

# **A Guide to Secondary Suites in the Town of Comox**

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This Guide has been prepared to assist homeowners in the process of constructing new secondary suites, or legalizing existing suites to ensure compliance with the BC Building Code and Comox Zoning Bylaw.

**This Guide is for convenience purposes only and should not be used for Legal or Interpretive purposes without reference to the Original Bylaws and Amending Bylaws.**

**For More Information Please Contact  
The Town of Comox Planning and Building Inspection Department**

**For More Information:**

Town of Comox Planning and Building Department: 250-339-1118  
[www.comox.ca/hall/departments/planning-and-building-inspection](http://www.comox.ca/hall/departments/planning-and-building-inspection)



# A GUIDE TO SECONDARY SUITES

As part of its [Housing Affordability Strategy](#) the Town of Comox is allowing secondary suites in most single family detached homes. Secondary suites can increase housing diversity and affordability within communities and provide important financial benefits to homeowners.

## WHAT IS A SECONDARY SUITE?

A secondary suite is a legal suite located within a single family detached house. The building owner must occupy either the primary or secondary suite of the residence. The suite must not have a floor area greater than 90 m<sup>2</sup>, or 40% of the gross floor area of the home, whichever is less. Only one secondary suite is permitted per residential home. The suite must have a separate entrance from the primary dwelling unit, and be located either above or below the primary unit. The residence must provide a minimum of two individually accessible off-street parking spaces: one for both the primary and secondary suites. These parking spaces cannot be in tandem (behind each other).

## WHY SECONDARY SUITES?

The Town of Comox identified legalizing secondary suites as a key component of its [“Housing Affordability Strategy”](#). The goal of this strategy is to improve the availability and affordability of a variety of housing types in Comox, while ensuring the housing produced is well-designed and suitable for the community. Secondary suites can provide an important component of the residential housing stock within a community, ensuring those in need of market rental housing can find quality accommodation. Additionally secondary suites can provide important benefits to home owners that range from mortgage help for new homeowners and young families, to maintenance and income assistance for seniors who want to age in place.

## WHERE ARE SECONDARY SUITES ALLOWED IN THE TOWN OF COMOX?

Secondary suites are currently allowed in the following zones: R1.1, R1.2, R1.3, R2.1, R3.1, R3.2, R3.3, R3.5, R3.6, R3.7, CD1.1, CD3, CD5 and CD9. See the [Town of Comox Zoning Map](#) for the locations of these zones. For more detailed information regarding zoning restrictions and secondary suites see the [Town of Comox Zoning Bylaw 1377](#), or contact the [Planning Department](#) at 250-339-1118.

## EXISTING ILLEGAL SECONDARY SUITES

If you have an existing illegal secondary suite, in the zones listed above, the new bylaw does not automatically mean your suite is legal. You must obtain a building permit from the Town of Comox to confirm that your suite successfully meets the [zoning bylaw requirements](#) (including the owner occupancy provision) and conforms to the current BC Building Code and its health and safety requirements. If you have any further questions regarding your existing illegal suite please contact the [Planning Department](#) at 250-339-1118.

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## PERMITTING PROCEDURES

In order to have a secondary suite approved, you must obtain a building permit from the Town of Comox. You (or your authorized agent) must apply for the building permit in person at the Town of Comox Building Inspection Department.

Building permit application requirements include the submission of the following:

- construction drawings. If there are no changes to the exterior of the house, this requirement may be limited to the submission of two sets of dimensioned floor plans with the primary and secondary suites, kitchen and bathroom facilities, and the primary and secondary suite entrances clearly marked.
- a dimensioned proposed site plan showing property lines, the building footprint including decks, building setbacks from property lines, unit entrances and onsite parking spaces.
- a signed and notarized [Owners Declaration of Secondary Suite](#) affidavit.

Detailed permit requirement can be found in the "[Town of Comox Building Permit Application Requirements – Schedule A](#)". Prior to preparing your application, contact the Town of Comox Building Department at 250-339-2259 to arrange a time to meet to review the requirements that apply to your specific project.

## BYLAW AND BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS

All legal secondary suites must be in compliance with the [Town of Comox, Zoning Bylaw 1377](#), which includes the following provisions:

- The secondary suite can only be located in single-family dwellings
- Either the primary or secondary suite must be owner occupied
- Only one secondary suite is allowed within each single family dwelling
- The secondary suite must be completely contained within a single family home
- The secondary suite must have a gross floor area not exceeding 40% of the single-family dwelling or 90 m<sup>2</sup> whichever is lesser
- Be located either above or below the primary suite
- Have their own entrance, separate from that of the primary suite
- Provide a minimum of two individually accessible off-street parking spaces (one for each dwelling unit). These cannot be in tandem (behind each other).

A completed [Owner's Declaration of Secondary Suite Affidavit](#) is required as part of the building permitting processes to ensure the secondary suite complies with the Town of Comox [Zoning Bylaws](#).

## **BC BUILDING CODE**

The building permitting process ensures that your secondary suite conforms to the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code. The Building Code has adopted Section 9.36, which contains reduced requirements for single family homes with secondary suites to provide minimum health and safety standards for occupants, while mitigating undue costs on homeowners. For more information regarding these requirements and the BC Building Code, please contact the Town of Comox [Building Department](#) at 250-339-2259 or by email at [irogers@comox.ca](mailto:irogers@comox.ca).

### **For More Information:**

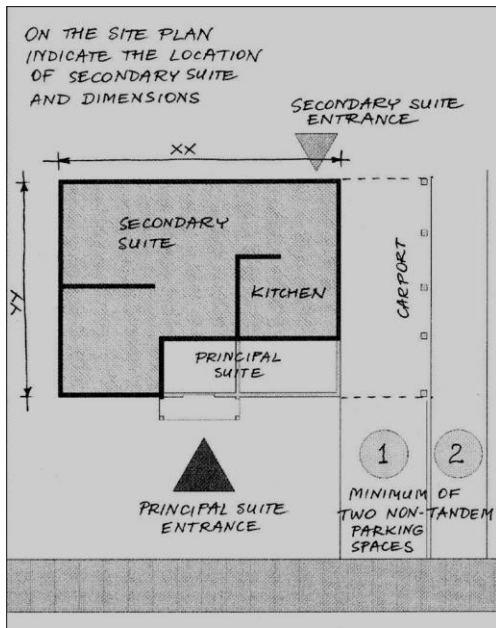
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## PLANS REQUIRED

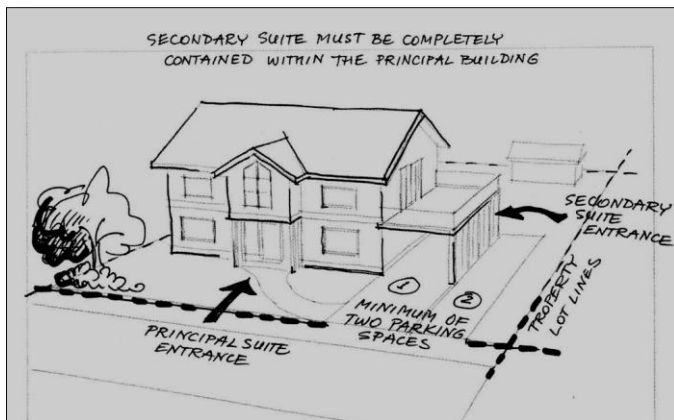
### FLOOR PLANS



Floor Plans must include the following:

- Dimensions of the primary and secondary suite
- Location of the primary and secondary suite
- Entrance locations for primary and secondary suites
- Location of kitchen and bathroom facilities

### SITE PLANS



Site Plans must include the following:

- Entrance locations for primary and secondary suites
- Location and dimensions of the minimum 2 off-street parking spaces (non-tandem)
- Any existing buildings on the property in relation to legal property boundaries
- Minimum Acceptable Scale: 1:200
- North Arrow and Drawing Scales

Depending on the type of construction necessary for the secondary suite additional construction drawings may be necessary. Please contact the Town of Comox [Building Department](http://www.comox.ca/building-department) at 250-339-2259 for more information.

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## OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A Plumbing Permit will be required if there are any additions or alterations to the plumbing system or fixtures. Your plumber can apply for this permit after the building permit is issued.

Residential fees for water, sewer and garbage collection are levied per residential unit. A secondary suite 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.

## FEEES

A \$50.00 application fee is due at the time you apply for a building permit. The balance of the permit fee (typically for a secondary suite \$200.00) is due when you pick up your permit. Additionally the town requires a damage deposit of \$750.00. For more information on building permit fees contact the Town of Comox [Building Department](#) at 250-339-2259.

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