

Building a Secondary Suite

Considering building a suite in your home or legalizing an existing one?

A secondary suite is a dwelling unit within a house, with its own cooking facility, sleeping and bathroom areas, as well as its own external access. Land Use Bylaw #2072 refers to suites as an accessory dwelling, and many zones permit a secondary suite OR a detached accessory dwelling unit. You will require a building permit if you want to construct new suite or legalize an existing non-permitted suite.

Key benefits

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

- Gain a mortgage helper income that otherwise might preclude mortgage qualifications.
- Ensure compliance with a variety of safety standards designed to keep occupants healthy and safe.
- It may be easier to obtain insurance coverage if a suite has been authorized. Property insurers may not cover work or damages caused by work done without permits and inspections.
- Maintain and potentially increase the value of your home. Your home or business is an investment. If your construction project does not comply with the codes adopted by your community, the value of your investment could be reduced.
- 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.



Planning and Building Services

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Considerations and incentives

You should be aware of the BC Residential Tenancy Act regulations and implications relating to property assessment, property taxes and utility costs. Find more information at Landlordbc.ca or gov.bc.ca/housing-tenancy

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. Learn more: BCHousing.org

This is an excellent guide for homeowners:
Gov.bc.ca/homesuitehome

Applying for a permit?

Review these requirements:

- Completed building permit application form;
- Certificate of Title (within the last 30 days);
- Completed Secondary Suite Checklist;
- Three sets of plans (online digital or physical) indicating all items as shown on the attached checklist, such as:
 1. site plan showing all buildings, dimensioned parking spaces and water service line location and size;
 2. plans of all floor levels, rooms uses, exit doors and bedroom window opening sizes, smoke alarms type and location, fire separations, ceiling heights, location of existing/new plumbing fixtures, and total floor areas;
 3. cross section or details of existing exterior walls, insulation, and sound/fire separations between dwelling units and around common spaces; and,
 4. building elevations showing building wall faces if altering (adding window or door);
- Non-refundable plan processing fee.

Other details/permits may be required for your specific project, such as septic approval, a plumbing permit, electrical permit or other details that arise during the permit review. Municipal records may include original floor plans or site plan which could assist in preparing your suite permit application.

Contact staff at 250-544-4217 or building@csaanich.ca

What are the key zoning regulations?

- **Floor area** - NEW - the maximum area of 90 m² (969 ft²) has been removed; there is no maximum secondary suite size.
- **Lot size** - Must be 400 sq. metres in area or greater.
- **Form and character** - No exterior elements shall be generally inconsistent with the form and appearance of single family dwellings in the area.
- **Parking** - The site must accommodate one additional off-street parking space (accessible at all times ie – not in tandem). NEW - There is no longer a requirement to locate the suite parking space behind the front line of the home.
- **Short term or vacation rentals** are not permitted.



What are the building code requirements?

Let’s talk about fire safety and sound transmission between the residential units and around any common spaces. These wall and/or ceiling 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 a Secondary Suite in an Existing Building

Regulation	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Fire Resistance Rating (FRR in mins)	15 minutes	30 minutes	45 minutes
Sound Transmission Class (STC)	Approximately 32 - 35 STC	Approximately 34 – 37 STC	43 STC
BC Building Code References	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 all this mean in practical terms?

OR

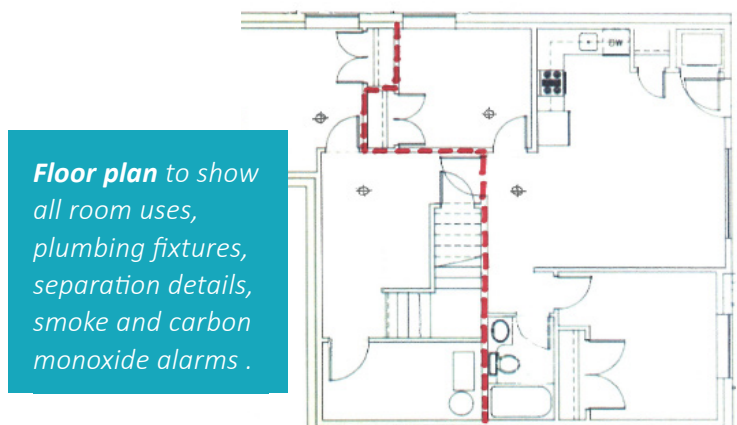
OR

Wall Construction	Wood studs with ½” gypsum board both sides	Add resilient channel and layer of ½” gypsum board to one side	Many options for increased fire and sound rating**
Ceiling Construction	Wood joists with ½” gypsum board on underside	Add resilient channel and layer of ½” 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 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 shall be photo-electric type and interconnected.	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.



What else is required?

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:

- **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 openable 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).
- **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 ¾”) 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. A separate plumbing permit would be required to approve any new (or previously completed) plumbing work. If plumbing has been installed without permits, the ticketed plumber could review the installation and complete a declaration form confirming compliance.



How do I legalize a secondary suite?

If Central Saanich staff have been made aware of your illegal suite, there are options to consider:

- Legalize the suite by meeting the minimum level of health and safety for the occupants as noted in this guide, through the a building permit process.
- If you are unable to comply, a building permit could be obtained to decommission the secondary suite, which typically means the removal of the “cooking facility” and restore building to a single family dwelling use.
- If you don’t complete either of those options, staff will follow Council policy by recommending the a bylaw notice to be filed on the land title record. Where significant safety concerns exist, further legal action may be taken by the District.

I have a building permit, now what?

Based on the permit plans, there may be upgrades required and this work will be inspected by Central Saanich building inspectors. These site visits will confirm compliance with a minimum level of health and safety required for the secondary suite. Additionally, if you need to authorize existing plumbing or install new plumbing fixtures, your plumber can now obtain the plumbing permit.

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.

Are these regulations applicable for a new suite, or an addition for a suite?

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.

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 inspectors.

The zoning regulations in the Land Use Bylaw are applicable for new or existing buildings.



Do you need more information?

We're here to help!

Contact:

250.544.4217

building@csaanich.ca

CSaanich.ca/Building

or scan this QR Code:



Secondary Suite Checklist

The following checklist is required when submitting a building permit to approve/construct a secondary suite in an existing building.

Please review the guide to **Building a Secondary Suite** prior to completing and submitting your application.

	YES	N/A	Details to be shown on PERMIT PLANS (3 paper sets or submit pdf online)
Site Plan			Show distance from property line to the building, if adding any new windows/doors
			Location of existing and new driveways and dimension vehicle parking as per bylaw (two spaces for main; one space for suite)
Floor Plans			Room uses and total area of the suite
			Show location and type of all wired in smoke and CO alarms – requirements based on fire resistant rating of separations
			Identify heating system and ventilation
			Indicate all plumbing fixtures in the house; water supply may require upgrade
			Show bedroom window clear opening size and exterior exit door location
Section			Confirm existing (or new) insulation values
			Details of all separation assemblies
			Indicate ceiling height of secondary suite
			If exterior changes, provide building elevations and spatial separation calculations.
Select wall and ceiling FIRE and SOUND separation indicated between units/ common space on plans.			
Fire Separation			15 min Fire Resistant Rating *
			30 min Fire Resistant Rating
			45 min Fire Resistant Rating
Sound Separation			Existing Assembly includes drywall layer, with minimum STC (depending on subfloor and flooring, could be STC 32 – 35) acceptable based on BCBC A-1.1.1.2.(1) cost/benefit analysis*
			Alternative Compliance permitted by code – existing ceiling/wall with addition of resilient channel and extra layer drywall; limited STC increase (approx. STC 34 – 37)
			Increase STC compliance (up to code minimum of 43 STC for new suite)



YES	N/A	DOCUMENTS
		Current Certificate of Title + Encumbrances <i>Within the last 30 days</i>
		This secondary suite checklist form
		Online or paper application form
		Permit plans (as per list on left)
		Owner authorization form <i>If applicant is not owner</i>
		Renovating pre 1990 home <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous Material Testing Required • After removal, post Air Clearance
		IF REMOVING WALL Structural Engineer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule B • Form 2 (Bylaw 1470) • Insurance certificate
		IF ON SEPTIC SYSTEM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VIHA accepted septic design OR • Letter from ROWP/ENG accepting existing

Owner Acknowledgement *

If retaining existing wall and/or ceiling assemblies with an existing layer of ½" gypsum board (15 min FRR and reduced sound rating).

Based on the BC Building Code, specifically A-1.1.1.1.(6) and A-1.1.1.2.(1), relating to existing buildings only, the authority having jurisdiction may consider alternative compliance options without affecting the intended level of safety.

As the owner, I am aware that existing assemblies with lower STC ratings will have increased sound transmission between units compared to what is required with new or renovated homes.

Owner's Name

Owner's Signature