

# A GUIDE TO SECONDARY SUITES

## Development Services Division

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*This guide is not a bylaw. It is a guide prepared to assist you in understanding the process in creating a new suite or legalizing an existing suite in the City of Pitt Meadows. For details and legal documents, you must consult relevant bylaws and provincial legislation.*

## Introduction

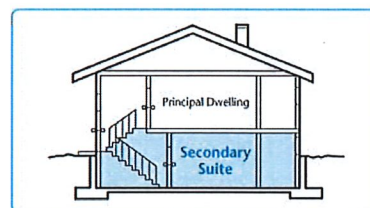
In 2011, Pitt Meadows Council adopted a new zoning bylaw in which secondary suites are allowed in certain zones subject to conditions. Council's primary goal in allowing secondary suites is to ensure that suites are safe and liveable for the inhabitants through encouraging code compliance while improving affordability of housing.

This guide is intended to familiarize residents and property owners with the new regulations and to describe the process for creating a new suite or legalizing an existing one.

If you are creating a new suite in a new or existing house, please review *A Guide to Building Permits* as well.

## What is a Secondary Suite?

A secondary suite is a set of rooms in a single family home that has been designed or configured to be used as a separate dwelling unit and is accessory to the principal dwelling. A suite should contain a bathroom, a kitchen with cooking facilities and at least one bedroom.



*Note: Some suites will require direct exit to the outdoors*

## What is the difference between a Duplex and a Secondary Suite?

A duplex is two dwelling units that share a common wall and may be owned separately through a strata title. A secondary suite must be completely enclosed within a single family dwelling and not externally appear as a separate unit.

Secondary suites are not permitted in a duplex.

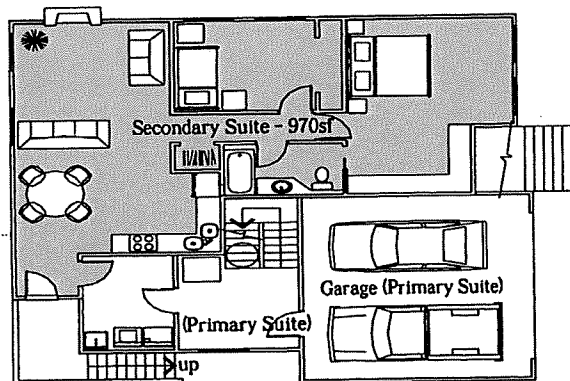
	Secondary Suite	Duplex
Use	accessory use	principal use
Size	33 m <sup>2</sup> to 90 m <sup>2</sup> max 40% of total house	any size within regulation
Appearance	not noticeable as a second unit	can appear as two units
Ownership	cannot be separately owned	can be separately owned

## What are the Requirements for Secondary Suites?

All secondary suites shall comply with the following regulations:

- Secondary suites are permitted in the following zones:
  - ✓ Agriculture: A-1, A-2
  - ✓ Rural Residential: RR-1, RR-2, RR-3, RR-4, RR-5
  - ✓ Urban Residential: RS, R-1
- Only **one** (1) suite per single family dwelling.
- The suite must be between 33 m<sup>2</sup> (355 sq ft) and 90 m<sup>2</sup> (969 sq ft) in size and occupy no more than 40% of the house's total floor area.
- Property owner must reside in either the main house or the suite, or retain a property management company based out of Pitt Meadows, Maple Ridge or Port Coquitlam to manage the tenancies of both units.
- One additional off-street parking space is required for the suite tenant.
- All home-based businesses, except child care programs may be carried out within a secondary suite.
- A suite is not permitted if the house and/or property has a bed & breakfast, boarders, or a garden suite.

Development Services staff is available to discuss the requirements for your secondary suite, as each situation may differ.



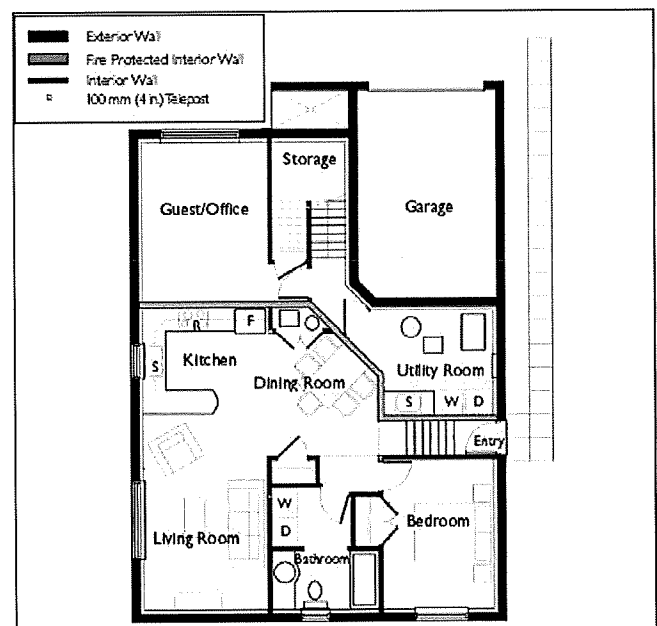
## What do I Need to Know Before I Submit an Application?

For a suite to be legal, it must meet the following criteria:

**Zoning Regulations** – the proposed suite must meet all the regulations as set out in the zoning bylaw. Please determine the existing zone of the property to ensure a secondary suite use is permitted. If your property is governed by a Land Use Contract (a separate bylaw) you may have to amend the bylaw to permit a suite on your property.

**Registered Legal Documents** – determine if there are any restricted covenants registered on title for your property. Some properties may have a no-suite or an in-law suite or a flood protection covenant. These documents must be discharged or modified to have a legal suite (considering all other criteria are met). For a complete list of documents registered on your property, request a title search at the Land Titles Office in New Westminster.

**Building Code** – new suites must comply with Section 9.36 of the BC Building Code. Existing suites must comply with the standards in the Building Bylaw No. 2131. Please refer to the end of the document for more details.



## Application Process for NEW Suites

Property owners wishing to construct a new secondary suite in either an existing house or a new house follow the process below:

### STEP 1: Building Permit Application

Apply for a building permit as you would for a new house or renovations. Application fees are 1% of the value of construction costs.

Please refer to ***A Guide to Building Permits*** for application requirements, fees and more information.

Essential inspections are required before concealing or burying any building component. All new suites must comply with Section 9.36 of the BC Building Code. Please refer to the end of the document for more details.

Once the Building Inspector approves the final inspection, the new suite (and house) may receive an Occupancy Permit.

### STEP 2: Suite Licence Application

Apply for a suite licence to register your suite. Property owners who build a new house for themselves may apply for a secondary suite licence earlier in the process. Those who purchase a new house from a company must apply for a suite licence before occupying the suite.

Suites with a valid suite licence pay the licensed suite service fee in addition to the single family dwelling utility rates.

## Application Process for EXISTING Suites

Property owners wishing to legalize a suite existing **before October 4, 2011** in an existing house follow the process below:

### STEP 1: Suite Licence Application

Apply for a suite licence to register your suite by submitting the following items:

- ☐ Completed **application form** signed by the property owner;
- ☐ **Floor plan** of house showing suite location.
- ☐ **Site plan** of property showing parking.

### STEP 2: Inspection & Staff Review

Applications will be circulated internally to appropriate staff (i.e., Planning, Building) to ensure the suite meets the required criteria listed previously, including the modification or discharge of covenants.

### STEP 3: Certificate of Inspection

A Building Inspector will inspect the suite with respect to the standards in the Building Bylaw (please see the last page of this brochure). Once the Building Inspector is satisfied that your secondary suite meets all the requirements, the City will issue a Certificate of Inspection to be displayed in the suite.

### STEP 4: Suite Licence Approval

An approved suite licence ensures the property owners live on the property and demonstrates that your suite has been inspected and meets safety standards. Suites with a valid suite licence also pay the licensed suite service fee in addition to the single family dwelling utility rates.

## Decommissioning a Suite

If you decide not to legalize your suite, you must decommission your suite by removing the cooking facilities and the locking door(s) separating the suite from the rest of the house. Removal of the cooking facilities involves obtaining an electrical (or gas) permit from the BC Safety Authority to remove the stove, hood fan and wiring (or piping).

Please contact the **Licensing Officer** at **604-465-2460** to confirm the removal of cooking facilities and locking door(s).



## Common Questions

### What determines if a secondary suite is legal?

An approved Suite Licence.

### Can I build a secondary suite in a duplex or mobile home?

No, only in a single family house with a permanent foundation.

### If I have an Additional Farm House, can I have a secondary suite as well?

Yes; however, only in the Farm House (the principal single family dwelling). Suites are not permitted in the Additional Farm House (accessory dwelling for farm employees).

### If I have a second kitchen, do I have a secondary suite?

Depends on how the area is laid out. Having a second kitchen may not be considered as a suite if it, and a bathroom and bedroom cannot be easily closed off from the rest of the house. In other words, can a bathroom, a bedroom and the cooking area be separated from the rest of the house just by closing a door or two? If yes, the area might be considered a secondary suite.

### Is a common laundry room included in the gross floor area (GFA) of a suite?

No, common spaces such as laundry rooms, storage areas or egress areas that are used by both units are not included in the suite's gross floor area.

### Do I need to hire an architect to create a secondary suite?

Your secondary suite does not need to be designed by an architect or building designer, but all plans and drawings must be accurate and to scale with dimensions shown. Specifications must be sufficiently detailed to establish that, when completed, construction work will comply with the BC Building Code.

### Does my secondary suite get a separate mailing address?

No, separate and unique addresses for them will not be assigned by the City nor recognized by Canada Post.

### Do I get a second garbage can?

No, all single family properties, with or without a suite, are allowed **only 1** 120L garbage can. Extra garbage bag tags can be purchased for \$5 at City Hall and Shopper's Drug Mart in the MeadowVale Shopping Centre.

## Application Fees *(subject to change)*

Type	Fee
Building Permit*	1% of construction value
Suite Registration	\$40 <i>(onetime fee)</i>
Covenant Discharge	\$300
Covenant Modification	\$225

\* Only applies to NEW suites in new & existing houses

## Service Fees *(subject to change)*

Suite	2018 Fee
Licensed	\$305.60
Unauthorized	\$1248.20

The cut-off date to qualify for discounted service fee is the property tax due date. Suites that are licensed after the tax deadline, qualify for the discounted rate for the following year.

If you are not using your suite and wish to remove the unauthorized suite service charge from your property tax notice, you must decommission your suite by the property tax due date.

## Financial Assistance

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) offers a Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) for qualifying homeowners. For more information, please contact CMHC at 1-800-668-2642.

## More Information?

### Development Services

Ph: 604-465-2428 Fax: 604-465-2404

[www.pittmeadows.bc.ca](http://www.pittmeadows.bc.ca)

### Land Title Office *(New Westminster)*

Ph: 604-630-9630 Fax: 778-312-0333

[www.ltsa.ca](http://www.ltsa.ca)

### Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation

Toll Free: 1-800-668-2642

[www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca)

### Fraser Health Authority

Maple Ridge office: 604-476-7000

### Technical Safety BC

Toll Free 1-866-566-7233

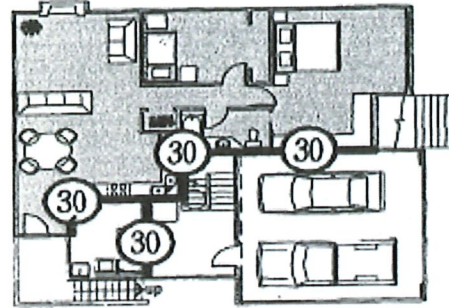
[www.technicalsafetybc.ca](http://www.technicalsafetybc.ca)

## Section 9.37 Building Code Requirements for NEW Suites

All new secondary suites in new or existing houses must comply with Section 9.37 of the BC Building Code.

### Fire Safety

The secondary suite and the main dwelling are considered separate fire compartments. In order to restrict the spread of fire and smoke, the fire separation between the two must 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 resistance rating may be reduced to 30 minutes when interconnected, photoelectric smoke alarms are installed. Below are some examples of how a fire rating can be achieved. **(No fire rating is required if the dwelling is sprinklered)**



Fire Rating	For Walls	For Ceilings
45 Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wall studs</li><li>• one layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") Type X drywall on each side of wall</li><li>• 4" absorptive material</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Floor joists</li><li>• two layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") Type X drywall</li></ul>
30 Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wall studs</li><li>• one layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") regular drywall on each side of wall</li><li>• 4" absorptive material</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Floor joists</li><li>• two layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") Type X drywall</li></ul>

Doors installed in walls that require a fire resistance rating must be solid core wood and should have at least three, self-closing hinges strong enough to close and latch the door automatically.

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 forced air heating system.

Plastic water pipes can pass through ceilings and walls if they are tightly fitted and if they are not more than 30 mm (1") in diameter.

Plastic drain, waste and vent piping are allowed to pass through the voids of fire rated ceilings, floors and walls if they are tightly fitted, enclosed inside a layer of drywall that is at least 12.7 mm (1/2") thick and the pipes do not penetrate the drywall on the underside of a fire rated ceiling.

### Safe Exiting

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:** Both the secondary suite and the main house must each have at least one swing door to the outside that is at least 1.98 m (6'6") high and 0.81 m (2'8") wide. The door can open into a shared corridor or exit stairway that discharges through a swing door to the outside.

If the existing doors are less than 0.81 m wide, the existing door can be used if it is at least 1.88 m (6'2") high and 0.61 m (2') wide, subject to each unit having a second exit or an openable window that is a minimum of 1 m (3'2") high and 0.55 m (1'10") wide.

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

Existing corridors or stairways can be less than 0.86 m wide or have only one exit door from the corridor or stairway provided that the exiting corridor or stairway has a minimum clear width of 0.71 m and each suite has a second exit or an openable window that is a minimum of 1 m (3'2") high and 0.55 m (1'10") wide.

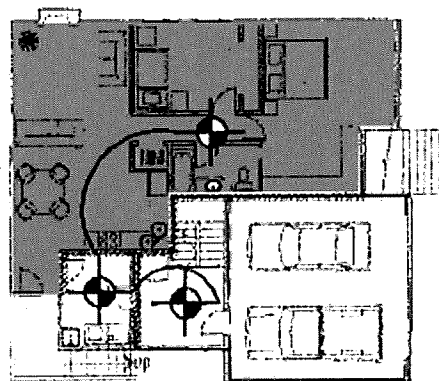
**Bedroom Windows:** Each bedroom must have a window, openable from the inside, to provide a second means of escape in case of fire. The window opening must have a minimum clear height and width of 0.38 m (15") and a clear opening area of at least 0.35 m<sup>2</sup> (3.76 sq ft).

## Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are required on each floor level and within 5 m (16'5") of each bedroom in the house and secondary suite.

In order to provide early warning to occupants, hard wired photoelectric type smoke alarms must be installed in both the secondary suite and the main house, in addition to any existing smoke alarms. The wired smoke alarms must be interconnected so that the activation of one smoke alarm will cause the other alarms to sound.

The additional alarms are not required if the building is sprinklered or if all fire separations separating the secondary suite from the rest of the house are rated at 45 minutes or more.

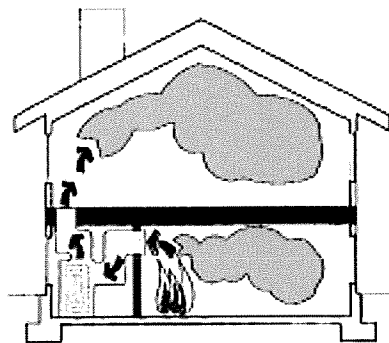


## Heating Systems

Each room in the secondary suite must have winter heating. In order to contain smoke and fire, the secondary suite and the main house are not permitted to share a common forced air heating system. Existing secondary suites that are heated with a common forced air system can comply with the following as an alternative:

- An additional interconnected photoelectric type smoke alarm is required in the furnace room;
- The furnace must have a relay to shut down the furnace fan if a duct-type smoke detector is activated;
- The cold air return to the furnace must be at floor level; and
- The ducts penetrating the walls and ceilings of the suite must be equipped with fire dampers.

Heating systems such as radiant hot water or electric baseboard that not involve air exchange between dwelling units and are therefore permitted without special measures.



## Plumbing

Additional plumbing fixtures installed to accommodate a secondary suite will affect the operation and performance of existing fixtures in other areas of the house. Drainage, venting and water systems must meet Plumbing Code requirements to ensure that an acceptable level of performance is maintained throughout the house.



## Minimum Building Requirements for EXISTING Suites

Secondary suites that have existed before the adoption of the Zoning Bylaw No. 2505 (October 4, 2011) must comply with the following Building Bylaw requirements in order to receive a "Certificate of Inspection" and become a legal suite.

### Fire Safety

The secondary suite and the main dwelling are considered separate fire compartments. In order to restrict the spread of fire and smoke, the walls and floor between an existing suite and the main dwelling must have a fire separation. This can be achieved by having:

- ☐ At least one layer of 12.7mm (1/2") regular drywall on the ceiling and on each side of the wall; and
- ☐ A solid core door with self-closing devices within walls that require a fire resistance rating.
- ☐ The required clearances from all equipment in common furnace or mechanical rooms.

### Safe Exiting

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. This can be achieved by having:

- ☐ An exit door leading directly to the outdoors;
- ☐ At least one openable window in each bedroom if the suite is not protected with a fire sprinkler system. The window opening must be unobstructed and have a minimum height and width of 0.38 m (15") and an area of 0.35 m<sup>2</sup> (3.75 sq ft);
- ☐ Stairs in safe condition; and
- ☐ Guardrails that are structurally sound and a minimum 36" high.

### Smoke Alarms

In order to provide early warning to occupants, smoke alarms must be interconnected so that the activation of one smoke alarm will cause the other alarms to sound. This can be achieved by having:

- ☐ Hard wired photoelectric type smoke alarms on each floor within 15' of every bedroom.

### Other

To ensure the safety of the suite, other requirements include:

- ☐ Minimum ceiling height of 6'6" over 80% of the suite area and in all egress routes; and
- ☐ Any condition that could cause undue hazard or risk to life, limb or health of any person shall be corrected as required by the building official.

