary suite and a laneway house or carriage house);
2. The secondary suite must not exceed 40% of the total floor area of the house;



3. The secondary suite must measure between 350 sqft and 968 sqft in size;
4. The secondary suite may not be stratified or subdivided;
5. The property owner must provide a minimum of two bylaw-compliant, off-street parking spaces: one for the primary dwelling unit and one for the secondary suite; and,
6. In Queensborough, the secondary suite may not be constructed below the flood construction level.

BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS

The BC Building Code applies to the construction of new houses, the alteration or renovation of existing houses, and changes in the use or occupancy of a houses. It is the responsibility of the property owner to ensure that the construction or authorization of a secondary suite complies with the provisions of the current Building Code, and that they have obtained any permits (e.g. plumbing, electrical) required under Provincial legislation.

TREE PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Before applying for any other permits, consult the Tree Bylaw and Regulation Department to obtain a permit for tree protection or removal, or verification that the property does not contain any trees. Visit the [Tree Permits web page](#) to learn more.

DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Houses with secondary suites must also conform to the *New Westminster Design Standards and Guidelines for Houses with Secondary Suites* to ensure they provide safe, healthy and good quality housing.

To construct or authorize a secondary suite in a house that was **built before July 1998**, review and fill out the [Design Standards Form for Houses Built Before July 1998](#).

To construct or authorized a secondary suite in a house that was **built after July 1998**, review and fill out the [Design Standards Form for Houses Built After July 1998](#).

To confirm when a house was built, please contact the Planning Division.

Applying for a Building Permit

After confirming that a house is eligible for a secondary suite, a building permit must be applied for. The application should include:

- the Building Permit Application Contact Form;
- the Secondary Suites Design Standards Form;
- a copy of a current title search; and,
- construction drawings showing how the secondary suite complies with the requirements.

Other documents that may need to be submitted with the building permit application include:

- a Letter of Authorization, if the applicant is not the owner of the property;
- a Heritage Alteration Permit, if an existing house is located within the Queen's Park Heritage Conservation Area or if the house is listed on the heritage registry; and,
- a Design Verification and House Performance Report, for new house construction or renovations to the exterior wall or ceilings.

Building permit applications may be submitted to the Building Division at New Westminster City Hall. Additional drawings may be required by the Building Division.

Building permit application packages are available at the Building Division front counter at City Hall or on the [Building Permit web page](#), which also provides more information about the application process and complete application requirements.

Receiving a Building Permit

If the application is approved, the City will issue a Building Permit. Then the work as per the approved drawings to build or authorize the secondary suite may proceed.

The Building Division must be contacted to arrange for a City Building Inspector to inspect the work as it proceeds. Inspections are required throughout the construction process to confirm that the building components (e.g., framing, insulation, plumbing) have been installed according to the BC Building Code.

After the suite receives Final Inspection approval, a letter will be issued confirming that there is an authorized secondary suite at the house.



Secondary Suite Utility Charges

All properties with secondary suites are subject to secondary suite water and sewer charges; however, there are certain circumstances where a property may be eligible for exemption.

If the suite area functions as part of the house, with occupants coming in and going out of the area from the principal dwelling unit, then the suite may be eligible for an exemption from the suite utility charges. To arrange for the exemption, call the Planning Division and sign an affidavit called a Statutory Declaration (Stat Dec).

Signing the Stat Dec is swearing under oath, as if in court, that the suite is not occupied as a separate unit and that if the suite is occupied as a separate unit in the future, the City will be notified and the secondary suite utility charge will restart. The entire inspection and Stat Dec signing process will take approximately five minutes.

The City will also consider "back-dating" the utility charge exemption if the secondary suite has been unoccupied as a separate unit for a period of time prior to the inspection. To qualify for a refund, write a letter to the Planning Division describing the occupancy of the suite, including dates of occupancy. An exemption will only be granted back to the beginning of the previous calendar year.