

Secondary Suites in Apartments

Background/Information Sheet

The City of Vancouver is considering bylaw amendments to enable secondary suites in new multi-family apartment and mixed-use buildings. This background/ information sheet provides some introductory details on this proposal as well as key issues to be addressed through the proposed bylaws.

What are Secondary Suites in Apartments?

Similar to secondary suites in single-family homes, the secondary suite in apartment buildings is a self-contained dwelling unit (with a kitchenette, bathroom, and living room/bedroom area) designed within a larger primary suite. The secondary suite is able to be 'locked-off' from the primary suite and a separate door is provided for the secondary suite to either a corridor or to the outside. Together the secondary suite and the primary unit would be approximately equal in size to a two-bedroom/two-bathroom apartment.

For an illustration, see the last page of this background/ information sheet.

Why is the City considering Secondary Suites in Apartments?

The secondary suite in apartments provides many of the same benefits as the secondary suite in single-family homes: an affordable housing option for renters, greater flexibility for the primary home owner, or a cost-effective option for locating close family members (i.e. elderly parents) or caregivers nearby. Secondary suites work as effective 'mortgage helpers', enabling home buyers who prefer the amenities and benefits of living in higher-density urban neighbourhoods, to purchase larger units. A further benefit is that secondary suites allow a unit to adapt over the life cycle of a family – for example, enabling a young family to rent out the suite until a new child requires the suite to be combined with the primary unit until the child moves out or the family outgrows the apartment.

Finally, secondary suites in apartments provide an affordable housing choice in areas with higher levels of transit service, easy access to major destinations such as schools, and within walking distance of many daily goods and services as well as community amenities – thereby providing affordable market-based housing in combination with low transportation costs and climate change impacts. Secondary suites also provide the benefits of hidden density, with no impacts to building size or external appearance.

History of the Proposal

Secondary suites in apartments were initially developed at the UniverCity community at SFU (Burnaby Mountain) where they were inspired by the lock-off suites used in many resort hotels. The UniverCity secondary suites were included in both townhouse and high-rise apartment building types and were well-received by the market (units with secondary suites sold faster and at a cost premium over units without secondary suites). The secondary suites were typically rented for approximately \$400 per month, providing an attractive option for SFU students.

Building from the success at UniverCity, the City of Vancouver and local developers quickly realized the potential for secondary suites and enabled their use through policies in the Oakridge Centre, Arbutus Centre, and East Fraser Lands planning documents. The potential of secondary suites in apartments was also identified through the EcoDensity public consultation process and was included in the EcoDensity Initial Actions as part of Action C-6 (More Options for Rental Secondary Suites). By enabling secondary suites in apartments through wide-scale policy updates, the City of Vancouver has taken a leadership role in expanding secondary suites potential as affordable and sustainable housing options.

What Would be Allowed and Where?

The City is proposing to enable secondary suites in apartments in multi-family residential and mixed-use buildings in commercial (C) zones, downtown district (DD), and in large projects such as South East False Creek. As part of the proposed rules controlling secondary suites in apartments, the following would be required:

- **Minimum Unit Size.** 280 sq. ft. (which may be reduced to 200 square feet if the design and location provides satisfactory living accommodations, i.e. in large developments with more extensive amenities and common spaces).
- **Unit Orientation.** Secondary suites are required to have independent access to an external hallway or the outdoors as well as sufficient natural lighting.
- **Parking Requirements.** Secondary suites would not be counted as individual units for calculating required vehicle parking spaces, however they would be counted for bicycle, visitor, and carshare parking space requirements.
- **Building Code Conformance.** Secondary suites would be required to provide adequate noise and fire separation between the secondary suite and the primary unit, as is already provided for in the Vancouver Building Bylaw.
- **Livability Considerations.** The City is developing design guidelines to ensure livability in secondary suites. Design guidelines will address issues related to natural light, ventilation, proportions, space efficiency, and others.

What Do You Think?

The City wants to know what you think of the proposal to allow secondary suites in apartments. Attend an information open house or send your comments to ecodensity@vancouver.ca. Please be sure to check our website vancouver.ca/ecodensity - under "What is Next?", for further information on public hearing.

Open House 1

Date: Thursday, June 18th

Time: 4-7:30pm

Location: Kitsilano Community Centre

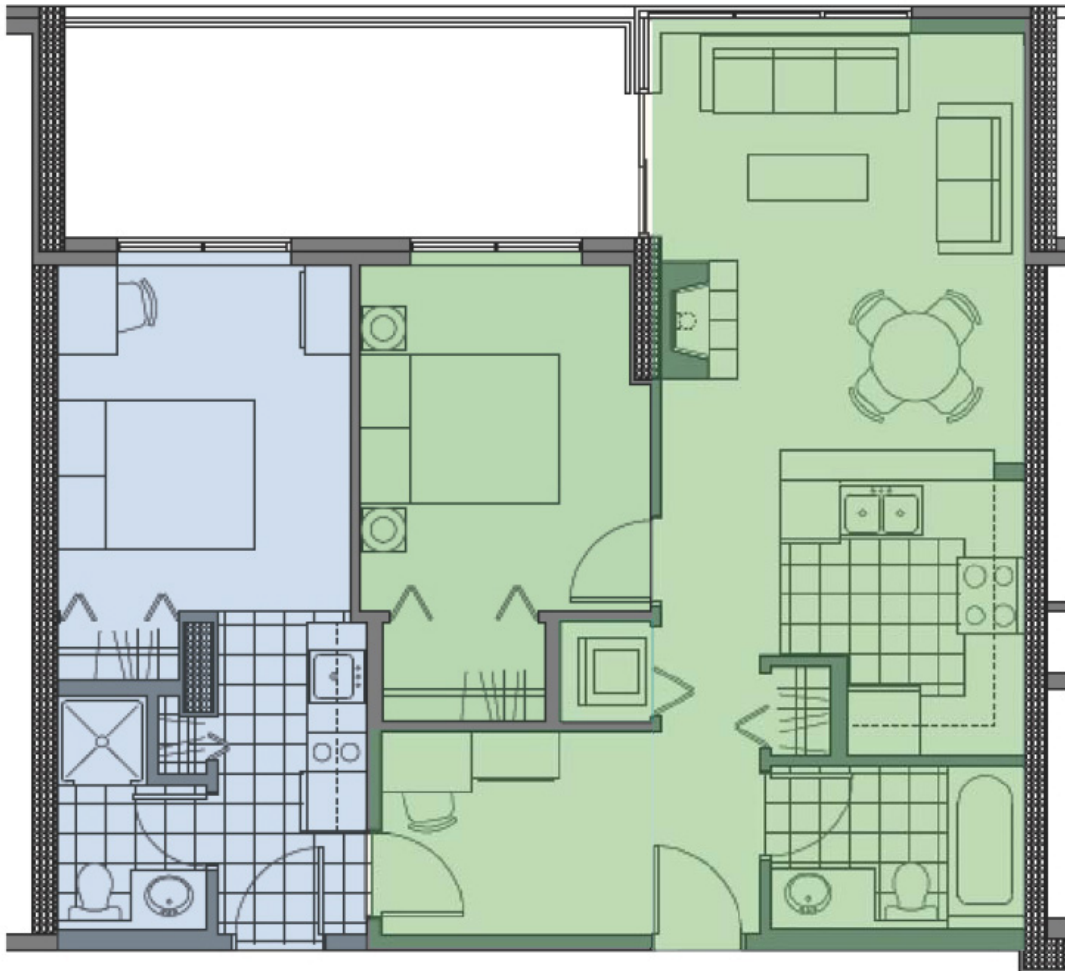
Open House 2 (in conjunction with Laneway Housing)



Date: Wednesday, June 24th

Time: 4-7:30pm

Location: Italian Cultural Centre

Secondary Suites in Apartments Illustration:



-  Principal Dwelling Unit
-  Lock Off Suite