



BUILDING / UPGRADING A SECONDARY SUITE

Information for home owners and builders

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Goal of this brochure

This brochure informs home owners and builders about the main B.C. Building Code safety requirements for secondary suites. Furthermore, it outlines Zoning Bylaw requirements for secondary suites. The goal is to inform home owners and builders about safety and other requirements for secondary suites. It is the home owner's responsibility to make sure a secondary suite is safe, properly constructed and respects the District's bylaws.

What is a Secondary Suite?

In general, the presence of an additional kitchen means a house is considered to contain a secondary suite. A secondary suite is an additional dwelling within a single family house. Secondary suites have to be built according to the requirements of the B.C. Building Code.

The Zoning Bylaw defines a secondary suite as an *accessory dwelling unit* that:

- a) is located within a single family dwelling;
- b) has a total floor area of not more than 90 m² (968 sft) nor more than 40% of the total floor area of the building;
- c) is located in and part of a building which is a single real estate entity; and;
- d) is meeting all the applicable requirements from the B.C. Building Code.

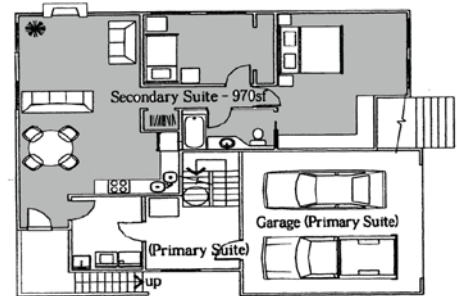
Building Permit and other permits

Before commencing with any work associated with the legalization of a secondary suite, a Building Permit must be applied for. It is advisable that you have an advisor (architect, certified builder) make an assessment in case you are renovating an existing house.

Floor Plans for building permit

To apply for the Building Permit you will need to provide two copies of the floor plan of the suite with the following information:

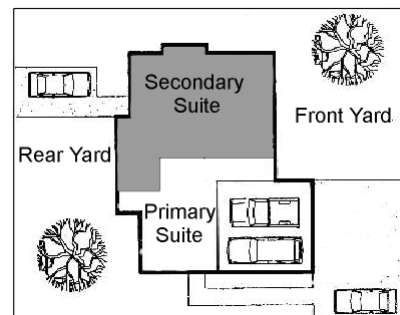
- scale 1/4" = 1'0" or metric equivalent
- floor plans of the complete house to determine the 40 percent total area limit of the suite, and the 90 m² limit.
- the walls of fire separation between the suite and the rest of the house
- the use and sizes of all the rooms
- the exit door(s) and required exit windows
- the sizes of doors, windows, openings
- location of smoke alarms
- location of primary exhaust fan
- heating system
- wall construction specifics



Site Plans for building permit

You will also need to provide two copies of a Site Plan showing the following information:

- the entire lot
- legal description of the property
- property lines with dimensions
- location of the house on the lot, setback distances
- identification and dimensions of setbacks from the property line
- location of all parking spaces on the lot
- location of secondary suite and primary dwelling



Plumbing, Gas and Electrical Permits

All new dwellings with a secondary suite require a separate meter and separate electrical panel board except if a joint panel board is placed in a common room.

For safety reasons Gas and Electrical Permits must be taken out by a licensed contractor. Electrical and Gas permits are issued by the Province's Safety Authority and can be applied for at the British Columbia Safety Authority tel: 1.866.566.SAFE (7233). The local number for the provincial electrical inspector is 604.885.5616.

What to consider when designing a secondary suite

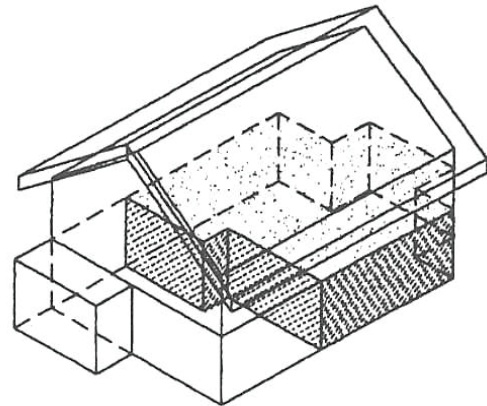
B.C. Building Code Section 9.36 regulates Secondary Suites

If you have an existing house you must meet the full Building Code Section 9.36 standards when constructing or upgrading secondary suites.

If you are planning to build a new home but are not sure you want to incur the full expense of a secondary suite at this time, some suite requirements can be built into your house so to prepare for a possible future secondary suite and reduce costs associated with future retrofit.

Fire Separations

The secondary suite and the main dwelling are considered separate fire compartments. The secondary suite must be “compartmentalized” or separated from the main house by walls, floors and ceilings that have a fire resistance rating of 45 minutes. In other words, the structure must be built so that it will take 45 minutes for a fire to burn from one suite into another. The fire separation can be reduced to a 30 minute fire resistance rating if interconnected photo electric smoke alarms (CAN/ULC S531) are installed (B.C.B.C. 9.36.2.20). The fire separation requires no fire resistance rating if the building is sprinklered throughout (NFPA 13D).



Examples:

- to achieve a 45 min. fire resistance rating for walls one layer of 1/2” Type X drywall on each side of the wall is required
- to achieve a 45 min. fire resistance rating for ceilings one layer of 5/8” Type X drywall is required
- to achieve a 30 min. fire resistance rating for walls one layer of 1/2” regular drywall on each side of the wall is required
- to achieve a 30 min. fire resistance rating for ceilings one layer of 1/2” Type X drywall or two layers of 1/2” regular drywall, or one layer of 5/8” regular drywall is required.

Pipes and Ducts Penetrating Fire Separations

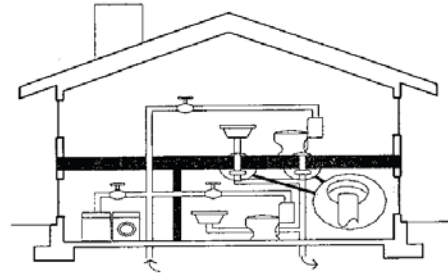
Metal pipes and sheet metal air ducts may pass through fire-rated ceilings and walls between the suite and the main house but they must be tightly fitted. Ducts must be fitted with fire dampers if they are part of a mechanical ventilation system, forced air heating system, or HRV.

Plastic water pipes can pass through walls if they are tightly fitted and sealed by a fire stop system (ULC S115) and if they are not more than 30 mm (1”) in diameter.

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Plastic drain, waste and vent piping is permitted to be located within, or penetrate a fire separation if they are:

- enclosed inside a layer of gypsum board that is a minimum of 12.7 mm (1/2") thick,
- the opening is tightly fitted to the pipes,
- the pipes do not penetrate the gypsum board on the underside of a fire-rated ceiling.



Safe Exiting Requirements

The basic principle of exit requirements is that people must be able to have two ways of getting out of the building in case of fire.

Doors

The main house and the Secondary Suite must each have at least one swing door to the outside that is at least 1.98 m (6'-6") high and 81 cm (2'-8") wide for fire exiting. The door may swing inward and is allowed to open into a shared corridor or exit stairway which, in turn, is provided a swing door to the outside.

Exit Corridors and Stairs

Exit corridors, stairways, or exterior passageways shared between the main house and the secondary suite must be at least 0.86m (2'-10") wide. It must be possible to travel in opposite directions from either suite exit door to two separate exits.

Bedroom Windows

A bedroom window must have a minimum clear height and width of 0.38 m (15 in) and a clear opening area of at least 0.35 sq m (3.75 sq ft). For the purposes of exiting in case of fire the window must be operable from the inside.

If the window in the bedroom does not meet the minimum area requirements specified above, you can:

- increase the window area to the minimum required size, or
- provide a bedroom door with direct access to the outside.

Windows near an exit route

Persons attempting to escape from one dwelling must not be exposed to fire emanating from the other dwelling. To this end if a stair, ramp or exit path that provides the only exit from either fire compartment comes within 3m (10 ft.) horizontally, passes 5 m (16 ft) above or 2 m (6'-6") below a window in the other fire compartment, the window must not present a hazard to a person using the stair, ramp or exit path. An acceptable level of protection can be achieved by constructing the window of wired glass in a fixed steel frame with no operable vents.

Heating Systems

Each room in the secondary suite must have winter heating. Hot water and / or electric baseboard heating is the easiest way to provide for this.

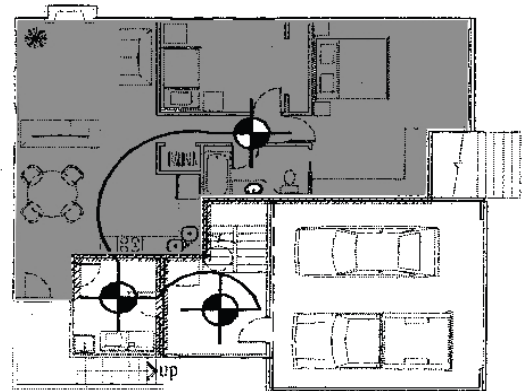
Forced air heating systems require additional safety features to prevent the spread of smoke and fire from one unit to the other:

- A duct type smoke detector is installed to prevent circulation of smoke;
- The furnace is provided with a relay to shut down the furnace fan and gas valve if the alarm is activated, and
- The heating ducts and cold air return, in the secondary suite, are equipped with fire dampers in conformance with article 3.1.8.9. B.C. Building Code where they penetrate the wall or ceiling membrane.

Smoke Alarms

As a minimum, suites that have a fire separation with a fire resistance rating of 30 min. are required to have hard-wired, interconnected photo-electric smoke alarms (CAN/ULC S531) installed in both the secondary suite and the main house. The smoke alarms must be wired so that activation of the smoke alarm in the suite will activate the alarm in the main dwelling as well.

If the main dwelling and the secondary suite share common facilities (shared spaces) such as a laundry, furnace room, foyer or stair, a hard wired, interconnected photo-electric type of smoke alarm must be located in each shared space, and the main dwelling must be provided with interconnected smoke alarms on each floor level. The extra interconnected photoelectric smoke alarms are not required in each suite if the fire resistance rating between the suite and the main house is increased to 45 minutes or more and no common facilities exist. A carbon monoxide detector is required in each dwelling unit if the building contains a storage garage or a fuel burning appliance.



Height of Rooms and Spaces

The headroom clearance for secondary suites in an existing house must be a minimum of 2.00m (6'7") from the floor to the underside of the ceiling. The minimum ceiling height must be maintained throughout the suite. In other words, no beams or drops in the ceiling below that height can obstruct a person from walking from one room into another within the suite.

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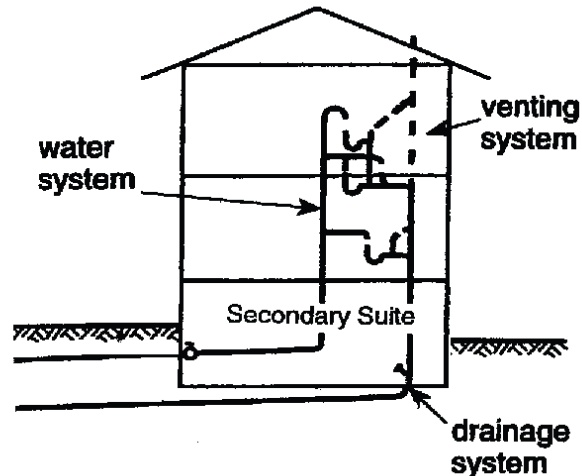
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Mechanical Ventilation

The secondary suite must have at least one primary exhaust fan on timer in the suite. This fan is usually located in the bathroom.

Plumbing

Additional plumbing fixtures installed to accommodate a secondary suite will affect the operation and performance of existing fixtures in other areas of the dwelling. Drainage, venting and water systems must meet Plumbing Code requirements to ensure that an acceptable level of performance is maintained throughout the dwelling. Non-compliance may result in poor plumbing system performance, trap seal failures and the entry of sewer gas into the building.



Plumbing fixtures must be in good condition and be marked with some evidence of CSA certification in accordance with Plumbing Code requirements. Non-conformance may result in inadequate fixture performance resulting in an unsanitary installation, compromising the health of the occupants.

Note: Provisions for a laundry facility may be provided in the suite. Alternatively a common shared laundry room, including fire separations, may be incorporated into the design.

Fire Sprinklers

Providing a fire sprinkler system throughout the entire building eliminates some of the foregoing requirements. Should you choose to exercise this option, please consult with your Building Official.

Requirements around the use of a secondary suite

The Zoning Bylaw regulates the use of a secondary suite and the land on which it is located. The following requirements apply:

One per single family dwelling

Only one secondary suite is permitted in any single family dwelling

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Resident requirement

The owner of a single family dwelling containing a secondary suite shall be resident of either the principal dwelling unit or the secondary suite for a minimum of 9 months a year.

1 extra parking spot on site

You must provide one extra parking space for the suite in addition to the two spaces already required for the main house. The extra parking space for the suite must be contained on the property and not encroach on public property. Also, the third parking space has to be accessible without crossing over the two other spaces.

Home occupations

The Zoning Bylaw has “general provisions” that regulate home occupations. In relation to a secondary suite the following requirements apply:

- A home occupation in a secondary suite shall be conducted only by residents of the secondary suite.
- Home occupations that attract customers or clients are not permitted on a lot that contain a secondary suite.
- Up to two home occupations are permitted on a lot.

Occupancy and registry

Use of a secondary suite is only allowed if an occupancy permit from the District of Sechelt has been issued. While undertaking your construction work, make sure to call for the required inspections, and complete the construction work. When the suite has passed all inspections, and an occupancy permit is issued, your suite is legal for occupancy.

Septic systems

For dwellings on septic systems a septic assessment is required before a secondary suite can be approved. The septic system will have to be designed to process any additional sewage flows.

Miscellaneous

What will it Cost?

Costs of construction or upgrading a secondary suite will depend on your actual scope of work. In addition to the cost associated with meeting code requirements, the quality and extent of finishes will have a significant impact on the final tally. Costs will include drawing of draftsman quality plans for the permit application, the fee for the Building Permit and other permits like Plumbing, Gas and Electrical, if these are necessary. Contractor costs will vary depending on scope of work undertaken.

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Financial Assistance

For qualifying homeowners Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation offers a Rental Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (Rental RRAP). For Further Information contact CMHC at: 1-800-668-2642 OR check their web site at:

<http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca>

Further information

Contact one of the building inspectors of the District of Sechelt, 604.885.1986 or visit

www.sechelt.ca