

Building or Legalizing a Secondary Suite



FAQ

What is a secondary suite?

A secondary suite is a self-contained dwelling unit located within a single-family house, with its own kitchen, sleeping area, and bathroom, as well as separate external access. It is fully functional and independent from the main home, and designed to comply with safety and building standards outlined in the BC Building Code.

Can I have a secondary suite in my home?

The zoning bylaw outlines which uses are allowed in which areas. Secondary suites are allowed within all zones where *Secondary Suite* is listed as a 'secondary use', and where a 'primary use' is established on the property (ie. a single-family dwelling).

To find your zone, use our interactive online zoning map: [UkeeMap](#).

Can I operate a short-term rental business within a secondary suite?

Within the District of Ucluelet, secondary suites are designated solely for residential use, with the exception of the Vacation Rental zone, where they may be used for commercial tourist accommodation.

Key Benefits

There are a number of advantages to having a secondary suite, especially one that has been authorized through the building permit process.

- **Safety:** Ensure compliance with a variety of safety standards and regulations designed to keep yourself and your tenants healthy and safe.
- **Mortgage helper:** Gain additional income that otherwise might preclude mortgage qualifications.
- **Insurance coverage:** It may be easier to obtain insurance coverage if a suite has been legalized. Property insurers may not cover work or damages caused by work done without permits and inspections.
- **Property value:** Maintain and potentially increase the value of your home. Your home or business has investment value. If your construction project does not comply with the BC building code and local municipal bylaws, the value of your investment could be reduced.
- **Property sale:** If you decide to sell a home or building that has had modifications without a permit, this may have an impact on the sale of your home.
- **Community benefit:** Be part of creating affordable long-term rental housing options for other community members.

1 Plan Your Project

GETTING STARTED: A Step-by-Step Overview

STEP 1 Review Requirements

When designing your secondary suite, ensure that your building plans comply with all District of Ucluelet bylaws and the BC Building Code. Key zoning and building code requirements are summarized within this guide, and links to applicable regulations and documents can be found within the **resources** section.

Applicants are encouraged to discuss their plans early on with staff. For land use inquiries, email planning@ucluelet.ca. For building and code inquiries email building@ucluelet.ca.

STEP 2 Cost Estimation

The cost of constructing a secondary suite is highly variable depending on design, size and material choices. Also consider the following post-construction costs:

- Adding an secondary suite will increase property taxes as a result of increased property value.
- You may see increases in annual water, sewer and waste collection costs. Contact the ACRD for information on waste collection charges.

The Province has introduced the **Secondary Suite Incentive Program** to help homeowners create affordable housing in their communities. The program will provide money to help homeowners create a new secondary suite on their property to be rented out for below market value for a required period of time.

Learn more: BCHousing.org

Project Management

A building permit is required to build a new secondary suite, or to authorize a existing suite built without the necessary permits. If you hire a builder or design professional, they will often take care of the application process for you, as well as ensure that your project meets all required regulations. See the **resources** section for links to professional directories.

STEP 3 Building Permit Application

Many documents are required at the time of submission. See the Building Application Form and Secondary Suite Checklist for more details. A application fee will also be charged upon submission.

See all submission requirements within the **Secondary Suite Checklist**. Other items or permits may be required for your specific project. Links to application forms and checklist can be found in the **resources** section. Alternatively, you can pick up forms at the District of Ucluelet office.

STEP 4 Obtaining Occupancy

Based on the permit plans, there may be upgrades required and this work will be inspected by District of Ucluelet building inspectors. These site visits will confirm compliance with a minimum level of health and safety required for the secondary suite.

Typical inspections would review any new plumbing, framing, firestopping and fire separations, new insulation and vapour barrier (if applicable) and then a final site visit when the work is completed. This list may vary depending on the scope of your project – just ask a Building Inspector if you have any questions. When the inspector has confirmed substantial compliance, an Occupancy Certificate will be issued.

Construction Scenarios

Requirements related to health and safety concerns are consistent across all building permit applications; however, certain requirements for secondary suites may differ depending on your project circumstances:

- Renovation of an existing area within a home
- New construction or addition to the home
- Legalization of an existing suite

Unfinished Basements

If you are building a new suite in an unfinished basement, there would be an opportunity for you to improve the fire and sound ratings between the residential units and common spaces. Please check in with the building code (Sections 9.10 and 9.11), your designer or reach out to our building department. The BC Building Code is available online for no charge at www.bcpublications.ca/BCPublications/.

New Build or Addition

If it is new construction, such as a new house with a suite, or a new addition that includes a secondary suite, the safety concerns are the same, but requirements may be different. A few examples relating to new construction are:

- Increased headroom for suite; and,
- Increased fire and sound separations.

Note that new buildings and additions must comply with Zoning Bylaw land use regulations. Development permits or variances (ie. approval to relax certain provisions within the bylaw such as setbacks) may be required.

Legalizing an Existing Suite

If you have an existing, unauthorized secondary suite, you may be able to legalize it by ensuring that it meets the minimum health and safety standards outlined in this guide through the building permit process.

If compliance is not feasible, you can obtain a building permit to decommission the suite. This typically involves removing the cooking facilities and restoring the space for use as part of the single-family dwelling.

If you choose not to legalize or decommission the suite, staff will recommend filing a bylaw notice on the land title record. In cases of significant safety concerns, the District may pursue further legal action.



3 Land Use

In addition to the regulations outlined within your property zone, **Section 403** of the zoning bylaw provides regulations specific to secondary suites.

Size

The maximum **gross floor area**¹ allowable for a secondary suite is the lesser of either 90 sq. metres (968 sq. feet) in area or 35% of the total habitable area of the home. A secondary suite also cannot contain more than 2 bedrooms.

If the suite is an addition onto your home, ensure that the increased footprint does not exceed **lot coverage**² or **floor area ratio**³ limits for your zone.

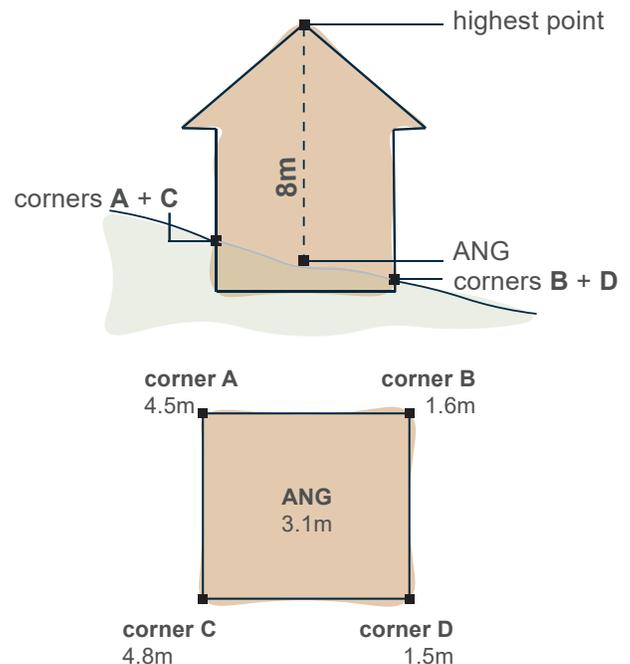
Although there is no minimum floor area requirement, the secondary suite must adhere to the standards of the BC Building Code.

Height

If the addition of the suite will result in height increase of the building, height must not exceed the maximum allowable. For single-family dwellings within residential zones, maximum height is **11m (3 storeys)**.

Height is calculated from **average natural grade**⁴ to the highest point of the building.

Figure 1. Measuring height



¹ Gross floor area

Total area of all floors, measured to exterior of building walls (exclude unfinished basement area/crawlspace)

² Lot coverage

Percentage of the lot that is occupied by buildings/ structures (ie. divide total building footprint area by lot area)

³ Floor area ratio (FAR)

Gross floor area of all buildings on the lot relative to lot size (ie. divide gross floor area by lot area)

⁴ Average natural grade (ANG)

Undisturbed ground elevation measured at each building corner (ie. corner A+B+C+D = ANG)

OTHER LAND USE REQUIREMENTS

Parking

One off-street parking space is required for each dwelling unit (ie. 2 spaces total for the suite and main dwelling).

Off-street parking must follow the standards within Division 500 of the zoning bylaw. A standard parking space dimension is 6m (20ft) in length and 2.5m (8ft) in width. Maximum driveway width is 7m.

Emergency Access

Safe access to the suite is important so that emergency responders can access the unit with necessary equipment during emergencies.

A minimum 1 metre wide, hardpacked and unobstructed path (with no sudden drop-offs) is required from the street to the entrance of the suite. Overhead clearance must be maintained, and any stairs or ramps along the pathway must also adhere to building code.

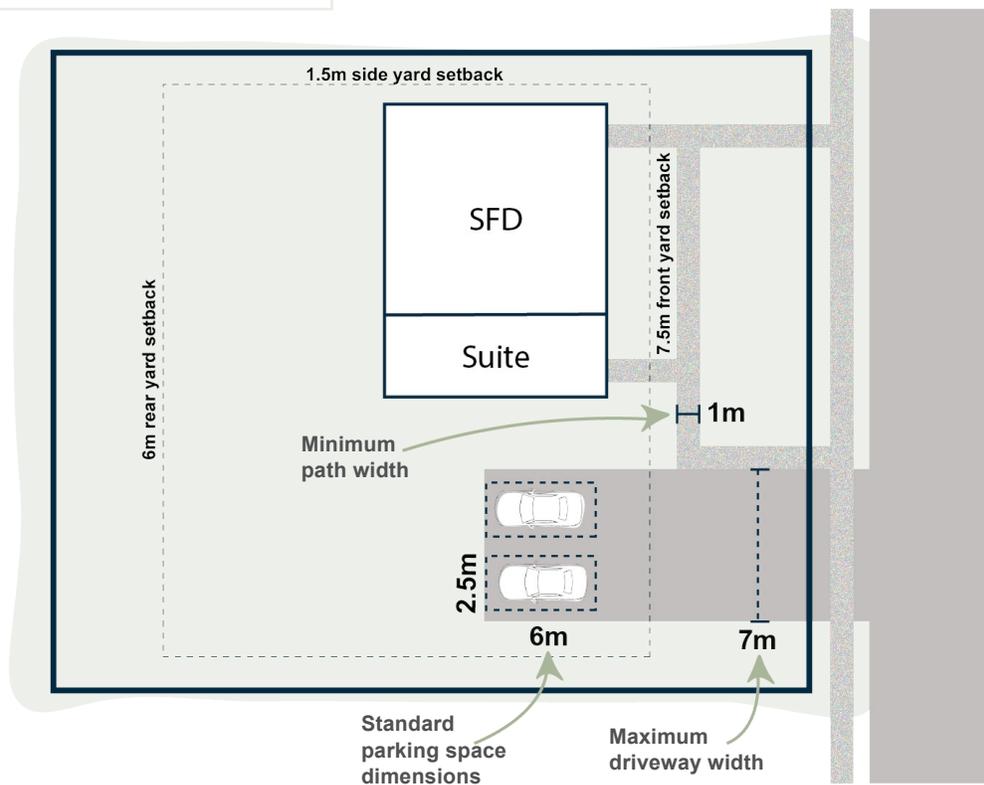
Civic Address

Secondary suites within single-family dwellings are given the label “A” in conjunction with the civic address (ie. “165A Elm Street”). The suite address must be easily visible from the street.

Zoning or Land Use Questions?

Contact the planning department at (250) 726-7744 or planning@ucluelet.ca

Figure 2.
Example Site Plan
(R-1 Zone)



4 Building Code

Fire Safety & Sound Transmission

Fire safety and sound transmission separations between the secondary suite, main dwelling and common spaces are one of the key aspects to creating a safe space for all building occupants. The construction options (summarized in Table 1 below) for a suite in an existing building, offer increased fire protection and better sound barriers, based on increased numbers.

Table 1. Construction options for Secondary Suite within Existing Building

Regulation	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Fire Resistance Rating (FRR)	15 minutes	30 minutes	45 minutes
Sound Transmission Class (STC)	Approx 32-35 STC	Approx 34-37 STC	43 STC
BC Building Code Reference	9.10.9.14 (4) (a) Table D-2.3.4.-F and A-1.1.1.2.(1)*	9.10.9.14 (4) (b) and A-1.1.1.1.(6)	9.10.9.14 (4) (c) and 9.11.1.1.(2)

What does this mean in practical terms?

Wall Construction	Wood studs with 1/2" gypsum board both sides	Add resilient channel and layer of 1/2" gypsum board to one side	Many options for increased fire and sound rating**
Ceiling Construction	Wood joists with 1/2" gypsum board on underside	Add resilient channel and layer of 1/2" gypsum board to ceiling	Many options for increased fire and sound rating**
Smoke Alarm Locations in Each Unit	Smoke alarms shall be located in each unit (and interconnected within each unit) in all bedrooms as well as between the bedroom door and all other spaces, in any common spaces and at least one on each storey.		
Smoke Alarm Interconnection between Units	All smoke alarms in both units and common spaces. Smoke alarms may need to be added in the existing dwelling, in addition to the suite.	One additional photo-electric in each dwelling and common spaces shall be interconnected.	No interconnection between units and common spaces is required
Carbon Monoxide Alarms (CO)	Where the home has an attached garage or a solid-fuel fired appliance (wood burning), a CO Alarm is required inside each bedroom or within 5 m of each bedroom door, all interconnected.		

*Based on the BC Building Code, A – 1.1.1.2.(1) related to existing buildings only, the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) may consider alternative solutions without affecting the intended level of safety; balancing the cost of implementation with importance to the overall objectives. Research has proven that:

- a wood framed floor will withstand a fire for at least 10min, and with gypsum board protection, resulting in at least a 15min FRR; and,
- there is limited increase in STC with the addition of resilient channel and additional gypsum board. Sound separation is not related to the level of safety, therefore, the AHJ has determined that existing separations may be adequate based on the cost/benefits.

**There are referenced assemblies in the BC Building Code Tables in 9.10.3.1. as well as listings for walls and floor/ceilings available through drywall manufactures or testing agencies, such as ULC.

OTHER BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS

There are additional code requirements to ensure a minimum level of health and safety for the occupants. Depending on your specific situation, there may be other code regulations, but typical requirements are outlined below.

Safe Exiting

Is required for the secondary suite, such as an exit door directly from the suite to the exterior. This door must be an exterior door, with a deadbolt and door viewer (or glazing), that swings on a vertical axis (not a sliding patio door).

Bedroom Windows

Are required to have an operable window with a minimum clear opening area of 0.35m² (3.77 ft²) and with no dimension less than 380mm (15”).

Electrical

Permits are obtained through Technical Safety BC, typically by an electrician. If work has been done previously, you can provide the permit documents or have an electrician complete a permit and site review for compliance.

Ventilation

Is required to provide fresh air to the suite. One example of an acceptable venting system would be installing a quiet, continuous principal exhaust fan, usually installed in the bathroom, along with a kitchen fan over the stove area. Supply air to a single storey suite may be provided by passive vents in living and bedroom areas, in compliance with BCBC 9.32.3.4.(6).



Heating Systems

For the secondary suite should be independent of the main dwelling. In order to prevent the migration of smoke between dwelling units during a fire, duct work is not permitted to interconnect the dwelling units (unless protected with fire dampers and duct smoke detector to shut down system, which requires professional design and review).

Ceiling Height

Is regulated in the building code, and slightly relaxed for existing buildings, with a minimum ceiling height of 1.95 m (or 6' 4 3/4") in a secondary suite.

Plumbing

Specifically the water supply pipe, may need to be upgraded to a larger size to meet the minimum code requirements for supplying all the existing and new suite plumbing fixtures. All the fixtures in the building should be shown on the plans to complete a fixture calculation. If plumbing has been installed without permits, video inspection of existing plumbing may be required and a ticketed plumber could review the installation and complete a declaration form confirming compliance.

5 Resources

Additional Resources

- [Home Suite Home Guide](#)
- [Secondary Suite Incentive Program](#)

Building & Land Use

- [BC Building Code](#)
- [Official Community Plan](#)
- [Zoning Bylaw](#)
- [Fees & Charges Bylaw](#)

Directories

- [Architectural Institute of BC](#)
- [BC Association of Building Designers](#)
- [BC Housing Licensed Home Builders](#)
- [Association of BC Land Surveyors](#)

Housing Resources

- [Landlord BC](#)
- [Housing & Tenancy](#)

Forms & Documents

- [Building Permit Application Form](#)
- [Secondary Suite Checklist](#)
- [Owners Authorization Form](#)
- [Municipal Services Application Forms](#)

Do you need more information?
We're here to help!

Contacts



District Office

Call (250) 726-7744, email info@ucluelet.ca or drop by the District of Ucluelet office between 8:30am to 4:00pm Monday to Friday.



Planning

Contact planning@ucluelet.ca for land use questions or development applications.



Building

Contact building@ucluelet.ca for building code questions or building permit applications.



Engineering & Public Works

Call (250) 726-7133 for utilities/servicing questions, or municipal services applications.

Looking for property records?

Some records can be released informally (ie. building and occupancy permits), while others require a formal request under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Submit requests to info@ucluelet.ca using the [Request for Access to Records](#) form.

