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Secondary Suites

A secondary 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 cannot be strata-titled, sold or used for short term rentals, but can be used for family or as long term rental units.

Creating or Authorizing a Secondary Suite

To create or authorize a secondary suite the property owner must first confirm that their property is eligible to have one. Any new or authorized secondary suite must meet the requirements of the Zoning Bylaw, the Building Code, and the Tree Protection and Regulation Bylaw.

Where are Secondary Suites permitted?

Most single detached dwellings and some duplexes in New Westminster are zoned to permit secondary suites. Before making plans to create or authorize a secondary suite, contact the Planning Division to confirm the house has the appropriate zoning.



Image via bars.aymannour.net

What is a Secondary Suite?

A dwelling unit, which is accessory to a single detached dwelling or duplex and is contained within the same structure separated by a door. It includes cooking facilities, a bathroom, and a sleeping area.

City Contacts

Building Division

buildingdept@newwestcity.ca

604-527-4580

www.newwestcity.ca/building-permits

Planning Division

plnpost@newwestcity.ca

604-527-4532

www.newwestcity.ca/planning-building-and-development

Tree Bylaw and Regulation Division

treebylaw@newwestcity.ca

604-636-4318

www.newwestcity.ca/services/trees

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Costs to Consider for Secondary Suites

PERMITS & DESIGN

The application fee for a Building Permit depends on the value of construction. There are also costs for the house designer to prepare the required drawings. Tree Permit costs vary, depending on if any trees will be removed.

UTILITY BILLING

All properties with secondary suites are subject to annual secondary suite water and sewer charges. Payment of the secondary suite utility charge to the City does not mean a suite is authorized.

A property may be eligible for an exemption to utility charges if the suite is vacant, or the suite is used by the occupants of the primary residence. To determine a property's eligibility contact the Planning Division.

ZONING BYLAW REQUIREMENTS

Zoning Bylaw Section 190.29 sets out 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 or carriage house);
2. The secondary suite may not be stratified or subdivided;
3. In Queensborough, the secondary suite may not be constructed below the flood construction level;

4. SIZE:

- The secondary suite must be at least 350 sqft in size;

5. PARKING:

- A minimum of two bylaw-compliant, off-street parking spaces must be provided: one for the principal dwelling unit and one for the secondary suite;

6. OUTDOOR SPACE:

- all suites will have usable outdoor space for the exclusive use of the suite occupants
- for below ground suites, a private, independent outdoor space of 80 sqft
- for above ground suites, the outdoor space can be a raised deck of 60 sqft

7. ENTRIES:

- all suites will have external entries (directly to outside), covered with a roof, awning or overhang of at least 10 sqft as weather protection.
- a hard surface pathway will connect the suite entry to the public sidewalk
- all suite entries will have entry lighting
- if the house main entry and suite entry face the same street, the suite entry will be set back by 5 feet

8. WINDOWS:

- all habitable rooms will include a window
- windows will either have 3.77 sqft of glazed area above the ground, or be in a window well of at least 4 feet long, uncovered and open to above
- all windows in bedrooms should be above the ground, or in a window well that is less than 1.5 feet deep, uncovered and open to above



Image via www.onesite4u.com

9. LAYOUT:

- all functions of the principal unit (e.g. laundry, storage, habitable rooms) shall not be required to be accessed through the secondary suite
- the functions of the secondary suite (e.g. laundry, storage, habitable rooms) shall not be required to be accessed through the principal unit
- the secondary suite shall be interconnected to the principal unit by an interior joining door, lockable by the occupants of the secondary suite to entry door standards and acoustically sealed

10. UTILITY SERVICES

- occupants of the secondary suite can control the heating and ventilation from within the suite;
- suites will have an independent heating system (e.g. electric baseboard or hydronic heating); interconnected ventilation between the suite and principal unit is not permitted;
- occupants of the secondary suite will have access to the utilities used to service the secondary suite including hot water tanks, boilers, electrical service panels and heating systems;
- the suite will be provided with electrical, plumbing and dryer duct connections for in-suite laundry facilities.

Laneway & Carriage Houses

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

A laneway or carriage house and a secondary suite are allowed in most single detached zones, provided they can meet the requirements of the Zoning Bylaw, the Laneway and Carriage House Development Permit Area guidelines and the BC Building Code.

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;
- a copy of a current title search; and
- construction drawings, including a site plan and floor plans showing how the secondary suite complies with the Zoning Bylaw and BC Building Code 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 sole owner of the property;
- a Heritage Alteration Permit, if an existing house is located within the Queen's Park Heritage Conservation Area, or the house is Heritage Designated and if exterior alterations are proposed.

Additional drawings may be required by the Building Division.

Building permit applications may be submitted to the Building Division at New Westminster City Hall between 8:00 am - 3:00 pm. Building Permit application packages, which provide application requirements and more information about the application process, are available at the Building Division or online.

Receiving a Building Permit

If the application is approved, the City will issue a Building Permit. You must come to City Hall to sign and pay for your permit in order for it to be issued.



Image via www.onesite4u.com



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Inspections are required throughout the construction process to confirm that the building components (e.g. framing, insulation, etc.) have been installed according to the BC Building Code and the approved plans.

To schedule an inspection with a City Building Inspector, contact the Building Division.

The Suite cannot be occupied until a final inspection approval is received from the Building Inspector.

What happens if a secondary suite is unauthorized?

If an unauthorized secondary suite comes to the City's attention, the City may investigate and pursue appropriate enforcement action, particularly where health, safety or neighbourhood impact concerns are identified.

This may include the requirement to authorize the suite by bringing it into compliance with City bylaws, or to remove the suite

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 house. It is the responsibility of the property owner to ensure that the creation or authorization of a secondary suite complies with the provisions of the current Building Code, and that any permits (e.g. plumbing or electrical) required under Provincial legislation have been obtained.

TREE PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Before applying for any other permits, a Tree Permit is required to determine any necessary tree protection or removal. An arborist report may be required for a tree permit



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Best Practices for Secondary Suites

Secondary suites must meet the regulations in the Building Code and Zoning Bylaw, section 190. Best practices are provided below to encourage suites that provides safe, healthy and good quality housing. Well-designed secondary suites have happier long-term tenants.

Suite Entries

Suite entrances should be welcoming and weather protected. Entries should be easily identifiable to visitor, delivery persons or emergency responders.

Good:

- The suite entry is visible from the street
- The suite entry is no more than 4 feet below grade level
- A separate suite mailbox is located next to the principal unit mailbox

Better:

- The suite entry sidewalk is not combined with an adjacent paved driveway
- Walkway lighting is provided along the path from the sidewalk at 6-8ft intervals.
- Decorative landscaping (e.g. flowering shrubs, planter boxes) in the area around the entry.

Suite Livability and Layout

Livable suites should have plenty of access to daylight from large windows.

Good:

- The floor level of the suite is no more than 3 feet below grade level
- Each room has at least one window that will receive direct natural daylight.

Better:

- The floor level of the suite is at grade level
- Additional storage space at least 3 feet deep is provided

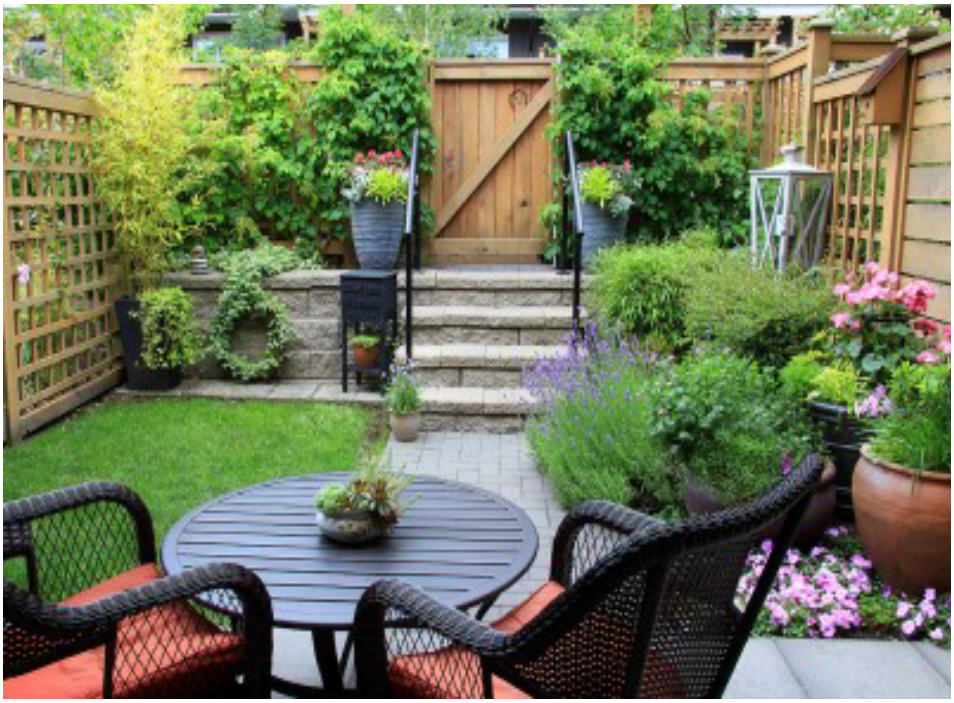


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Landscaping and Private Outdoor Space

The suite must have Private Outdoor Space (POS) for the suite's tenants which is clearly separate from the rest of the outdoor space at the property. Landscape design and paving materials should consider rainwater management and runoff.

Good:

- The POS is delineated, with fencing, hedges, shrubs, and planter boxes. No fencing constructed of chain-link, concrete, or concrete blocks will be used
- The POS is no more than 3ft below grade
- Additional trees are planted to provide shade to outdoor areas.
- Landscape design and paving materials consider rainwater management and runoff. Permeable surfaces are provided on pathways and patios.

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Better:

- The POS is located just outside the entrance to the suite, or directly accessed by a patio door.
- Retaining walls and fences are softened with plantings.
- A closable gate will be used to allow access between the POS and other yards or parking areas.
- Landscape design incorporates rainwater retention, infiltration and harvesting including rain gardens, permeable surfaces, rain barrels and swales

Parking

A property with a principal dwelling and a secondary suite should have at minimum two parking spaces located on the property. Secure and weather protected long term bicycle storage should be provided.

Good:

- Vehicle parking spaces are located in an enclosed garage. Garage doors face the lane.
- Space for bikes is provided in a garage or under a deck.

Better:

- Parking spaces located in carports, or as parking pads.
- Permeable surfaces are encouraged for driveways and parking spaces, including permeable unit pavers, gravel, and wheel paths integrated into planted strips
- Long term bike storage is provided in a secure bike room, bike lockers or bike shed. Space for cargo bikes, trailers and children's bike attachments is provided.

Suite Accessibility

At-grade and step-free secondary suites can be accessible for seniors and persons with mobility challenges.

Good:

- Outlets and switches are installed in all rooms in locations that are easily reached by persons in wheelchairs.
- Bathroom walls are constructed with grab bars and handles next to toilets and showers
- Bathroom and kitchens are designed to allow sufficient turning radius for person using wheelchairs
- Hallway widths are a minimum of 0.85m (34")
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Image via southlake.lorisdecor.com

- All doors have a minimum clearance width of 0.81m (32"), and thresholds to a maximum height of 13mm (1/8"),

Better:

- Wider parking spaces for accessible vehicle ramps are provided, with a step free pathway from the parking to the suite entry
- Knee clearance is provided under the bathroom and kitchen sink,
- lever-type or automatic faucets are installed, not knob-handle or push-operated faucets
- Lever-type door handles that do not require tight grasping or twisting of the wrist are installed
- More accessible unit design ideas are available on Supplemental Guidelines for Accessible Laneway and Carriage Houses