Secondary Suite Guidelines

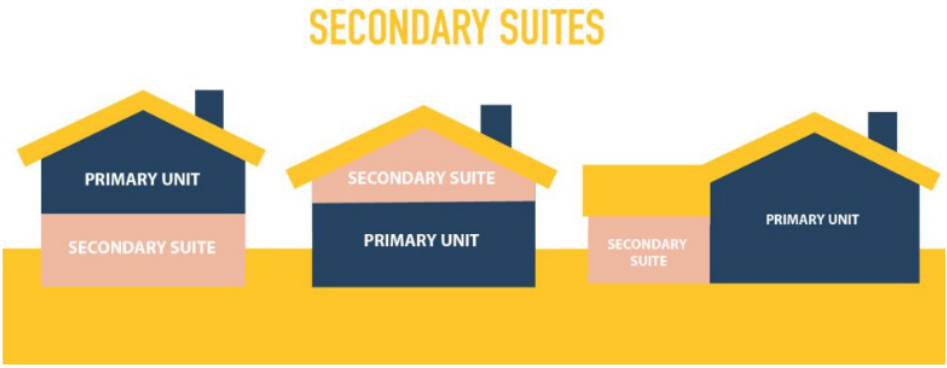
This brochure is designed to help you understand secondary suite regulations and guide you through the building permit process. It is for general guidance only and does not replace the requirements of the BC Building Code, the RDBN Zoning Bylaw, or any other RDBN regulations.

What is a secondary suite?

A secondary suite is a residence within a single-family dwelling. It may share common space on the same floor with the primary residence (e.g. a laundry room).

Can my home contain a secondary suite?

One secondary suite is permitted in most single-family dwellings in residential zones.



RDBN Planning Department

planning@rdbn.bc.ca
www.rdbn.bc.ca

37 3rd Ave, PO Box 820
Burns Lake, BC V0J 1E0

Call us at: 250-692-3195
Toll free 1-800-320-3339

Building Permits
Before starting any construction associated with your secondary suite (including alterations to or additions of plumbing), you will need a building permit.

Permit fees
A fee is due at the time of application. The permit fee is based on the construction value.

Plans
You will need to submit plans that show:

- The entire floor area of the level where the secondary suite is located.
- Walls and floors requiring fire and sound separation between the suite and the main dwelling.
- Use and sizes of all rooms, indicating rooms that contain shared facilities.
- Sizes of proposed and existing doors and windows including exit doors and bedroom exit windows.
- Locations of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.
- Locations of heating sources and ducting.
- Locations of ventilation systems.
- Wall construction details.
- Identify and label all bathroom and kitchen plumbing fixtures and indicate whether they are existing or proposed.

Requirements
A secondary suite must conform to the requirements of the BC Building Code (BCBC). This guide does not include all the requirements of the BCBC and its requirements for secondary suites. This guide is provided to assist in clarifying the most critical health and safety requirements.

Bedroom windows
Each bedroom is required to have a window or door that opens to the outside, without any special tools or knowledge, to provide a second means of escape in case of fire. The window must have an unobstructed clear opening of 0.35m2 (3.76 ft2) in area with no dimension less than 380 mm (15”). Security bars are not permitted.

Doors and ceiling heights
Both the secondary suite and the main dwelling unit must each have at least one exit door that is at

least 810 mm (2’8”) wide and 1980 mm (6’6”) high. Each exit door is required to open to the outside. The minimum ceiling height in the secondary suite is 2.1 m (6’6 3/4”) at all exit routes and in 80% of the suite.

Heating systems

A heating or ventilation system serving the secondary suite must be designed and installed to prevent passage of smoke between the dwellings, which may include fire dampers in the ducts. A separate heating system for a secondary suite such as electric baseboard is typically an easier design alternative. If a single heating system serves the 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 of their own dwelling.

Fire separation

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 to how this can be achieved. Depending on the thickness and type of drywall installed, you may be required to install an additional photoelectric-type smoke alarm system that serves the suite as well as your home. This smoke alarm would be required to be installed in the suite and then interconnected to an additional photoelectric smoke alarm located within the home, in locations in accordance with the BCBC.

Doors or windows must have the appropriate fire protection rating.

Sound Separation

Controlling sound transmission between the secondary suite and the other dwelling unit in a house is important for the health and well-being of the occupants. The separation between the two

---

Need more information?

Our Planning Department staff and Building Inspectors are here to help.

dwellings must have a Sound Transmission Class (STC) rating of not less than 43. There are several ways that this rating can be met, which may include joist and stud spaces filled with sound-absorbing material, resilient metal channels, and additional layers of gypsum board.

Plumbing

A secondary suite is required to have a kitchen sink, a bathtub or shower, a bathroom sink, and a toilet. A building permit is required to add any fixtures in a suite if the rough-in is not already in place. A shut-off valve is required where the water supply enters each dwelling unit, so that, when the water supply to one suite is shut off, the water supply to the remainder of the building is not interrupted. It is not mandatory that the secondary suite has its own hot water tank.

Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are required inside each bedroom and outside of each bedroom, as well as on each floor. These smoke alarms are required to be interconnected between each suite, so that when one alarm is activated all the other alarms are activated as well. The alarms need to be hard-wired, with a battery back-up. If suites contain gas or solid fuel burning appliances, carbon monoxide detectors are also required within 5 meters (16.4”) of each bedroom door.

Ventilation

The BCBC requires that each bathroom and kitchen be equipped with an exhaust fan that is vented to the exterior. A secondary suite requires a separate ventilation system that ensures fresh air is ventilated through the suite. The best way to do this is using a Heat Recovery Ventilator (HRV) or an Energy Recovery Ventilator (ERV).

Electrical and Gas

For electrical permits and requirements, please contact Technical Safety BC at 866-566-7233.

Questions?

Our Planning Department staff and Building Inspectors are here to help.