



# A Guide to Secondary Suites in Port Moody

Building Division

604.469.4534 • [www.portmoody.ca](http://www.portmoody.ca)



**This guide assists you in creating a new secondary suite.**

This document is for general guidance only. It does not replace bylaws or other legal documents.

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# Introduction



## What is a Secondary Suite?

A secondary suite is a separate living area contained within a single detached home. It functions as a self-contained living unit complete with a kitchen, bathroom, and a sleeping accommodation. It may share common space on the same floor with the primary residence, for example, a laundry room. A secondary suite may not be stratified.



**Do you need more information?**  
Building Division staff are here to help.  
Here's how to get in touch:

Phone: 604.469.4534

Email: [buildingpermits@portmoody.ca](mailto:buildingpermits@portmoody.ca)

Secondary suites expand the supply of lower cost rental housing, providing the opportunity for renters to live in lower-density residential neighborhoods. They can offer rental housing that is affordable, ground oriented, and market based. It also offers opportunities for homeowners to downsize in their own home.

Like all housing, secondary suites are regulated by the City. This guide is designed to help you understand the City of Port Moody's secondary suite program and guides you through the permit process. It is for general guidance only and does not replace the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code, Zoning Bylaw, or any other City regulation.

## The History of Secondary Suites:

In 1995, the BC Building Code was amended to include specific provisions for secondary suites. The amendments made a suite possible in a single detached home by reducing code requirements for things such as ceiling heights, fire safety provisions, and sound controls.

In 2004, the City of Port Moody amended its Zoning Bylaw to allow secondary suites in all single detached residential zones (except for Manufactured Homes Parks). The Zoning bylaw was further amended in 2018 to permit secondary suites in the City's duplex zone and also remove the restriction on maximum size.



# Frequently asked questions



## Can I have a secondary suite in my home?

If you have a single detached home or legal duplex, you are allowed to have one secondary suite. The suite must meet the minimum life safety requirements required by the BC Building Code. Multiple secondary suites, or secondary suites in a separate building on your property, are not permitted. The following sections in this guide will help you to determine the requirements for your suite.

## I have an existing secondary suite within my home. How do I know if it was built with a permit?

To determine whether your suite was created with a permit, contact the City's Building Division at 604-469-4534. Building staff can search records to confirm if your suite was created with a permit.

## If my suite was created without a permit, what should I do?

Staff will work with you to obtain a permit to ensure that the minimum life safety requirements are in place. These requirements are in place to ensure the safety of your suite occupants, as well as your family and may involve a site meeting to review the work currently in place.

## What if I have a suite and no longer rent it out?

You may contact the City's Bylaw and Licensing Division at 604-469-4541 to start the process of decommissioning your secondary suite. As part of the process, applicants must remove either the cooking facilities, bathing facilities or create a permanent opening between the suite and the rest of the house.

# How does the approval process work for a secondary suite?



## 1. Apply for your building permits - [www.portmoody.ca](http://www.portmoody.ca)

- Along with your building permit application, submit an electronic set of floor plans showing the floor that contains the suite and its layout plus any interconnections with the remainder of the house.
- Building staff will review the application, along with your floor plan. They will provide comments on potential revisions or issues. A site inspection may be conducted to help determine the work needed for the suite installation.



## 2. Building permit issued

- Your permit will be issued once Building staff can ensure that the suite design complies with the BC Building Code's provisions for suites, and the City's Zoning Bylaw.
- For existing suites, you will be required to schedule an inspection with Building staff. At that point, staff will identify any life safety issues that require addressing.
- [Inspections](#) will be required during the construction process for building and plumbing work. This work is required to be reviewed prior to any of the work being covered or concealed.



## 3. Suite approval

- Once Building staff have completed and accepted a final inspection, your permit process is complete.
- A no fee business license will then be created by our Licensing department for your suite.

# City staff are here for you!



## Technical Advice

Our staff will answer your questions about the suite program and steps you need to take to establish your secondary suite. We can explain what you need for a successful permit application, assist you in understanding the Zoning Bylaw and B.C. Building Code regulations, and provide guidance on good building practices.

## Plan Examination

Our staff will review your application and floor plan and point out anything that does not comply with current regulations. Staff will work with you or your designer to resolve these issues.

## Inspections

Inspections are part of the permit process. You or your contractor will be responsible for ensuring the work is completed in accordance with the code, and ready for inspections at [specific stages](#) in the construction process. Our Inspectors will assess the work and point out anything that is not meeting standard regulations. Building Inspectors will be able to answer any technical questions you may have at that time and provide you with an inspection report.

## Regulations

### Zoning Bylaw

This City bylaw regulates land use within the City. It also regulates the location of secondary suites, along with parking requirements.

### Building Bylaw

This City bylaw enables the City to regulate secondary suites through the use of permits and inspections. It outlines such things as when permits are required and how and when inspections shall be conducted.

### British Columbia Building Code

This provincial code document contains the health and safety aspects of construction. The Code outlines minimum standards of construction, structural integrity, fire safety, plumbing, heating and ventilation, and many other aspects of buildings that we rely on.

Although most people involved in the building industry are familiar with the Code, it is the property owner's responsibility to ensure that their home is in full compliance with the regulations.

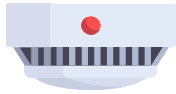


[portmoody.ca/bylaws](https://portmoody.ca/bylaws)

# What are the requirements for constructing a secondary suite?

A secondary suite must conform to the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code for Secondary Suites. The B.C. Building Code (B.C.B.C.) has adopted a number of alternative requirements for secondary suites in existing homes in order to provide minimum health and safety standards for occupants in an effort to reduce costs to owners.

This guide does not encompass all the requirements of the B.C.B.C. for secondary suites; however, it is being provided to assist in clarifying the most critical health and safety requirements of the B.C.B.C.



## Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are required in each bedroom, and outside each bedroom separating them from the remainder of the floor space, as well as on each floor. These smoke alarms are required to be interconnected within the suite and the remainder of the dwelling, so that when one alarm is activated all other alarms within the suite and house will also activate.



## Plumbing

Every dwelling is required to have a kitchen sink, a bathtub or shower, a bathroom sink, a laundry connection, and a water closet. Additional plumbing fixtures installed to accommodate a secondary suite may affect the operation and performance of existing plumbing in other areas of the home. Drainage, venting and water systems must meet the Plumbing Code requirements to maintain an acceptable level of performance, and to ensure a healthy environment is provided.



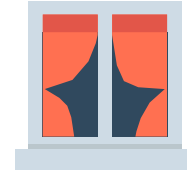
## Fire Separation

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. Depending on the thickness and type of drywall installed, you may be required to install an additional smoke alarm system that serves the suite as well as your home or change the type of smoke alarms that are currently installed. The additional or change to smoke alarms that may be required would be a photoelectric type, smoke alarm. These would be required to be installed in the suite and then interconnected to an additional photoelectric smoke alarm located within the main home (preferably located outside the bedrooms).

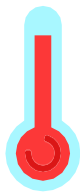
Doors installed in walls that are part of the fire separation must have labels confirming that they have a fire protection rating of 20 minutes and have rated self-closing devices included. All other openings in a fire separation are required to be tightly fitted and sealed with an approved material.



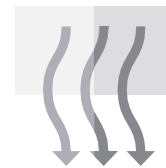
**Doors** – Both the secondary suite and the main home must each have at least one exit door that is at least 2'8" wide and 6'-6" high. Each exit door is required to open directly to the outside. If this is not achievable in your situation, arrange a meeting with our Building staff to discuss possible solutions.



**Bedroom Windows** – Each bedroom is required to have a window that opens to the outside, without any special tools or knowledge. This is required to provide a second means of escape in case of fire. The window opening must be a minimum of 3.76ft<sup>2</sup> in clear opening area with no dimension less than 15" (i.e., 23"x 23" or 15"x 36"). Security bars are not permitted.



**Heating Systems** – Each room in the secondary suite must have winter heating. To ensure smoke and fire are contained, a secondary suite and the main house are not permitted to share a common forced air heating system without modifications to the system. Existing secondary suites that are heated with a common forced air system may utilize fire dampers and additional smoke alarms connected to the furnaces operation.



**Ventilation** – The B.C.B.C. requires that each bathroom and kitchen be equipped with an exhaust fan vented to the exterior, this includes a suite. A secondary suite requires a ventilation system that ensures fresh air is ventilated through the suite. There are different options as to how this can be achieved. One potential option is a passive ventilation system, which includes a principal exhaust fan that runs continuously (typically the bathroom exhaust fan) and fresh air inlets installed in each bedroom and main living area.



**Parking** – One additional off-street parking space for the secondary suite must be provided in addition to the space(s) required for the main house. The extra space for the suite must be contained on the property and not encroach on a public right-of-way or street. The extra space must also be independently accessible.



**Gas and Electrical** – Gas and Electric permits are required for any alterations to the respective systems. Permits must be obtained from Technical Safety BC (1.866.566.7233) [Permits | TSBC \(techsafetybc.ca\)](https://www.techsafetybc.ca/Permits).



# Applying for a permit to construct a secondary suite



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*If you are hiring a contractor to conduct the work on your behalf, a letter of authorization is required from the property owner.*

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Along with your building permit application form, the City requires an electronic floor plan to be submitted. Submitted plans are required to be drawn to an architectural standard. The following is a list of the information needed on these plans:

## Floor Plans

- A separate floor plan is required for each floor level where any work will occur;
- Clearly indicate the separation of the Suite from the remainder of the building with a bold line;
- Show all new framing details including beams, joists, lintels, posts, rafters, etc.;
- Indicate materials being used (i.e. 1/2" or 5/8" Type X drywall);
- Identify the use of each room on the floor plan;
- Show and dimension all walls, windows, doors, skylights, stairs, decks, plumbing fixtures, fireplaces, furnaces, laundry equipment, and other appliances;
- Provide floor area calculations for the Suite and the remainder of the building;
- Identify all smoke alarms, ventilation fans, heating outlets, and air intakes.
- A site plan showing the parking space dedicated for the suite and the path of travel from the suite to the street.

## Elevation Drawing

Note: An elevation drawing will also be required if there are changes to the exterior of the building. (i.e. new doors or windows).

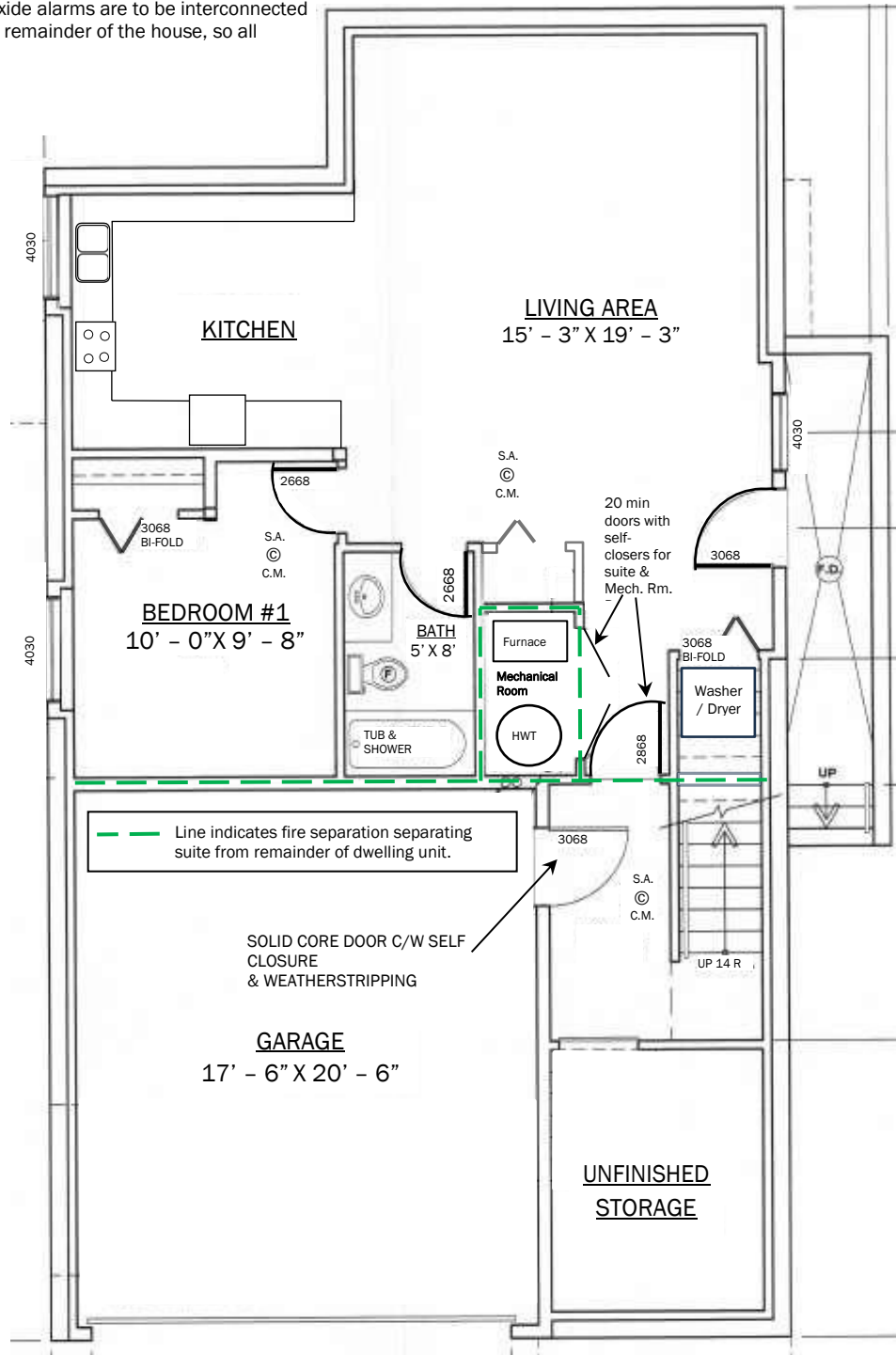
**If you don't have experience in drawing building plans, we recommend engaging a professional designer, or a registered professional familiar with the requirements of the B.C. Building Code.**

**Contact the Building Division at 604.469.4534 to see if there are plans on file that may assist you in your design.**



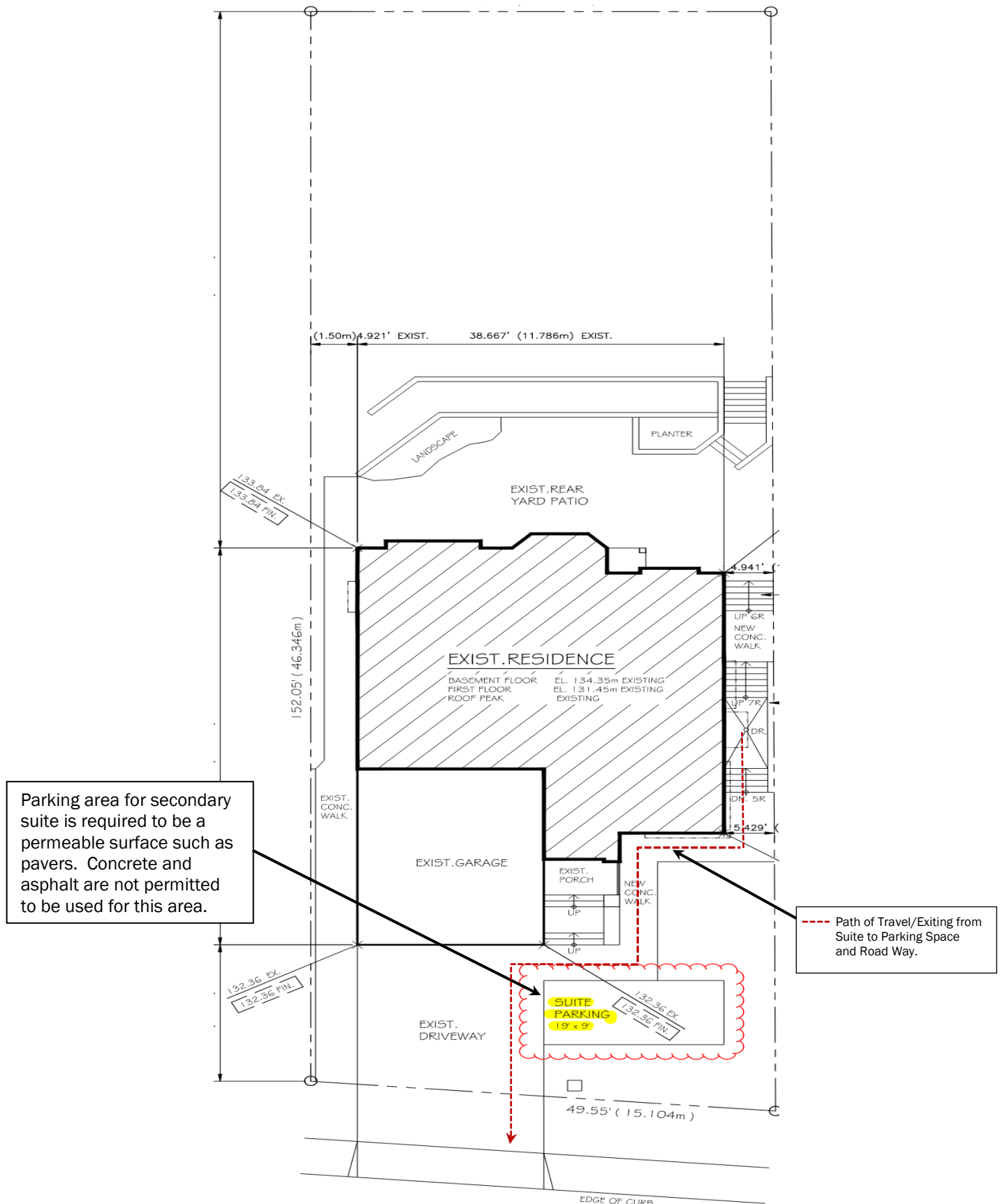
# Secondary Suite Sample Floor Plan

Smoke/Carbon Monoxide alarms are to be interconnected with the alarms in the remainder of the house, so all activate.





# Secondary Suite Sample Site Plan



## Permit Fees

The application fee is created after the permit submission has been reviewed and accepted, the fee slip and payment instructions will then be sent by email to the applicant.

The remaining permit fees are based on calculated construction value and is payable when the permit is issued. A Damage Bond may also be required. For more information on fees, please contact the Building Division at 604.469.4534.

## Related Fees for a Suite

If you have a secondary suite, you must obtain a Residential business licence from the City. The business licence for a secondary suite is a licence issued for tracking purposes and currently has no fee attached to its issuance.

An additional utility fee will also be charged on your annual utility bill. This reflects the added consumption and use of City water and sewer services.

## Other Requirements:

A plumbing permit will be required if there are any alterations or additions to plumbing fixtures. This permit must be obtained by a licensed plumbing contractor. Your plumbing contractor can apply for the permit after the building permit is issued.

## Application and Application Review Process

Outside of this document the city has these additional documents to assist you with the process to providing a complete application.

1. Once you have gathered all the information necessary you will submit your application and all supporting documentation [online](https://www.portmoody.ca) at [www.portmoody.ca](https://www.portmoody.ca).
2. When your application has been submitted and initial intake processing has been completed, you will be contacted by a City Building Official to go over your application.
3. As part of this process the building official may arrange for an on-site meeting to review the suite location and adjacent spaces (typically only done for existing suites or existing homes). This is to ensure the all the information needed is included for permit issuance.

Should you have any questions prior to making an application you may contact the city for assistance and guidance. Gathering all the necessary information up front saves time, which means the City can issue building permits faster.





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