

Secondary Suites



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Secondary suites provide many benefits to homeowners, tenants and the community, and tend to be an affordable alternative to apartment living. Approximately 70% of all single-family homes within the City of Coquitlam contain a secondary suite. This brochure is designed to help you choose which option meets your needs and guide you through the permit process. It is for general guidance only and does not replace the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code, Zoning Bylaw or any other City regulation.



What is a secondary suite?

A secondary suite is a separate living area contained within a single detached home. It functions as a self contained living unit complete with a kitchen, bathroom, and a sleeping accommodation.

It may share common space on the same floor with the primary residence (e.g. a laundry room). A secondary suite may not be stratified.

Secondary suites expand the supply of lower cost rental housing, providing the opportunity for renters to live in lower-density residential neighbourhoods. They can offer rental housing that is affordable, ground oriented, and market based. It also offers opportunities for homeowners to downsize in their own home.

Do you need more information?

Building Permits Division staff are here to help. Here's how to get in touch:

Phone: 604-927-3441

Email: permits@coquitlam.ca

Can my home contain a secondary suite?

Secondary suites are permitted in most single-family homes in residential zones. Although every suite application is reviewed in detail, the following general regulations will apply to all homes:

- A secondary suite may only be located in a single-family dwelling.
- A single-family dwelling may not contain more than one secondary suite.
- A suite may be located within a residential building containing only one other dwelling unit (the primary unit).
- A suite will not be permitted on a property where a restrictive covenant on title prohibits it.
- One extra parking space, in addition to the two spaces already required for the main dwelling, will need to be provided for the secondary suite.



Removing a Secondary Suite

Secondary suites are unauthorized unless the necessary building and plumbing permits have been obtained, and a final inspection has been completed by the City of Coquitlam. If you do not want to legalize a suite, it is in your best interest to remove the suite and take advantage of this space for your personal use. The added benefit is that you do not face any municipal tax penalties for having an unauthorized suite in your home.

A secondary suite may be removed through one of the following options:

Option 1

Remove Cooking Facilities

This option involves removing all types of cooking facilities.

- Step 1** Obtain a gas or electrical permit from the Technical Safety BC (TSBC) for the removal of a stove.
- Step 2** Remove the stove and terminate all associated gas piping or wiring at the wall.
- Step 3** Call the TSBC Inspector for inspection.
- Step 4** Once approved by TSBC, fill out the Suite Removal Form enclosed in this brochure, and submit it to Building Permits Counter at City Hall or email to permits@coquitlam.ca.

Option 2

Remove Locks to Create One Dwelling

The unauthorized suite has to be permanently open and accessible to the rest of the house.

- Step 1** Remove the locks from doors between the suite and main dwelling. If the suite and the main dwelling unit are not connected by a door, a passageway between the two units must be established.
- Step 2** Fill out the Suite Removal Form enclosed in this brochure, and submit it to Building Permits Counter at City Hall or email to permits@coquitlam.ca.

Important: Ensure fire safety standards in the bedroom or sleeping area of the decommissioned suite meet current standards. (The requirement for smoke alarms is mandatory in homes built after December 1981, and is strongly recommended in all homes irrespective of age.)

Regulations

Zoning Bylaw – This City bylaw regulates land use in the City. It also regulates the size of the suite, along with parking requirements.

Building Bylaw – This City bylaw enables the City to regulate secondary suites through the use of permits and inspections. It outlines such things as when permits are required and how and when inspections shall be conducted.

British Columbia Building Code – This provincial code document contains the health and safety aspects of construction. The Code outlines minimum standards of construction, structural integrity, fire safety, plumbing, heating and ventilation, and many other aspects of buildings that we rely on. Although most people involved in the building industry are familiar with the Code, it is the property owner's responsibility to ensure that their home is in full compliance with the regulations.

Your Utility Bill

A suite will generate additional usage of services. Here's the breakdown.

- > Home with no suite – **standard utility tax**
- > Home with an authorized suite – **standard utility tax + 40% surcharge**
- > Home with an unauthorized suite – **standard utility tax + 100% surcharge**

IMPORTANT!

You must apply for a suite removal by December 31 of the previous year in order to qualify for an adjustment of your utilities the following year.

Who is Responsible?

The homeowner is ultimately responsible for the maintenance, upkeep and condition of a home. This means that all building permits are a form of contract between the City and the owner.

Applying for a Permit to Construct a Secondary Suite

Before starting any construction work associated with your secondary suite, you will need a building permit.

If you are hiring a contractor to apply for a permit and/or conduct the work on your behalf, an Agent Authorization Form for Permit Application or File Access is required from the property owner.

Permit Fees

A fee is due at the time of application. The remaining permit fee is based on calculated construction value, and is payable when the permit is issued and ready for pick-up. For more information on fees, please contact the Building Permits Division at 604-927-3441.

Related Fees for a Suite

An additional utility fee will be charged on your annual utility bill. This reflects the added consumption and use of City water and sewer services.

Other Requirements

A plumbing permit will be required if there are any alterations or additions of plumbing fixtures. Your plumbing contractor can apply for the permit after the building permit is issued. Property owners are not permitted to do plumbing work for secondary suites.

Inspections

Inspections are part of the permit process. You or your contractor will be responsible for ensuring the work is completed in accordance with the BC Building Code and is ready for inspection at specific stages of construction. Our inspectors will assess the work and point out anything that does not meet standard regulations. Building inspectors are available to answer technical questions you may have at that time and will provide you with an inspection report. Schedule your inspection(s) at coquitlam.ca/inspections.

Other agencies that you may require services from.

- British Columbia Building Code (BCBC): bccodes.ca
- Technical Safety BC – Gas and Electrical Permits and Inspections: technicalsafetybc.ca
- BC Hydro: bchydro.com
- FortisBC: fortisbc.com
- BC One Call – Call Before You Dig: bconecall.bc.ca
- RRAP Program: cmhc-schl.gc.ca
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Your Home Insurance Provider
- Your Telephone and Cable Provider

You will submit two copies of your final drawing package. The drawing set will include:

- ☐ A site plan accurately drawn to scale showing:
 - ✓ The entire lot, legal description of the property, property lines and identification and dimensions of setbacks of the main dwelling from the property line
 - ✓ Location of secondary suite and primary suite and all parking spaces
- ☐ A floor plan at a scale of ¼" = 1'0" or metric equivalent accurately drawn to scale that shows:
 - ✓ The entire floor area of the level where the secondary suite is located (area calculation)
 - ✓ Floor plans of the rest of the house to see the size of the secondary suite relative to the size of the house, and its location to the main dwelling
 - ✓ Fire separation walls and floors between the suite and main dwelling
 - ✓ Use and sizes of rooms
 - ✓ Sizes of doors and windows including exit door(s) and bedroom exit window
 - ✓ Location of smoke alarms and primary exhaust fan
 - ✓ Wall construction details
 - ✓ Location of heating sources

Things to Consider...

Home Occupation – If you are running a business from your home, you should check with our Business Licence staff before you add a suite to your home. There are limitations to the total area and usage of both activities.

Flood Plain – Do you live in a flood plain? Specific areas of Coquitlam are located within one of several potential flood zones of the Coquitlam River, Fraser River, Pitt River and several streams throughout our city. Check your Certificate of Title for restrictions or ask our staff for assistance.

Check Your Certificate of Title – If your home is considered as part of a bare land strata, you will require permission from your Strata Council. You should review your Certificate of Title for any other restrictions that may apply to your lot.

In some cases, restrictive covenants can be removed. You must seek legal advice in this case.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are there regulations for secondary suites?

Like all housing, secondary suites must be regulated. The City's Zoning and Building Bylaws, along with the BC Building Code regulate the provisions of secondary suites. Neighbourhoods must also be protected from potential negative impacts that unregulated suites may cause, such as parking congestion, noise and unsightly premises.

I have an existing secondary suite within my home. How do I know if it was built with a permit?

To determine whether or not your suite was created with a permit, contact the City's Building Permits Division at 604-927-3441 or permits@coquitlam.ca. Building Permits staff can search records to confirm if your suite was created with a permit.

If my suite was created without a permit, what should I do?

The owner or agent will need to consult with the BC Building Code for secondary suite regulations. Staff will work with you to obtain a permit, in order to ensure that the minimum life safety requirements are in place. These requirements are in place to ensure the safety of your suite occupants, as well as your family.

What if I have a suite and no longer rent it out?

Contact the City's Building Permits Division at 604-927-3441 or permits@coquitlam.ca to start the process of decommissioning your secondary suite. See page 3 for more information on decommissioning your secondary suite.

Benefits of Legalizing Your Secondary Suite

Legalizing your secondary suite ensures the safety of your home's occupants - both your family and your tenants. It is also a source of protection for your financial investment.

Some Benefits:

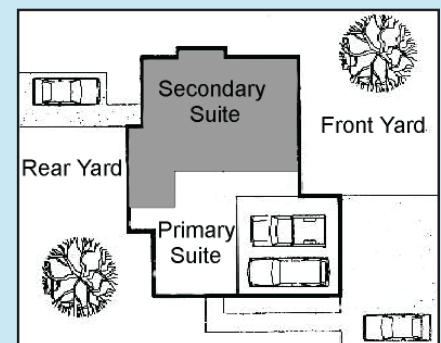
- > **Safety of occupants** – When you legalize your suite, you comply with a variety of safety standards designed to provide minimum levels of health and safety to occupants.
- > **Ensure adequate property and home insurance coverage** – If your suite is legal, you can obtain the proper insurance coverage that will protect you in cases of emergencies and/or disasters caused by either a tenant or a member of your family.
- > **Reduce neighbours' complaints** – A legalized suite enables you to provide adequately for your tenants so their impact on the neighbourhood is minimal. By legalizing your suite, you provide adequate parking so the impact to the neighbourhood and street is minimal.
- > **Maintain the value of your home and potentially increase its value** – The work undertaken to legalize a suite is often seen as providing more value because all work has been completed and inspected and has the potential for supplemental income.
- > **Avoid costly penalties** – Upon complaint, the City will investigate to confirm whether a secondary suite is permissible and/or legal. A homeowner found with an unauthorized secondary suite will be required to legalize or remove the suite, and may be faced with bylaw compliance fines.

Parking

You will be required to provide one extra parking space for the suite in addition to the two spaces already required for the main dwelling on the lot. The extra parking space for the secondary suite must be independently accessible, contained on the property and not encroach on the public property or right-of-way.

The additional space may be enclosed in a structure such as a detached or attached garage. It may also be a parking pad located on or beside your driveway. Tandem parking is not permitted.

While you or your designer prepares your drawings for the suite, consider the location of this parking space on your site plan. A site plan will form part of your drawing application.



What are the requirements for constructing a secondary suite?

A secondary suite must conform to the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code. The BC Building Code (BCBC) has adopted a number of alternative requirements for secondary suites in order to provide minimum health and safety standards for occupants without imposing undue costs to owners.

This guide does not encompass all of the requirements of the BCBC and its requirements for secondary suites; however, it is provided to assist in clarifying the most critical health and safety requirements of the BCBC.

Bedroom Windows

Each bedroom is required to have a window that opens to the outside, without any special tools or knowledge, to provide a second means of escape in case of fire. The window opening must be a minimum of 3' 9" in area with no dimension less than 15" (i.e. 23"x 23" or 15"x 36"). Security bars are not permitted.



Doors and Ceiling Heights

Both the secondary suite and the main home must each have at least one exit door that is at least 2'8" wide and 6'6" high. Each exit door is required to open to the outside. If this is not achievable in your situation, arrange a meeting with our Building Permits staff to discuss possible solutions. The BCBC provides minimum dimensions for clearances under beams and decks.



Gas and Electrical

Gas and Electric permits are required for any alterations to the respective systems. Permits must be obtained from Technical Safety BC (1-866-566-7233).



Heating Systems

Each room in the secondary suite be supplied with heating according to the BCBC. The main house and secondary suite are allowed to have separate heating systems, or shared heating system. If a forced air heating system is shared between the main house, secondary suite and common spaces, then there are additional requirements for the heating system to prevent the spread of fire and smoke. If a single heating system serves the a house with a secondary suite, individual controls must be provided in each dwelling unit served by the system so that it is possible for the occupants to control the temperature in their own dwelling.



Fire and Sound Separation

In order to restrict the spread of fire and smoke from the suite to the remainder of the home in the event of a fire, a fire separation is required between the suite and the home. A fire separation can be made up of a wall and/or ceiling with drywall applied to it. There are different options as to how this can be achieved. Depending on the thickness and type of drywall installed, you may be required to install an additional smoke alarm system that serves the suite as well as your home. The additional smoke alarm that may be required would be a photoelectric type smoke alarm. It would be required to be installed in the suite and then interconnected to an additional photoelectric smoke alarm located within the main home in locations in accordance with the BCBC.



Doors in a fire separation with a required fire-resistance rating of 15 min, but not greater than 45 min, do not need a fire-protection rating provided they are at least 45 mm thick solid core wood doors and have a self-closing device. All other openings in a fire separation are required to be tightly fitted.

The BCBC also contains requirements for limiting the sound transmission between the main house, secondary suite and common spaces.

Parking

One additional off-street parking space for the secondary suite must be provided in addition to the space(s) required for the main house. The extra space for the suite must be contained on the property and not encroach on a public right-of-way or street. The extra space must also be independently accessible. Tandem parking is not permitted.



Plumbing

Every dwelling is required to have a kitchen sink, a bathtub or shower, a bathroom sink, and a water closet. Additional plumbing fixtures installed to accommodate a secondary suite will affect the operation and performance of existing plumbing in other areas of the home. Drainage, venting and water systems must meet Plumbing Code requirements to ensure that an acceptable level of performance is maintained, and a healthy environment is provided. A ticketed plumber will need to purchase a plumbing permit from the City and to do the plumbing work. A homeowner is not permitted to do plumbing work within a secondary suite.



Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are required in each bedroom, and outside each bedroom, separating them from the remainder of the floor space, as well as on each floor. These smoke alarms are required to be interconnected within the suite, so that when one alarm is activated all other alarms within the suite will activate as well.



Ventilation

The BCBC requires that each bathroom and kitchen be equipped with an exhaust fan vented to the exterior. A secondary suite requires a ventilation system that ensures fresh air is ventilated through the suite. There are different options as to how this can be achieved. One potential option is a passive ventilation system, which includes a principal exhaust fan that runs continuously (typically the bathroom exhaust fan) and fresh air inlets installed in each bedroom and main living area.



This information has been prepared to provide information only. It is not a legal document. If any contradiction exists between this document and the relevant City bylaws, codes or policies, the text of the bylaws, codes or policies shall be the legal authority.

It is the responsibility of the homeowner to ensure their housing unit is maintained in a safe and healthy manner.



Secondary Suite Removal

Submit in person: City Hall, 3000 Guildford Way
Building Permits Division
Phone: 604-927-3441
or by email: permits@coquitlam.ca

Owner(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Date: _____

Secondary Suite Address: _____

Suite Removed (select one)

1. ☐ Cooking facilities removed
2. ☐ Locks from doors between suite and main dwelling removed

Comments: _____

If you have selected option number **1** or **2** from above you are declaring that the secondary suite has been removed. Reinstating an unauthorized secondary suite without proper permits may result in fines or other legal action.

Please note: You must apply for a suite removal by Dec. 31 to qualify for an adjustment in utilities in the following year.

Owner's signature: _____

Second Owner's signature: _____

Office Use Only:

Amanda System Updated: ☐ Tax Roll No. _____