
Secondary Suites in Single Family Zones

The 14 October 1997 Zoning Bylaw Amendments and current BC Building Code permit a secondary suite in a single family dwelling provided a building permit has been issued for the current conditions.

The purpose of this handout is to inform homeowners, builders and contractors about general requirements for existing and new secondary suites.

An existing family residential unit (FRU) is not required to comply with the secondary suite requirements if it is maintained in accordance with the previous Zoning Bylaw including family use only.

Building Permit Application Process

1. Review the Zoning Bylaw, Building Bylaw and BC Building Code requirements. A summary of main issues is provided below. For clarification, review with a single family dwelling Plans Reviewer, Plumbing/Gas Inspector or Electrical Inspector.
2. Call 604-990-2480 to schedule an appointment to submit the building permit application with a single family dwelling Plans Reviewer.

For a new single family dwelling or for an addition to an existing building, the Zoning Bylaw and Building Code provisions will be reviewed by a single family dwelling Plans Reviewer as part of the building permit process. An appointment can be scheduled for information only prior to submitting an application.

For an existing suite or renovation to create a secondary suite in a single family dwelling:

- schedule a field inspection Building, Plumbing/Gas and Electrical Inspectors to assess existing conditions and to determine the amount of upgrading required (current inspection fee is applicable, payable in advance of inspection).
- submit 2 copies of a site plan and floor plans for the entire building showing the location of the principal suite and secondary suite and noting the location of 3 parking spaces on the property (see parking space requirements below), and
- additional or revised drawings or other documentation may be required where renovations are necessary to address issues identified by inspectors.

3. The building permit application is reviewed and a building permit issued after fees and refundable security deposits have been paid.
4. Only certified electrical contractors, bonded gas contractors and trade qualified plumbers may obtain Plumbing, Gas and Electrical permits for work in a single family residential building containing a secondary suite.
5. Owner and/or contractor request inspections during construction as required.

Zoning Bylaw Requirements for Secondary Suites

1. An owner is to occupy either the principal dwelling unit or the secondary suite.
2. A secondary suite is only permitted in a single family residential building and is not permitted in an accessory building or parking structure.
3. A maximum of 1 secondary suite is permitted in a single family residential building.
4. A secondary suite is not permitted:
 - in a single family residential building used to accommodate boarders or lodgers,
 - in an accessory building,
 - in a single family residential building containing a home occupation (occupation or profession conducted for gain including office, business, daycare, or
 - to exceed the lesser of 90m² (968 sq.ft.) or 40% of the residential floor space of the single family residential building. Residential floor space excludes balconies, decks, patios, accessory buildings carports and garages.
5. A minimum of three (3) off street parking spaces are to be provided on the property for a single family residential building containing a secondary suite (8'10" wide, 18'9" long with 6'11" high). Parking spaces are to be durable and dust free surfaces such as concrete, asphalt or crushed limestone. Crushed limestone is to have a suitable containment border.
6. The secondary suite cannot be subdivided from the building and sold.

Building Bylaw/Code Requirements in Secondary Suites

The current BC Building Code and District Building Bylaw should be referenced for design purposes. The following information is provided for information.

1. A building containing a secondary suite that is located in the fire limits area of the District is to be sprinklered. Fire limits area include property above 1050ft and some other properties that are not easily accessible by the fire department because of steep driveways or remote locations.
2. Floors and walls are to be fire separations where they separate:
 - the suites from each other,
 - a public corridor (serving both suites) from the remainder of the building, and
 - an exit stair enclosure from the remainder of the building.

3. The above fire separations are to have:
- except as permitted below, a 45 minute fire resistance rating or 1 hour fire resistance rating if either suite contains 2 or more storeys (including basements),
 - a 30 minute fire resistance rating where an additional photoelectric smoke alarm is provided in both suites, or
 - no fire resistance rating where the building is sprinklered according to NFPA 13D*.

*Note that a fire separation including one with no fire resistance rating is a smoke barrier and any door openings are still required to have a door closing device.

Appendix A indicates a 30 minute fire resistance rating can be provided by:

- walls of 12.7mm (1/2") gypsum wallboard (gwb) on both sides and 400mm (16") framing, and
- floors of 12.7mm (1/2") Type X gwb or 15.9mm (5/8") gwb on frame assemblies.

Wall and floor construction material details should be provided for fire separations including attic and crawl space fire separations.

4. A minimum room height of 2m (6'8') is to be provided throughout the required floor area of each suite and for the connecting space including corridors.
5. An egress door from each suite is to be provided either:
- at grade
 - to exterior exit stairs,
 - to exterior passageway,
 - to an exterior balcony,
 - through a public (shared) corridor, or
 - through an exit stair enclosure.
6. A second egress stair, door or window may be required from one or both suites where the egress route involves an enclosed exit stair, public corridor, exterior passageway or exterior balcony as described in Sentence 9.37.2.11.(1)
7. The required egress doors are not to be exposed to window or door openings in the other suite. Review the egress requirements in Part 9 and Subsection 9.37.2.9.
8. The travel limit to an exit or egress door may exceed one storey where an openable egress window conforming to Sentence 9.9.9.1.(2) is provided on that floor level.
9. Windows are required for egress purpose.
10. An exterior door or openable window is required in each bedroom. A window is to have an unobstructed height and width not less than 380mm (1'3"), an unobstructed area not less than 0.35 sq m (3.8 sq ft) and have the bottom of the window opening not more than 1.5m (5') above the floor.

11. Heat/ventilation systems can **not** serve both suites. The drawings should indicate the type of heating proposed for each suite. Renovations to return air ducts or furnace room enclosures may be required to prevent circulation of air between the suites.
12. Smoke alarms and CO alarms are to be provided as indicated in the electrical section below and connected as indicated by the building inspector. Also see #3 above.
13. Sound control requirements are not applicable as permitted in Article 9.37.2.20.
14. Combustible water pipe having up to 30 mm (1-1/4") outside diameter is permitted to penetrate a fire separation where it is tightly fit or has a listed firestop system.
15. Combustible dwv piping can be located in and penetrate a fire separation provided the wall and floor assembly has 12.7mm (1/2") gypsum wallboard (gwb) and the combustible piping does not penetrate a gwb membrane on the underside of a horizontal fire separation (i.e. rated floor between suites).

Plumbing, Gas and Sprinkler Requirements in Secondary Suites

1. Isolation valves are required for the principal dwelling unit and the suite.
2. Plumbing, gas and sprinkler work is to be performed by a qualified tradesperson after permits have been obtained by them.
3. For interior renovations, review requirements for new plumbing or gas work with the Plumbing/Gas Inspector.

Electrical Code Requirements in Secondary Suites

1. Any electrical work done in a home containing a secondary suite is to be done by a certified electrical contractor **after** the electrical permits have been obtained as required in Electrical Safety Regulation 487/95: Sec.22: regular permits.
2. In new and open construction:
 - conform to BC Building Code (Part 9 including secondary suite requirements in Section 9.37) and the Canadian Electrical Code,
 - see notes in #3 below regarding smoke alarms, heating and service size,
 - provide separate wiring for the secondary suite. Main dwelling and any common areas to be wired as one unit. 26.722(a), and
 - provide an electrical panel in the secondary suite and main dwelling unit as required in 6-206 and 14-406. A common panel may be permitted with special permission from the Electrical Inspector. Where a common panel is permitted, locate suite breakers together and separate from main dwelling breakers.

3. In finished buildings, an electrical contractor is to:
- upgrade rooms in the secondary suite to current Canadian Electrical Code, including kitchens, living rooms, bathrooms and bedrooms,
 - upgrade smoke alarms to current building and electrical code requirements:
 - smoke alarm on each floor level of the main dwelling unit,*
 - smoke alarm on each floor level of the secondary suite,*
*applies to floor levels with more than 900 mm between adjacent floors,
 - smoke alarm in each bedroom and a location between bedrooms and remainder of the storey (suite) and if bedrooms are served by a hallway, the smoke alarm shall be located in the hallway,
 - provide an additional photoelectric type smoke alarm if required in each suite in lieu of the higher rating for fire separation-see Building Code on page 2,
 - indicate if electric baseboard heat is being provided in either the main dwelling unit and secondary suite (single forced air system can not supply both), and
 - indicate whether the service size is adequate.

For Further Information

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