

Secondary Suites Information Brochure



This information brochure has been prepared to provide homeowners with an overview of Summerland's requirements for secondary suites. This brochure is for general guidance only, and does not replace bylaws and legal documents such as the Municipal Zoning Bylaw or the BC Building Code.

WHAT IS A SECONDARY SUITE?

The BC Building Code & Municipal Zoning Bylaw defines a secondary suite as an additional dwelling unit which:

- has a total floor space of not more than 90 m² (968 ft²) in area or;
- has a floor space less than 40% of the habitable floor space of the building which ever is less;
- is located within a building of residential occupancy containing only one other dwelling unit; and
- is located in and part of a building which is a single real estate entity.

In simple terms, a secondary suite is an area of a single family dwelling that is separate from the rest of the house. A secondary suite can include common areas with the rest of the house (such as a laundry room) but must contain facilities that are completely separated from the rest of the house, including at least one bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. The kitchen would usually include cooking facilities such as a stove or microwave, but a stove plug of 220 volts or a gas line into the kitchen is also considered a cooking facility, since either of these hook-ups would enable quick and easy installation of a stove.

WHAT ARE THE MUNICIPALITY'S REQUIREMENTS FOR SECONDARY SUITES?

Secondary suites are permitted in principle buildings in single family zones. RSD1 / RSD2 / RSD3 / CR1 / A1 and RSH with lots having a minimum size of 460 m². Not for multi-family buildings. The Municipality has placed a number of conditions on the legalization of secondary suites including:

- Maximum of one (1) secondary suite per lot. This helps to ensure the preservation of the character of single family residential neighborhoods. No separate address will be assigned for secondary suites. Instead, the principle dwelling unit would retain the same legal address with the unit number "101" and the secondary suite would use the unit number "102" immediately following the legal address to distinguish the two dwelling units.
- One (1) additional parking space is required. All single family homes must have at least 2 off-street parking spaces. This requirement means that all single family homes with a secondary suite must have at least 3 off-street parking spaces.
- Home occupations limited to businesses that do not generate traffic. For both the principle dwelling unit and the secondary suite, home occupations would be limited to businesses that do not generate traffic. Permission would be required in writing from the property owner(s) to operate a home occupation in a secondary suite.

HOW DO I GET PERMISSION TO CONSTRUCT A SECONDARY SUITE?

Property Title Search. You will first need to determine whether there are any restrictions registered on the title of your property that may not allow you to have a secondary suite. These restrictions could include a restrictive covenant or Land Use Contract.

Obtain construction estimate. You will need to obtain the services of a professional contractor to provide an estimate of the work required to legalize your secondary suite. This estimate should include the construction value required to legalize your suite.

Apply for permits. Once you know what is required to legalize your suite, you can apply for a building permit to commence the work. Applicable building permit fees will be required, based on the construction value of the work.

Ongoing inspections. Once construction has commenced, a building inspector will conduct a variety of inspections throughout the project. Including a final occupancy inspection *prior* to anyone moving in to the space in order to ensure that the required work has been completed and meets the BC Building Code and Municipal Zoning Bylaw requirements.

Utility charges. Once the building upgrades are completed and the Building Inspector issues a final occupancy permit, the property owner will then be responsible for additional utility bills each and every month. These will include water, sewer (where applicable), electricity and garbage removal. The installation of a Dual Meter is mandatory, and an electrical upgrade to the existing service may be required. In cases where the suite is not rented or occupied, the monthly utility fees will still be applicable.

WHAT ARE THE BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS?

The secondary suite must conform to the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code – Section 9.36 Secondary Suites. The BC Building Code (BCBC) has adopted a number of alternative requirements for secondary suites to provide a minimum health and safety standards for occupants without imposing undue costs to owners. However, there are a number of other requirements in the BCBC pertaining to secondary suites that are not outlined in Section 9.36.

The following general guidelines are provided to assist in clarifying the most critical health and safety requirements in Section 9.36 and the balance of the BCBC.

Fire Safety

In order to restrict the spread of fire and smoke, and to ensure the occupants a safe exit from the building in an emergency situation, a fire separation must separate the suite from the balance of the house. A fire separation is a construction assembly that acts as a barrier against the spread of fire. Wall and floor systems that are shared by both the suite and the remainder of the house must be separated by a fire separation with a fire resistance rating of 45 minutes. The fire resistance rating can be reduced to 30 minutes when interconnected, photoelectric smoke alarms are installed.

- To achieve a 45 minute fire resistance rating for walls, one layer of 15.9mm (5/8") Type X drywall on each side of the wall is required.

- To achieve a 45 minute fire resistance rating for ceilings, one layer of 15.9mm (5/8") Type X drywall is required.
- To achieve a 30 minute fire resistance rating for walls, one layer of 12.7mm (1/2") regular drywall on each side of the wall is required.
- To achieve a 30 minute fire resistance rating for ceilings, one layer of 12.7mm (1/2") Type X drywall or two layers of 12.7mm (1/2") regular drywall is required or one layer of 15.9mm (5/8") regular drywall.

Doors installed in walls that require a fire resistance rating must have labels confirming they have a fire protection rating of 20 minutes and have rated self closing devices. All other openings in a fire separation are required to be tightly fitted.

Safe Exiting

Doors: Both the secondary suite and the main house must each have at least one exit door that is at least 800mm (2'- 8") wide and 1980mm (6'-6") high. The door must be equipped with an approved deadbolt lock. The door must also have a door viewer unless there is transparent glazing in the door or in a sidelight.

Shared Egress Facilities: Exit corridors, stairways or exterior passageways shared by the suite and main house, must be at least 860mm (2'-10") wide. It must be possible to travel from the suite door in opposite directions to two separate exits. A single exit is acceptable if both the suite and the main house have either a separate exit or a window with an opening, which is a minimum of 990 mm (3'-3") high, 530mm (1'-10") wide and less than 990mm (3'-3") above the floor. Please note that special precautions must be taken if an exit stair or ramp from one unit passes a window from the other unit.

Bedroom Windows: Each bedroom must have a window, openable to the outside, to provide a second means of escape in case of fire. The window opening must be a minimum of 0.35 m² (3.76 ft²) in area with no dimensions less than 381mm (15"). The window must be openable from the inside without any special tools or knowledge. Security bars are not permitted.

Smoke Alarms

Smoke Alarms are required on each floor level and within each bedroom in the house and secondary suite.

In order to provide an early warning to occupants, hard wired photoelectric type smoke alarms are required in the house and suite, in addition to any existing smoke alarms. The additional smoke alarms must be interconnected so that the activation of one smoke alarm will cause the other alarms to sound.

The additional alarms are not required if the building is sprinklered or if all fire separations separating the secondary suite from the rest of the house are rated at 45 minutes or more.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors

For homes with forced air gas furnaces and/or gas water heaters, a carbon monoxide detector must be installed adjacent to the sleeping areas in both the principle dwelling and the suite. CO is odorless and tasteless, and spreads evenly through space, so the CO detector can be placed almost anywhere. However, so the alarm can be heard, the detector should be located not more than 5 meters (16 feet) from a sleeping area.

Heating Systems

Each room in the secondary suite must have winter heating. In order to contain smoke and fire, a secondary suite and the main house are not permitted to share a common forced air heating system. Existing secondary suites that are heated with a common forced air system may apply for an equivalent approach to meet this Building Code requirement as follows:

1. An additional interconnected photoelectric smoke alarm is to be installed in the furnace room, and
2. The furnace is provided with a relay to shut down the furnace fan and gas valve if the alarm is activated, and
3. The heat ducts and cold air return in the secondary suite are equipped with fire dampers where they penetrate the wall or ceiling membrane.

This approach is not necessary in buildings with hot water or baseboard heating.

Ventilation

The BC Building Code requires that each bathroom and kitchen be equipped with an exhaust fan vented to the exterior. Intermittent, for two 4-hour periods daily or continuous operation for the bathroom fan is required. A fresh air intake is required if the suite contains any fuel fired appliances like a hot water tank or fireplace.

Plumbing

Each dwelling is required to be provided with a kitchen sink, a bathtub, or shower, a bathroom sink and a water closet.

Additional plumbing fixtures installed to accommodate a secondary suite will affect the operation and performance of existing fixtures in other areas of the dwelling. Drainage, venting and water systems must meet Plumbing Code requirements to ensure that an acceptable level of performance is maintained throughout the dwelling.

Gas and Electrical

Gas and Electric permits are required for any alterations to the respective systems. Permits must be obtained from the BC Safety Authority.

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