



# Coach Houses in the Town of Comox

**This information package is for convenience purposes only**

**For more information please contact:  
Town of Comox Planning Department at 250-339-1118,  
or in person at 1809 Beaufort Avenue, Comox BC**

<http://comox.ca/hall/departments/planning-and-building-inspection>

## BACKGROUND

The need to address housing affordability was affirmed and formalized with the adoption of the Town's Housing Affordability Strategy in November of 2007. A key component of the Strategy is the removal of regulatory barriers to the development of more affordable market housing, including small sized rental suites.

Coach Houses address sustainability by making better use of existing municipal infrastructure (roads, sewer and waterlines etc.) which means reduced servicing costs and less GHG emissions. Such infill development also increases the viability of public transit, local commercial and public service deliverability.

Households are getting smaller and older. Currently, the average Comox household size is 2.3 persons and the Comox Valley population's median age is approaching 50. This age coincides with the time when children leave the family and establish their own households. It also coincides with the period when parents are approaching their retirement and often wish to downsize, but remain within the same communities. For both young and old, provision of appropriate housing forms and sizes could solve some affordability and accessibility issues.

### **Coach Houses respond to the changing residential market by:**

- providing wider housing choice within the same community;
- accommodating different needs for different household situations;
- allowing downsizing or upsizing within the same neighbourhood;
- promoting affordability via "mortgage helpers" for owners, and more housing options for renters;
- presenting opportunities for infill within the established neighbourhoods; and
- encouraging the retention of existing neighbourhood character.

## COACH HOUSE REGULATIONS

The Town's Official Community Plan sets out the community objectives and broad statements of policy to guide decisions about future land use, zoning, development and servicing. Official Community Plan, Residential: Detached Policy 2.1.1.4(b) supports development of Coach Houses on a site by site basis. The Town's Zoning Bylaw regulates current land use and Coach Houses are a permitted use in some residential zones.

To ensure Coach Houses are compatible with neighbourhood character, Development Permit Area #17 regulates form and character specifically for Coach Houses. The development permit process works well for those who want more flexibility in design, although this involves additional permitting costs and processing time. For those who don't need this flexibility, development permit exemption criteria are in place to avoid the increased costs and timelines of the development permit process.

The key concerns addressed in the Development Permit Area #17 exemptions and guidelines are as follows:

- tree retention;
- provision of a minimum of 15 square metres of usable open space per dwelling unit for livability considerations; and
- limiting window size on building elevations which are closer than 7.5 metres to any property line, to address privacy implications.

A Building Permit is required for all coach houses. Applications should be directed to the Building Department.

Residential fees for water, sewer and garbage collection are levied per residential unit. A coach house is a residential unit; as a result the residential fees will double once a suite is constructed regardless of whether the suite is occupied or vacant. Paying for 2 residential units of garbage allows for the pickup of two garbage cans. Switching to metered billing from flat fees can reduce the water fee, depending on water use.

## COACH HOUSE ZONING STRATEGY AND CONDITIONS OF USE

**Either the principal dwelling or a Coach House shall be owner occupied.**

*(see Zoning Bylaw 1850 Couch House definition for further criteria)*

<b>Permitted uses:</b>	Either a Coach House or a Secondary Suite; Bed and Breakfast is <b>not permitted</b> within a Coach House.						
<b>Minimum Parcel Area:</b>	500 m <sup>2</sup>						
<b>Minimum Parcel Frontage:</b>	As applicable under current zoning						
<b>Parcel Rear Yard:</b>	Minimum width 15.0 m Minimum depth 10.0 m						
<b>Coach House Required Setbacks:</b>	Coach House shall be located in rear yard.						
Rear:	Minimum 2.0 m						
Interior Side:	Minimum 2.0 m						
Front and Exterior Side:	as applicable under current zoning						
<b>Maximum Total Parcel Coverage:</b>	No increase in the maximum allowable parcel coverage under current zoning (typically 30-35%, for single-family zones)						
<b>Coach House Parcel Coverage:</b>	maximum 10%, which is included in the total Parcel Coverage						
<b>Gross Floor Area of Coach House</b>	<b>is relative to Parcel Area</b> Maximum Coach House Gross Floor Area, in combination with accessory buildings, carports and garages, which are attached to the coach house:  <table border="0" style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">Parcel Area: 500 – 650 m<sup>2</sup></td> <td>50 m<sup>2</sup></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">    &gt;650 – 1000 m<sup>2</sup></td> <td>60 m<sup>2</sup></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;">    &gt;1000 m<sup>2</sup></td> <td>70 m<sup>2</sup>, or up to 90 m<sup>2</sup> may be considered if proposed environmental protection is beyond that required by existing regulations (i.e. land donation to Nature Trust or Land Conservancy).</td> </tr> </table> Coach House Gross Floor Area does not include: carports attached to a coach house less than 20m <sup>2</sup> , accessory buildings less than 10m <sup>2</sup> , and one room less than 40m <sup>2</sup> in gross floor area, completely contained within the building and used by residents of a coach house for storage, vehicle parking or workshop purposes.	Parcel Area: 500 – 650 m <sup>2</sup>	50 m <sup>2</sup>	>650 – 1000 m <sup>2</sup>	60 m <sup>2</sup>	>1000 m <sup>2</sup>	70 m <sup>2</sup> , or up to 90 m <sup>2</sup> may be considered if proposed environmental protection is beyond that required by existing regulations (i.e. land donation to Nature Trust or Land Conservancy).
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<b>Maximum Coach House Height</b>	<b>is relative to its Gross Floor Area</b>						
Gross Floor Area:	Coach House Height:						
Up to 50 m <sup>2</sup>	4.5 m						
>50 m <sup>2</sup>	5.5 m						
<b>Distance to principal building:</b>	Minimum 4.0 m						
<b>Access driveway, parking and carport:</b>	Maximum one 6.0m driveway per lot. At least 6.2m aggregate width of parking area to accommodate 2 off-street parking spaces per parcel (the same as for secondary suites). Up to 20 m <sup>2</sup> of roofed (i.e. open-sided) carport, attached to a coach house, as parcel coverage permits.						

- Green space and patio, or deck:** Up to 10 m<sup>2</sup> roofed patio and deck area.  
Unroofed patio area not limited, subject to zoning setbacks.
- Screening requirements:** Where a Coach House is located closer than 7.5 metres to a lot line, screening is required as per Section 8 of Zoning Bylaw.
- Adaptable Housing Standards:** A Coach House must conform to the existing Zoning Bylaw Adaptable Housing Standards (Section 5.20)

### **3.17 Development Permit Area (DPA) # 17 Coach Houses**

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(Add #1752, Sept 25/2013)

#### **3.17.1 Area Affected**

DPA #17 – Coach Houses applies to all areas as shown on the map *DPA #17 – Coach Houses*.

#### **3.17.2 Purpose**

In accordance with sections 488, 489, 490 and 491 of the *Local Government Act*, the purpose of DPA #17 is to establish objectives:

- For the form and character of intensive residential development consisting of coach houses;
- To promote energy and water conservation; and
- To promote a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
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#### **3.17.3 Justification**

Coach house development presents the possibility to create a range of housing opportunities in both “greenfield” sites and already established neighbourhoods. Coach houses should be compatible with surrounding areas that typically contain a predominance of single detached dwellings. Appropriate site planning and landscaping can result in energy and water conservation and lead to a reduction in a community’s greenhouse gas emissions.

#### **3.17.4 Exemptions**

A development permit is not required for the following actions:

- A. Internal building alterations;
- B. Construction of, addition to or alteration of buildings and structures other than coach houses; or
- C. Alteration of land, including vegetation.

Written confirmation of exemption from the Town is available prior to the commencement of the following actions:

- D. Construction of, addition to or alteration of a coach house provided that:

- I. The exterior materials are brick, fibre cement siding, stone masonry, wood, stucco or concrete and no building face is more than 20% unfinished concrete. Metal trim and architectural hardware and details are permitted;
- II. Any coach house elevation located closer than 7.5 metres to an interior side or rear lot line, has vertical glazing not exceeding 10% of that elevation's area, excluding roof and individual windows shall be limited to 0.5 square metres or less and shall not be located within 1.0 metre of another window;
- III. All coach house elevation's located closer than 7.5 metres to the interior side or rear lot line do not exceed 3.0 metres in height, as measured from existing grade to the underside of the roof;
  - IV. Both the coach house and the single detached dwelling have separate at grade outdoor space, or deck with a minimum depth of 2.5 metres, a minimum area of 15 square metres and not located closer than 2.0 to a lot line. For the coach house:
    - a. the open space must abut an exterior coach house wall and be directly accessible from the coach house; and
    - b. an exterior faucet is provided to facilitate optional gardening by residents;
  - V. Existing trees with a DBH of more than 20 centimetres are retained, unless removal is necessary to allow for a coach house of the Zoning Bylaw maximum permitted gross floor area, in conformance with DPA #17 exemption criteria. In this case a replacement tree of comparable species of minimum 5 cm DBH for deciduous trees and 1.5 meter minimum height for coniferous trees is provided for each mature tree removed; and
  - VI. All new onsite wiring services are underground;
- E. Minor external additions or alterations to existing coach houses provided that:
  - I. Changes are consistent with a previously approved Development Permit, in terms of colour, materials, form, landscaping and open space. **(Rep # 1908, April 17/2019)**
  - II. additions or alterations are valued less than \$10,000 for materials and labour;
  - III. Additions or alterations do not exceed 30% of the existing floor area to a maximum of 20 square metres; and
  - IV. changes in the exterior design of a building on any one side involve an area less than 50%; **(Rep # 1908, April 17/2019)**
- F. Subdivision of land.

### **3.17.5 Guidelines**

Unless exempt under Section 3.17.4, no alteration of land, including vegetation; construction of, addition to, or alteration of a building or other structure is to occur unless the applicant first obtains a development permit. A development permit shall not be issued except in compliance with the following guidelines.

Use of the word “should” in a guideline does not indicate that compliance is at the option of the applicant. Rather compliance to the guideline will be required as a condition of issuance of a development permit unless there are exceptional reasons why the guideline should not be applied to its fullest extent.

Use of the term “encourage” indicates that compliance with the guideline may at the discretion of the Council be required as a condition of issuance of a development permit.

#### **3.17.5.1 Site Services and Access**

- 1) All onsite services should be underground.

#### **3.17.5.2 Building Guidelines**

- 1) The exterior materials of coach houses should be brick, fibre cement siding, stone masonry, wood, stucco or concrete. No building elevation should be more than 20% of unfinished concrete. The use of vinyl siding may be permitted where sufficient architectural details are provided to ensure visual interest. Metal trim and architectural hardware and details are permitted;
- 2) Exterior trim and architectural features should be robust and weather resistant;
- 3) Pedestrian access to a coach house is encouraged to be designed for universal access, to accommodate persons with mobility impairment;
- 4) Coach house siting and design should encourage crime prevention by using passive security design elements including, where applicable, the location of habitable rooms with windows that face streets, sidewalks, pathways and coach house associated open space, to promote informal surveillance through a high level of visual oversight; and
- 5) All exterior building and site lighting fixtures should:
  - a. produce illumination levels in accordance with common engineering practices and standards;
  - b. be of a metal halide type or provide a similar light spectrum;
  - c. minimize illumination of adjacent properties;
  - d. consist of full cut off/flat lens pole lighting or fully shielded wall lighting;



- e. be arranged so rays of light are directed upon the parking, walking, areas and not upon adjacent land or streets; and
- f. be so arranged that no part of any fixture is more than 4.5 metres above finished grade level of off-street parking areas.

#### 3.17.5.3 Integration with the Existing Development:

- 1) The design, siting and orientation, of a coach house should reflect that of a secondary unit;
- 2) Coach house design, siting and orientation, should provide visual privacy between neighbouring properties; and
- 3) Coach house design and features should be compatible with surrounding development;

#### 3.17.5.4 Energy, Water Conservation and Greenhouse Gas Reduction:

- 1) Coach houses should be sited, designed and landscaped to take advantage of passive solar exposure in wintertime and reduce sun penetration in summer. This guideline does not apply to sites which do not receive substantial solar exposure;
- 2) Coach house incorporation of solar panels as a supplementary or alternative energy and geothermal heating is encouraged; and
- 3) Coach house landscaping should be drought resistant; xeriscaping is encouraged.

#### 3.17.5.5 Landscape Guidelines

- 1) Both the coach house and single-family dwelling should be provided with their own separate outdoor space, balcony or deck, each with:
  - a. a minimum depth of 2.5 metres, a minimum area of 15 square metres and not located closer than 2.0 to a lot line;
  - b. located in a suitable location adjacent to the unit, serviced with direct access thereto; and
  - c. the coach house outdoor space should be provided with an exterior faucet to facilitate optional container gardening by residents
- 2) Existing mature trees should be retained wherever possible. Owners should employ the principle of “no net loss” of significant plant material in any development. Where it is necessary to remove significant plant material in order to build a coach house on a property, replacement plantings should be provided of a sufficient number, size, type, suitability and maturity to off-set its removal; and

- 3) Fences should be aesthetically designed and be compatible with adjacent developments. Fencing should be robust. Wood fencing should have minimum 4" x 4" posts and 2" x 4" horizontal supports at the top and bottom of fence panels. All wooden fencing and other wooden landscape components should be treated with paint, stain, or other preservative, or contain a natural preservative (i.e. cedar).

### 5.18 Setbacks

Where lot lines connect, the setback applicable to each lot line projects to their point of intersection as shown in Figure 5-6.

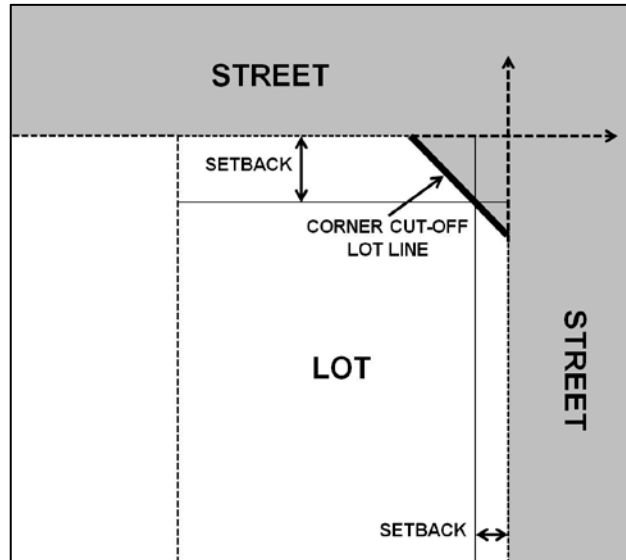


Figure 5-6. Determining setbacks for corner cut-off lot lines

### 5.19 Watercourse Regulations

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Bylaw, no building shall be constructed or located on land above the natural boundary:

- (1) within 7.5 metres of the natural boundary of Golf Creek, Carthew (Indian) Creek, the sea, or a retention pond, or detention pond; or
- (2) within 15.0 metres of the natural boundary of Brooklyn Creek, or a marsh or natural pond.

### 5.20 Special Needs Housing Standards – Adaptable Housing

#### (1) Paths of Travel

- (a) Walks to at least one main entrance and at least one route to all shared outdoor space shall:
  - (i) Be provided by means of a continuous plane not interrupted by steps or abrupt changes in level;
  - (ii) Have permanent, firm and slip resistant surface such as asphalt, concrete pavers, well compacted crushed stone, or lumber with the planks across the direction of travel; and
  - (iii) Have an uninterrupted width of not less than 0.9 metres for coach houses and 1.5 metres for all other dwelling units, and a gradient not steeper than 1 in 20.

#### (2) Doors

- (a) Doors shall have a clear width when open of not less than 0.815 metres.
- (b) Thresholds shall not exceed 0.013 metres high.

- (c) Where door viewers are provided, one shall be located at a height between 1.1 metres and 1.2 metres from the floor and the other shall be located at a height between 1.5 metres and 1.6 metres from the floor.
  - (d) Operating devices such as handles, pulls, latches, and locks shall:
    - (i) Be operable by one hand;
    - (ii) Not require fine finger control, tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist to operate; and
    - (iii) Be mounted between 0.40 metres and 1.2 metres from the floor.
- (3) Maneuvering Space at Doors
- (a) When the door swing is towards the maneuvering space, the space shall be not less than 1.5 metres long by a width equal to the door assembly width plus not less than 0.6 metres clear space beside the latching jamb of the door.
  - (b) When the door swing is away from the maneuvering space, the space shall be not less than 1.22 metres long by a width equal to the door assembly width plus not less than 0.30 metres clear space beside the latching jamb of the door.
- (4) Corridor Widths
- (a) Corridors shall be not less than 1.0 metre wide for all interior routes.
- (5) Floor Surfaces
- (a) Shall be firm and slip resistant such as tiles, carpet or PVC with non-slip granules.
  - (b) Shall have no changes in level greater than 0.013 metres.
  - (c) Where carpets or carpet tiles are used shall:
    - (i) Be securely fixed;
    - (ii) Have a firm cushion, pad or backing;
    - (iii) Have a pile texture with a maximum pad and pile height of 0.013 metres; and
    - (iv) Have the exposed edges of the carpet firmly fastened to the floor surface.
- (6) Controls and Outlets
- (a) Light switches, circuit breakers, locks, and intercom buttons shall be located at a height between 0.455 metres and 1.2 metres from the floor.
  - (b) Electrical receptacles outlets shall be located between 0.455 metres and 1.2 metres above the floor.
  - (c) Thermostats shall be located no higher than 1.5 meters above the floor.
  - (d) The operable part of controls, such as thermostats, electrical switches, circuit breakers, locks and intercom buttons, microphones, and electrical and communication wall outlets shall be:
    - (i) Located adjacent to a clear floor space that has width of not less than 0.75 metres;
    - (ii) Operable with one hand; and
    - (iii) Of a type that does not require tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist.

- (e) At least one switched electrical outlet shall be provided in the master bedroom and living room.
  
- (7) Alarms
  - (a) An electrical receptacle shall be provided above the main entrance to allow for the connection of a personal visual or auditory signal.
  
- (8) Windows
  - (a) Opening and locking mechanisms shall be:
    - (i) Located adjacent to a clear floor space that has width of not less than 0.75 metres;
    - (ii) Operable with one hand; and
    - (iii) Of a type that does not require tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist.
  
- (9) Kitchens
  - (a) The clearance between counters and all opposing base cabinets, counter tops, appliances or walls shall be not less than 1.5 metres.
  
- (10) Bathrooms
  - (a) Bathrooms shall have a space not less than 1.5 metres x 1.5 metres for access to the toilet and the fixture itself, and this access space may overlap access space for other fixtures;
  - (b) The distance between the centre line of the toilet fixture and the adjacent wall shall be between 0.46 metres and 0.48 metres; and
  - (c) Behind a toilet, shower or bathtub, wall structural support shall be provided to allow the installation of grab bars.
  
- (11) Bedrooms
  - (a) At least one bedroom shall provide sufficient space for a turning area of not less than 1.5 metres diameter on one side of a bed.
  
- (12) Base Cabinets (Kitchen and Bathrooms)
  - (a) The base cabinets under a kitchen or bathroom sink shall be removable; and
  - (b) At least one section of the kitchen counter shall have a work surface that is:
    - (i) Not less than 0.75 metres wide and 0.6 metres deep; and
    - (ii) Adjustable in height from 0.71 metres to 0.86 metres.
  
- (13) Clothes Storage
  - (a) Where provided, one hall closet and one bedroom closet shall have:
    - (i) A clothes hanger rod capable of being lowered to a height of 1.2 metres
    - (ii) At least three shelves between 0.4 metres and 1.2 metres from the floor;
    - (iii) A clear floor space of not less than 0.75 metres x 1.2 metres shall be provided in front of the storage area; and
    - (iv) A clear opening of not less than 0.9 metres.

- (14) Laundry Facilities
  - (a) A clear floor space of not less than 0.75 metres x 1.2 metres shall be provided in front of clothes washing or drying equipment.
  
- (15) Living Areas
  - (a) Complete living facilities, including a kitchen, bathroom and bedroom, shall be provided on one level to avoid the need for lifts or elevators. However, where living areas are provided on two or more levels, closet or foyer space not less than 0.915 metres wide by 1.20 metres long shall be positioned one above the other on each level to provide space to accommodate the future installation of a residential elevator or lift.
  
- (16) Outdoor Living Areas
  - (a) Outdoor living areas such as patios, balconies or decks shall be not less than 1.5 metres x 1.5 metres.
  
- (17) Notice of Adaptable Features
  - (a) A permanent information sheet on the location and type of adaptable features included in the unit shall be posted on, beside or inside the electrical panel.
  
- (18) Areas of Refuge
  - (a) Where possible, all Adaptable units shall be located on the main floor, however, if located above the main floor, those units must provide an area of refuge.
  
- (19) Accessible Parking
  - (a) A minimum of 1 parking space for disabled persons shall be provided in accordance with Section 6.9(4)(a) and Section 6.9(4)(b) of this bylaw for each adaptable dwelling unit, including a path of travel in accordance with Section 5.20(1), for 4 or less adaptable dwelling units on a parcel, and at a ratio of 0.25 for each additional unit. **(Add #1913 May 15/19)**