Calgary

# Secondary Suites

**A guidebook for creating and legalizing safe secondary suites.**

Updated June 2026

**Disclaimer**

This information has no legal status and cannot be used as an official interpretation of the various bylaws, codes and regulations currently in effect. The City of Calgary accepts no responsibility to persons relying solely on this information. Web pages are updated periodically.

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800 Macleod Trail SE

Book an eAppointment for in person services at **appointment.calgary.ca**

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# 1 Introduction

**Secondary suites play a crucial role in addressing population growth by providing additional housing options in urban areas. By increasing housing density, the need for new developments is reduced and existing infrastructure can be used more efficiently.**

Secondary suites create more housing options, enabling a diverse range of residents, including young professionals, students and families, to live in desirable locations. Secondary suites also support multi-generational living, allowing extended families to stay close together while maintaining separate living spaces.

Overall, secondary suites contribute to more inclusive, sustainable urban growth by enhancing housing availability and affordability in densely populated cities. Calgary strives to diversify housing options while prioritizing community and safety. That is why the City of Calgary uses an education first approach that streamlines the secondary suites process making it easier, safer and more flexible for homeowners to add or legalize secondary suites.

# How to use the guidebook

The Secondary Suites Guidebook outlines the process of adding or legalizing your secondary suite. It will help you:

1. **Determine if a secondary suite is suitable for your property**
2. **Obtain the permits you will need**
3. **Understand construction and building code requirements**
4. **Navigate inspection processes**
5. **Navigate registration processes**

The guidebook also provides answers to common questions and concerns. Watch for the red asterisk symbol (see top left) for tips and tricks to make your secondary suite journey faster, easier and more cost efficient.

At the bottom of every page, you will find the chapter title to help navigate this guidebook.

**Definitions**

Trouble understanding a word or how it is defined for the purpose of secondary suites? Check the glossary for definitions at the end to help further your understanding.

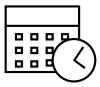
# A brief history

Calgary experienced rapid growth in the early 2000s, which led to an increased demand for housing. With the city's population expanding quickly, affordability became a concern.

Today, secondary suites are an attractive option for residents looking for affordable places to live. Below is a quick timeline of some of Calgary's secondary suites milestones from the last decade.

## 2015

The Secondary Suites Registry was created but was not mandatory.



## 2018

- The Secondary Suite Registry became mandatory for all suite owners on June 1, 2018. Council mandated registration by June 1, 2020.
- Registry Bylaw 11M2018 established for non-compliance of registration.
- Secondary suites were adopted as a discretionary use in low density residential districts so owners no longer had to apply for redesignation and could apply for a development permit.
- Council approved a two-year amnesty period, waiving the fees for development permits and mandatory registration for qualified suites.

## 2019

Council approved changes to allow secondary suites to be developed within an existing semi-detached home, and for a new semi-detached home to be developed containing secondary suites.

## 2023

- Council approved Home is Here – The City of Calgary's Housing Strategy.
- The Secondary Suite Incentive program was approved by Council.
- Council approved an extension of the amnesty period to December 31, 2026.

## 2024

- The Secondary Suite Incentive program launches to provide qualified homeowners up to $10,000 to build safe secondary suites.

## 2025

- Registry reaches 20,000 suites

# Secondary suites

Secondary suites are self-contained living spaces located within a primary residence. Your suite can be in the basement, on the main floor or on an upper floor. Any separate detached suites are considered backyard suites, not secondary suites.

Your secondary suite must include a kitchen, sanitary facility, and have separate access from the rest of the home.

- The kitchen must include facilities used or designed to be used for the preparation and cooking of food. This can include but is not limited to counter space, a stove, fridge, oven and sink.
- The sanitary facility must have a bath or shower and a toilet.
- There must be at least one space designated for sleeping.
- There must be access to the secondary suite that does not require the tenant to enter through the primary residence.

**Basement Suite** **Upper Floor Suite** **Main Floor Suite**

**Does my secondary suite qualify for the amnesty program?**

Contact the Planning Service Centre to confirm.

# Determine your secondary suite type

## Choose your suite type

**Secondary suite**

Is your suite already built?

**No**,
I want to add a suite to my home.

**Yes**,
but it's not registered.

Was it built **before** March 12, 2018?

**No**

**Yes**

Have you made any structural changes between March 12, 2018 and today?

For example, removal of structural elements or addition of suite entrance, a kitchen, windows or bedrooms.

**Yes**

**No**

I'm not sure of the work done before I acquired this property.

Apply as a pre-2018 suite and we'll help you figure it out.

**Secondary suite**

**Existing suite**

**Pre-2018 suite**

**Backyard suite**

For information, visit **calgary.ca/backyardsuite**

See the next page to learn about your suite type before reading the rest of the guidebook.

# Secondary suite types

## Existing suite

An existing suite is a self-contained space that may or may not meet all safety requirements but does not have the proper permitting and has not been registered on the City of Calgary Suite Registry.

## Pre-2018 suites

A secondary suite that has been in place since before March 12, 2018, with no structural changes made since that time.

**Pre-2018 suites have specific rules, code requirements and application processes. When you apply for a secondary suite building permit, your file manager will confirm the code requirements that apply. Any content related specifically to a pre-2018 will have a blue background throughout the guide.**

Structural changes that may disqualify a secondary suite from falling under the pre-2018 suite type, include but are not limited to:

- The addition or renovation of a separate entrance.
- The removal of any structural walls or the addition of walls to create additional spaces.
- Adding new opening (windows) to increase the number of bedrooms.

## Amnesty Program

The Secondary Suite Amnesty Program waives fees for a secondary suite development permit for pre-2018 suites. The purpose of this program is to make as many pre-2018 suites legal and safe. The amnesty period ends on Dec. 31, 2026.

**Find out more about the Suite Registry on page 60.**

# 2 Planning Your Secondary Suite

**Every secondary suite is unique depending on location, and how and when it is constructed. It is important to understand your secondary suite to avoid complications that can make your secondary suite journey longer and more expensive. Your secondary suite process will be different if you are adding a brand-new secondary suite versus legalizing and registering an already existing secondary suite.**

**1** **Planning your secondary suite**
Page 7

**2** **Permit applications**
Page 16

**3** **Incentive program (optional)**
Page 31

**4** **Permits issued**
You can now begin construction

**5** **Construction**
Page 35

**6** **Inspections**
Page 51

**7** **Registration**
Page 57

**8** **Occupy**

# Secondary suite planning checklist

There are a few things to consider ensuring an easier, smoother and more cost-efficient process when building or renovating a secondary suite.

Use the checklist below to make sure you are prepared.

- ☐ **Are there any permits outstanding for work previously completed on your property (i.e. home renovations or construction projects)?**

  Visit **maps.calgary.ca/myProperty/** to find out.

- ☐ **Does your property meet land use bylaw requirements for secondary suites?**

  See pages 10-11 to find out.

- ☐ **What will it take for your space to meet National Building Code – Alberta Edition requirements?**

  See page 21 to find out.

- ☐ **Will your property meet secondary suite parking requirements?**

  Call 403-268-5311 to find out.

- ☐ **Do you know which permits are required for your secondary suite?**

  See page 25 to learn more.

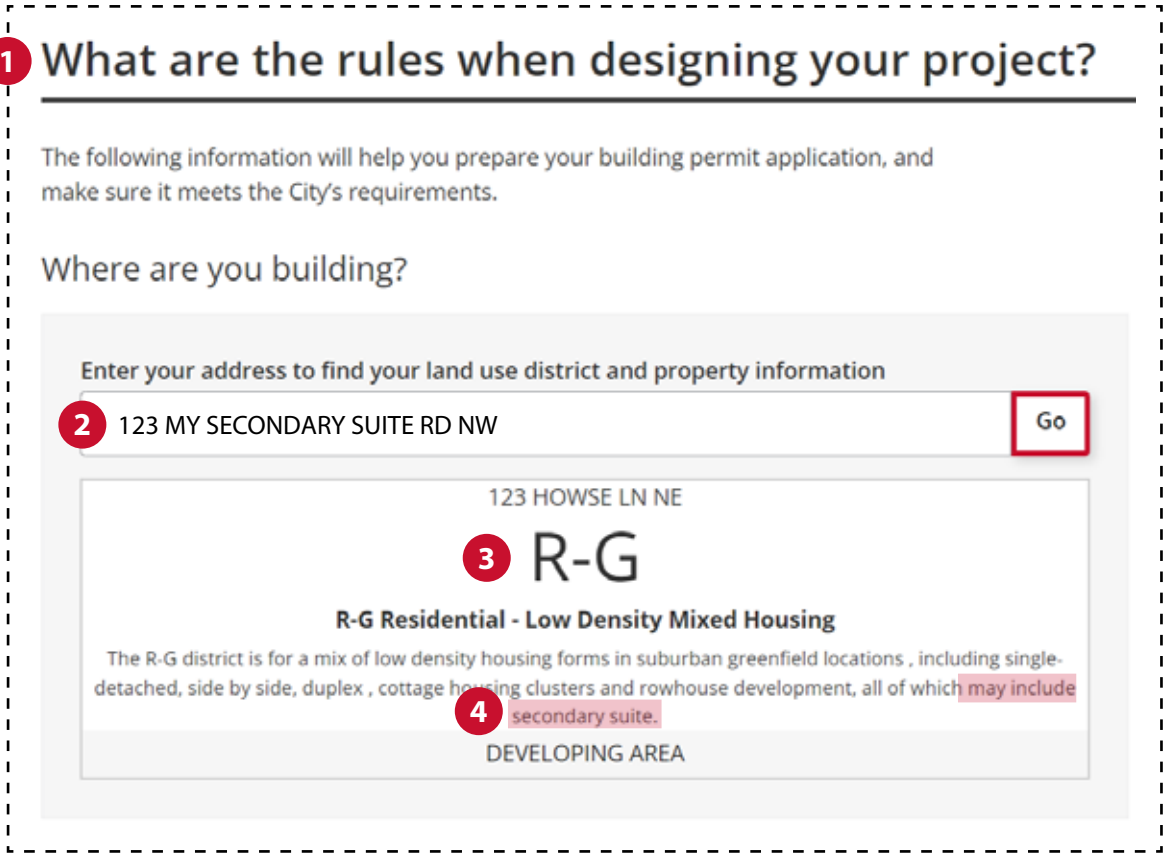
- ☐ **Do you understand your responsibilities when it comes to renting a secondary suite?**

  See page 60 to learn more.

# Confirm your land use district

Before starting your secondary suite journey, you will need to make sure that you are allowed to have a secondary suite in your land use district. Secondary suites are allowed in land use districts that have it listed as 'permitted' or 'discretionary use', but different types of permits may be required.

To find your land use district, visit **calgary.ca/zones**



# Land use district specifications

A permitted use is a use listed in a land use district where approval is guaranteed as long as all the rules are met. Applications for permitted uses that fully comply with the Land Use Bylaw must be approved. Below is the land use districts where secondary suites are permitted and those where they are not.

Once you've identified the land use district, you need to determine if your project meets the requirements outlined in the Land Use Bylaw. If your development doesn't meet the Land Use Bylaw specifications (Bylaw 1P2007 **lub.calgary.ca**), a development permit may be needed for your secondary suite.

**Questions about your land use district?**

If your land use district is 'direct control (DC)' or to confirm parking stall requirements, call the Planning Service Centre at 403-268-5311 to assess your specific case.

| Permitted | | Not permitted |
|---|---|---|
| R-2M* | M-H1f#h#d# | R-MH |
| R-CG | M-H2 | M-G |
| R-G | M-H2f#h#d# | M-Gd# |
| R-Gm | M-H3 | M-1 |
| M-CG | M-H3f#h#d# | M-1d# |
| M-CGd# | M-X1 | M-2 |
| M-C1 | M-X1d# | M-2f#d# |
| M-C1d# | M-X2 | S-FUD |
| M-C2 | M-X2f#d# | |
| M-C2f#d# | H-GO | |
| M-H1 | | |

*Where there is only one main residential building located on a parcel.

# Design considerations

Once you've determined that your land use district allows for a secondary suite, you can begin planning the design and layout. Before construction there are some things to consider. Make sure your design can accommodate the intended purpose of the secondary suite. Some elements you might want to consider include but are not limited to:

### Purpose and functionality

Determine the primary use of the secondary suite (e.g., rental unit, guest suite). This will influence the layout and design choices. Once you know the use, decide on the number and type of rooms needed to meet secondary suite requirements related to bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens.

### Natural light and windows

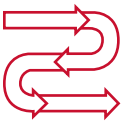
Consider the position of windows to maximize both natural light and privacy. Also, make sure that proper egress windows can be placed in all potential bedrooms and shared spaces.

### Plumbing and electrical

Place the kitchen and bathroom(s) near existing plumbing lines to reduce costs and complexity. Plan specific electrical needs like kitchen appliances, entertainment systems and office equipment in advance to maximize space.

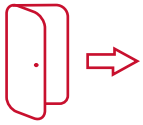
### Heating and cooling

Ensure your secondary suite has sufficient heating and cooling. Consider adding a second furnace or a heat recovery ventilation system. Proper ventilation is crucial to maintain air quality and reduce humidity within secondary suites.



### Layout and flow

Create a logical flow between spaces. For example, place the kitchen and dining area adjacent to each other. Consider the need for privacy in different areas, particularly bedrooms and bathrooms. Use walls and doors to create private spaces.

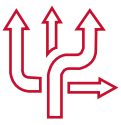


### Entry and access

If the secondary suite is intended for rental or guest use, ensure there is a separate, private entrance for privacy and security. Ensure that the entry and interior spaces are easily accessible. Considering features like staircases, ramps and door widths.

### Ceiling height

Verify that the ceiling height meets building code requirements. A minimum of 1.95 m is typically required. Plan the layout to minimize disruptions caused by low ceilings, ductwork, beams and pipes.



### Future flexibility

Consider how the layout might appeal to future buyers or tenants. Ensure the space is versatile and attractive for others. This might involve designing the layout to allow for basic changes or reconfigurations.

# Fire safety

Considering fire safety when building your secondary suite is essential. Fire safety is a set of practices and precautions designed to prevent the start of fires, reduce the risk of fire-related injuries and minimize damage to property in the event of a fire.

To ensure fire safety in your secondary suite, make sure:

- All bedroom windows meet egress requirements.
- All secondary suite entrances are protected.
- All smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are interconnected.
- There are smoke-tight barriers between the main unit, secondary suite and any shared spaces.

Find more information on fire safety requirements in the Construction process section.

Review the elements below and share with the occupant of the secondary suite to help prevent fires.

### Clothing dryers

Dryer lint traps and exhaust pipes should be cleaned regularly to avoid a house fire.

### Cooking and appliance safety

Cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries, with many fires starting because of appliances.

### Fireplaces and wood burning stoves

Learn how to maintain your fireplace or stove, prevent the build-up of carbon monoxide and reduce smoke emissions in your home.

### Fire pits

Fire pits, outdoor fireplaces, wood-burning ovens and chimeneas in Calgary must meet certain standards to ensure that they are enjoyed safely.

### Lithium-ion battery safety

Lithium-ion batteries are used in items like smart phones, laptops, e-scooters, e-cigarettes, toys, smoke alarms and cars. When these batteries are not used or charged properly, they can start a fire or explode.

### Oxygen safety

Do you use home oxygen therapy? Oxygen by itself is not flammable, but it can feed a fire. When oxygen is flowing near fabrics like bed and furniture coverings, they can burn more easily. Make sure you store your oxygen safely to prevent a fire.

### Propane safety

Propane is a highly flammable, compressed and colourless gas which has a faint odour at high concentrations. It's heavier than air and can spread over long distances, so distant ignition and flashback are possible. Make sure you store all your propane tanks safely to prevent a fire.

### Smoking and disposing of smoking material

The improper disposal of smoking material is the leading cause of outdoor fires in Calgary.



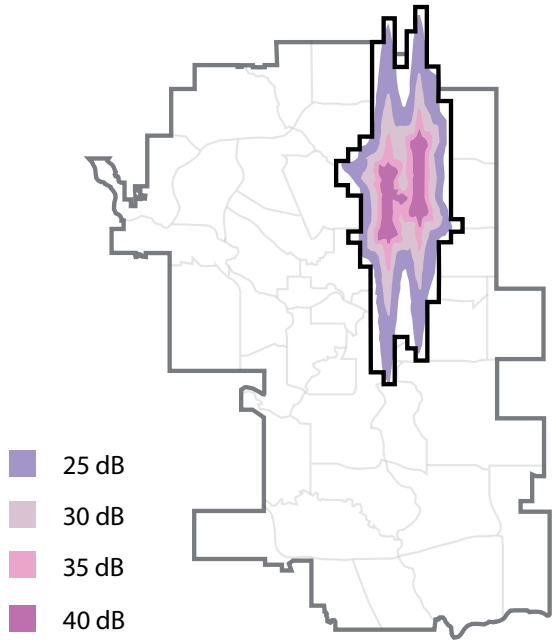
Visit **calgary.ca/safety/in-your-home** for more information.

# Airport Vicinity Protection Area (AVPA)

The Calgary International Airport Vicinity Protection Area Regulation (AVPA) outlines uses that are prohibited within certain locations in Calgary that have been identified as Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF) areas.

Due to the increased noise impacts from aircraft flying over communities, certain uses are prohibited within the different NEF contour areas. Secondary suites can be developed within the AVPA however, there are limitations if the secondary suite is located in the NEF 30+ areas. For instance, different acoustical requirements are required within the AVPA to prevent as much noise exposure as possible.

All secondary suites located within the AVPA must be installed in an already existing basement.




**If your property falls in any of the NEF areas or within the AVPA border, a development permit is required for your secondary suite.**

**Allowed in NEF 30+**

**Allowed in NEF 25**

## Determine if your property falls within the AVPA

1. Go to **calgary.ca/avpa**
2. Click on AVPA Regulation Overview on the right side of the page. You will see an introduction to the AVPA and some useful information on reading the map.
3. Click Enter to access the map.
4. Once you have accessed the map, use the search icon in the top left corner to enter your address.

# Flood zone considerations

It is important to determine whether your property is located in a flood risk area. Basements (including basement secondary suites) can be especially vulnerable to flooding because underground spaces can quickly fill with water, risking life or personal safety and property damage. During river flood events, basements can be flooded by overland floodwater or high groundwater that enters the basement through cracks and drains.

Developments that fall within flood risk areas are subject to land use and building regulations as set out in The City's Land Use Bylaw. Depending on the location of your property and the type of secondary suite, your property may not be suitable for a basement suite, or you may need to apply for a development permit.

You can determine whether your property falls within a flood risk area by checking Calgary's flood hazard map following the steps below. As of June 2025, updated provincial flood hazard mapping is available which reflects the latest understanding of flood risk and is now available at **floods.alberta.ca**

If you have questions about what this means for your property, call 311. Our teams that are knowledgeable about flooding can share the best available flood risk information and provide advisory comments for further resilience.

## Determine if your property falls within the flood areas

1. Go to **calgary.ca/buildinginfloodareas**
2. Click on "Flood Hazard Map."
3. Click on "Hazard."
4. Zoom in to locate Calgary.
5. Click the eye icon in the top right corner to access the legend.

To learn more about the impact of flooding and flood preparedness, check out The City's great resources:

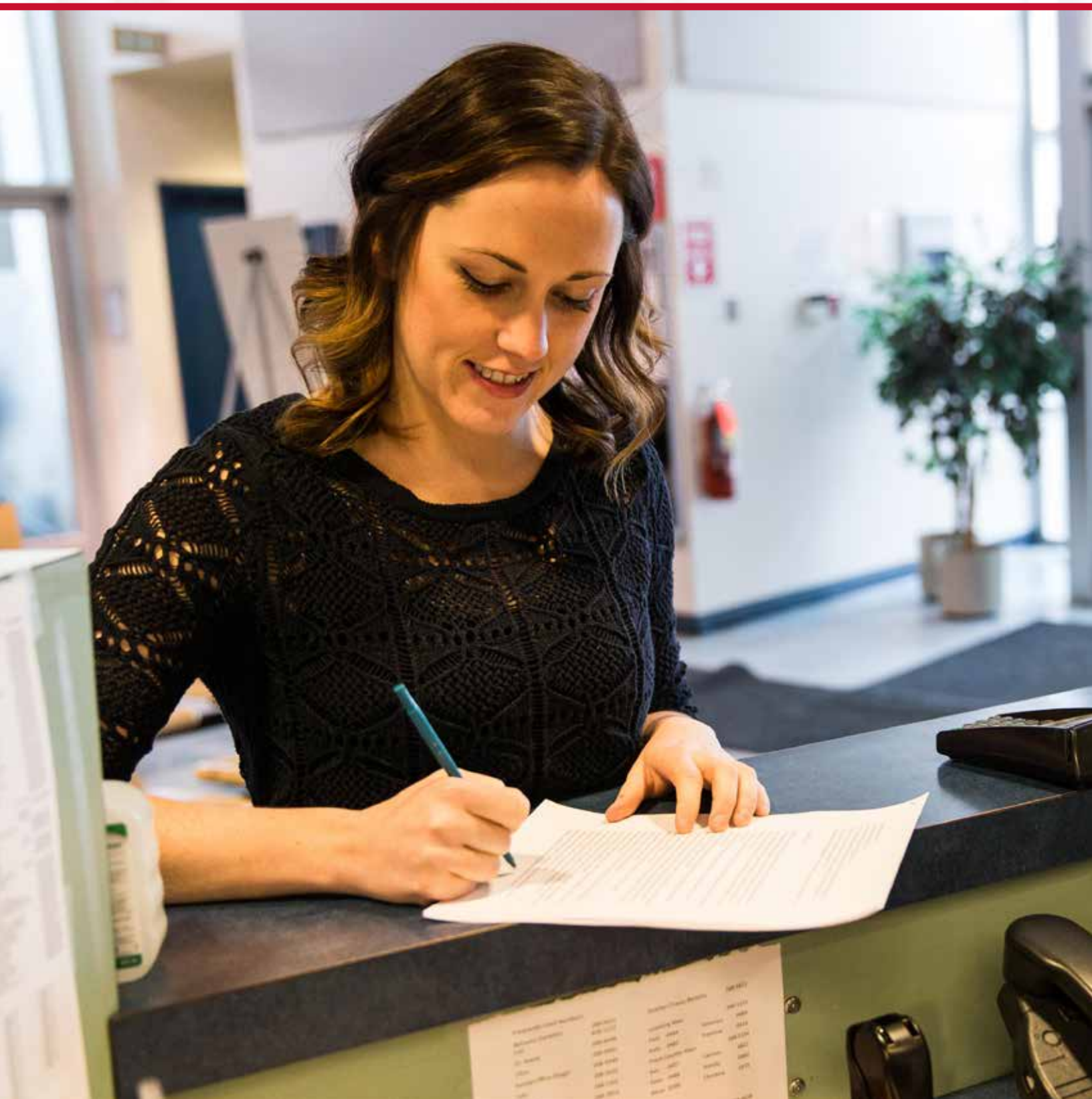
- Climate hazards: Heavy rain and flooding: **calgary.ca/environment/resources/climate-hazards--heavy-rain-and-flooding.html**
- Be prepared for flooding: **calgary.ca/water/flooding/readiness.html**

## How to reduce flood impacts

These climate ready measures may help reduce damage if your home is vulnerable to heavy precipitation and flooding.

- If possible, avoid building living spaces in the basement
- Repair cracks in basement foundation
- Install a back-flow prevention device on your sewer pipe. This helps protect your home from sewage backups associated with extreme rainfall and stormwater flooding. These can also be installed in basement showers, toilets and sinks.
- Install a sump pump with a back-up power source.
- Install water alarms in the basement to alert you if water is backing up.

# 3 Permit Application Process



**Throughout the secondary suite journey, you will be required to obtain a variety of permits. Some secondary suites will require a Development Permit (DP) before work can begin. Once your development permit is issued, you can apply for a Building Permit (BP).**

Along with a building permit, the secondary suite may also require trade permits. Trade permits include electrical, gas, plumbing and mechanical. While most secondary suites will require at least one of the previously mentioned trade permits, some work may be completed by the homeowner through acquiring a homeowner permit.

Understanding the permitting process will ensure a smoother, faster and safer journey.

# Applying for permits

If you are adding or legalizing your suite, you may require permits.
Before starting the application process, review the information below about:

1. **The types of permits you might need.**
2. **When you need to apply for permits.**
3. **How to apply for permits.**

---

| | Permit type | Who can apply | Cost | Expiry time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Development permit** | Secondary Suite | Homeowner or contractor | $0.00 | Your permit conditions will outline your commencement date. Commencement date is the day you must start construction by for the development permit to bevalid. If you do not start construction by that date, you can request an extension of commencement. |
| | Pre-2018 Suite | | | |
| **Building permit** | Secondary Suite | Homeowner or contractor | $418.08 | 180 days |
| | Existing Suite | | $205.92 | |
| **Trade permits** | Contractor Electrical Permit | Contractor | Fee Estimator | 330 days |
| | Homeowner Electrical Permit | Homeowner | $116.50 | |
| | Contractor Gas Permit | Contractor | Fee Estimator | |
| | Contractor Mechanical Permit | Contractor | Fee Estimator | |
| | Contractor Plumbing Permit | Contractor | Fee Estimator | |
| | Homeowner Plumbing Permit | Homeowner | $116.50 | |

# Development permit

A development permit is a document authorizing a development, issued by a Development Authority pursuant to the Land Use Bylaw governing land use within Calgary city limits. It includes the plans and conditions of approval.

A permit issued by The City to erect a new building or structure or to demolish, relocate, repair, alter or make additions to an existing building or structure.

## A development permit is required if any of the following conditions apply:

- Your design does not meet Land Use Bylaw specifications in your land use district, refer to pages 10-11 to identify your land use district.
- Your property appears in any of the NEF areas or within the AVPA border, refer to page 14 to find out if your property falls within the AVPA.
- Your property is in any of the flood-prone areas, refer to page 15 to determine if your property falls within the flood-prone areas.

## Application requirements

It is important to know and understand what you need to include in an application to ensure a smooth review process. If information is missing in your application, it may increase the time it takes to issue your permit. Below is a list of information you should know before applying for your development permit.

- The project address.
- Who is applying (the homeowner or someone representing the owner).
- What relaxation (ie. parking) are you applying for, if any?
- Project details, see requirements below.

### Prepare required documents

To receive your development permit, several supporting documents are needed. These documents are necessary to avoid future complications and to ensure all property requirements are met. Some of the documents you need to include are the following:

### Abandoned Well Declaration form

- A map of the subject property showing the presence or absence of abandoned well locations on GeoDiscover Alberta's Map Viewer must be included with the form.
- Reference the user guide to finding abandoned wells for more information on how to locate your property, available in the online resources section of this guidebook.

## Public Tree Disclosure Statement

- Indicate yes or no if there is a public tree on City land within six meters of and/or overhanging your property.
- If there are public trees, show these trees on your site plan.
- If you are unsure if there are public trees surrounding your property, you can use The City's Tree Map or call 311.

**Note:** If applying in person, you will also need to fill out a Home Improvement Service Application Form.

## Prepare required plans and elevations

Architectural drawings are required to evaluate the structure. These plans help to identify the primary dwelling, secondary suite and any shared spaces. Pending successful plans reviews, you will be issued your desired permits. Review the specific details and drawings/visuals you will be required to provide when submitting your development permit application below.

## Site plan

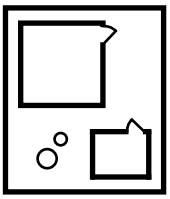
- Address
- Property lines and the distance from the property lines to the house
- Names of adjacent city streets
- Outline and dimensions of the home and any other buildings on the property
- Location of all exterior stairs
- Location of all parking stalls on the parcel and label the stall you plan to allocate to the secondary suite (indicate size and material of parking stalls)
- Location and dimensions of the outdoor amenity space for the suite

## Floor plans

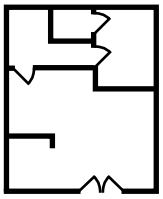
- Address
- Layout of each floor of the house (ie. basement, main floor and upper floors)
- Label the purpose of each room (ie. kitchen, bathroom, bedroom)
- Location of all windows and exterior doors (indicate size, type and operation)
- Area of the secondary suite (ie. square footage)

## Elevation drawings

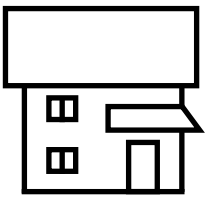
- Height and width of any of side of the home being structurally altered (ie. windows and doors)
- Location of all windows and exterior doors (indicate size, type and operation)
- If applicable, locations of all exterior stairs (above and/or below the ground)



**Site plans**



**Floor plans**



**Elevations**

**The Development Authority or Safety Code Officer may require additional materials considered necessary to properly evaluate the proposed development as stated in Part 2, Section 26(3) of Land Use Bylaw 1P2007, Section 6(1) of Bylaw 64M94 and Alberta Building Code 2014.**

# Secondary suite building permit

**A building permit is always required if you want to add or legalize a secondary suite.**

A secondary suite building permit is an application with The City to ensure your project meets the minimum National Building Code (Alberta Edition) requirements and, more importantly, is safe. The code provides guidance on approved building materials and construction methods. All secondary suites will require a building permit.

In some cases, you can do the work by yourself or hire a professional to do it for you. If you choose to hire a contractor, it is important to make sure they have pulled all the necessary permits for your renovations, and that all required inspections are completed. The following section will provide you with the requirements to apply for the permits as a homeowner, and what to consider when hiring a contractor.

## Application requirements

It is important to know and understand all required application details to ensure a smooth application process. If elements are missing in your applications, there may be increased wait times and delays for the permit issuance. Below is a list of application details you should know before applying for your building permit.

- The project address
- Who is applying (the homeowner or someone representing the owner)
- Who will be doing the work (contractor, homeowner)
- What you are applying for
- Project details

### Prepare required documents

In order to receive your building permit, all secondary suites require an Asbestos Abatement form and pre-2018 suites require an Owner Declaration and an Existing Secondary Suite Information Sheet.

### Asbestos Abatement form

The City may require an Asbestos Abatement form if your house was constructed before 1990.

If asbestos is found:

- Immediately stop work.
- Address the asbestos that has been encountered.
- Submit a building permit revision to include a revised Asbestos Abatement form acknowledging the removal of asbestos before resuming work related to the building permit.

#### Owner declaration

Provide certification that the secondary suite has existed since prior to March 12, 2018.

#### Existing secondary suite information sheet

Provides required information on the suite that will prove the existence of the suite prior to March 12, 2018.

**Note:** If applying in person, you will also need to fill out a Home Improvement Service application form.

# Prepare required plans and elevations

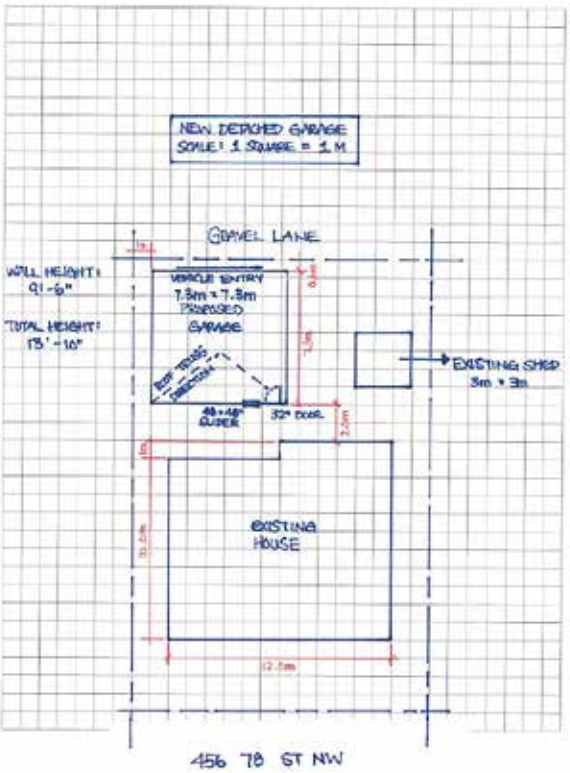
Architectural drawings are required to evaluate the structure. These plans help to identify the primary dwelling, secondary suite and any shared spaces. Pending successful plans reviews, you will be issued your desired permits. Review the specific details and drawings/visuals you will be required to provide when submitting your building permit application below.

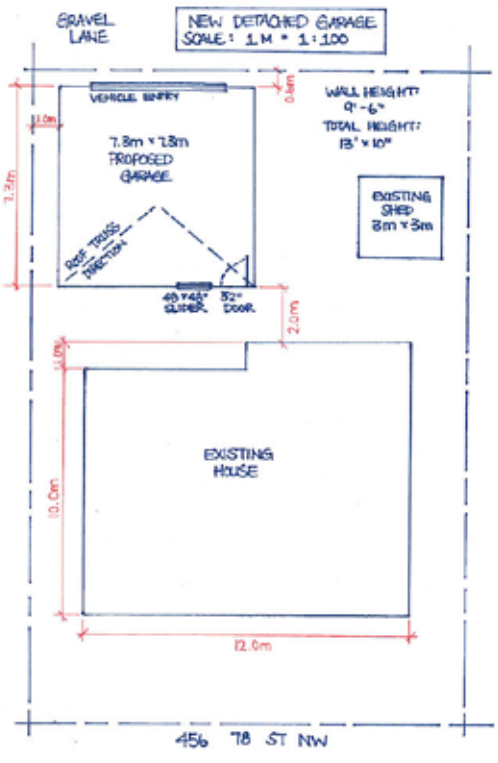
## Site plans

- Address
- Property lines and the distance from the property lines to the house
- Names of adjacent city streets
- Outline and dimensions of the home and any other buildings on the property
- Location of all exterior stairs
- Location of all parking stalls on the parcel and label the stall you plan to allocate to the secondary suite (indicate size and material of parking stalls)
- Location and dimensions of the outdoor amenity space for the suite

**Site plans, floor plans and elevations are not required for pre-2018 and existing suites.**

### Sample site plans



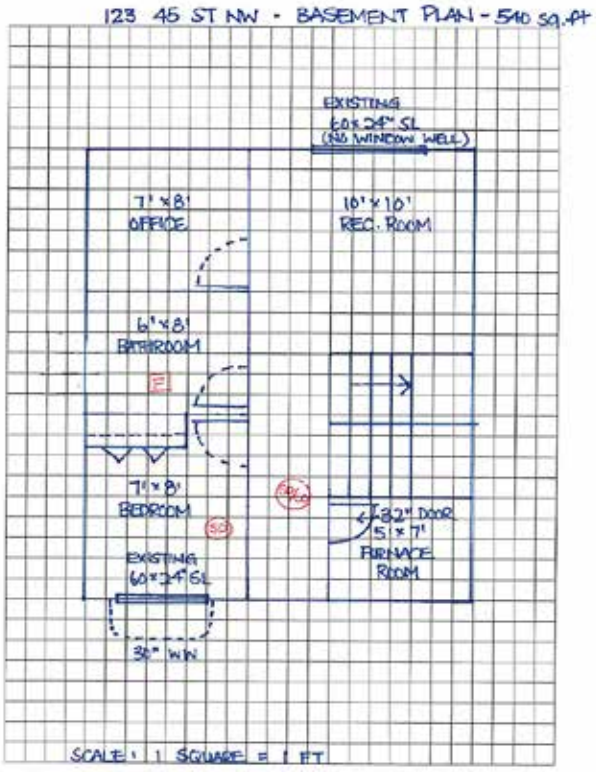
## Floor plans

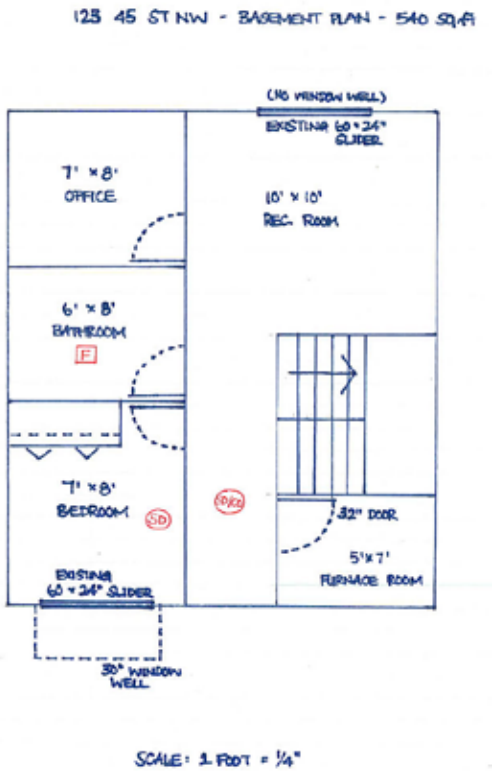
- Address
- Layout of each floor of the house (ie. basement, main floor and upper floors)
- Label the purpose of each room (ie. kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms)
- Location of all windows and exterior doors (indicate size, type and operation)
- Area of the secondary suite (ie. square footage)
- Locations of separate ventilation and heating for the main dwelling unit and the suite

## Elevation drawings

- Height and width of any of side of the home being structurally altered (ie. windows and doors)
- Location of all windows and exterior doors (indicate size, type and operation)
- If applicable, locations of all exterior stairs (above and/or below the ground)

### Sample floor plans



# Pre-2018 secondary suite permit application – additional requirements

## Prepare colour photographs

For pre-2018 suites, the building permit, the building permit application must provide colour photographs showing the existence of the suite. In order to qualify you must provide photos of:

- The entryway into the suite, taken from outside (include the entire side of the house where the door is located)
- The entryway into the suite, from the inside (include the stairwell, interior doorway and all other entrances into the suite entryway)
- The suite kitchen (please ensure all cooking appliances are visible)
- The suite bathroom
- Any and all parking area(s) on the property
- The outdoor amenity space area/yard
- The mechanical/furnace room showing the ceiling
- The interior and exterior of each window in a bedroom / sleeping area (include the whole window and window well if applicable)

**Photos must be combined into one file to submit online.**

**Sample photos**

# Trade permits

If you require a trade permit for your suite, you can apply for a homeowner electrical or plumbing permit if you own the home, are currently living in it and are planning to do the work yourself.

It is important to understand when you will need a trade permit so you can avoid delays and ensure safety throughout your journey. The four main types of trade permits are:

- **Electrical permit**
- **Plumbing permit**
- **Mechanical permit**
- **Gas permit**

## Electrical permits

If you're interested in installing electrical wiring in your secondary suite, refer to The City's Homeowner Electrical Wiring Guide. Other methods of installation not identified in this guide may be acceptable; however, all installations must meet the most current requirements of the National Electrical Code of Canada.

**Homeowners are permitted to…**

- Tie into the main panel without physically changing it.
- Add a sub-panel to an existing main service, provided there is an existing main breaker.

**A contractor is required to…**

- Legalize a secondary suite when there is concealed electrical without proper permits.
- Install, alter or modify the main electrical service, including the main panel, main breaker or the meter base.
- Install electrical wiring in permanent, in-ground swimming pools and hot tubs.
- Install battery-based energy storage systems.
- Install electrical vehicle charging systems.
- Install electrical vehicle energy management systems (EVEMS) or load management systems.
- Install electrical for air conditioning units.

## Plumbing permits

If you are interested in completing the plumbing work for your secondary suite, refer to The City's Homeowner Plumbing Guide. Other methods of installation not identified in this guide may be acceptable; however, all installations must meet the most current requirements of the National Plumbing Code of Canada.

**Homeowners are permitted to…**

- Construct, extend or alter a plumbing system.
- Replace water and sewer lines in or around the home.

**A contractor is required to…**

- Legalize a secondary suite when there is concealed plumbing without proper permits.

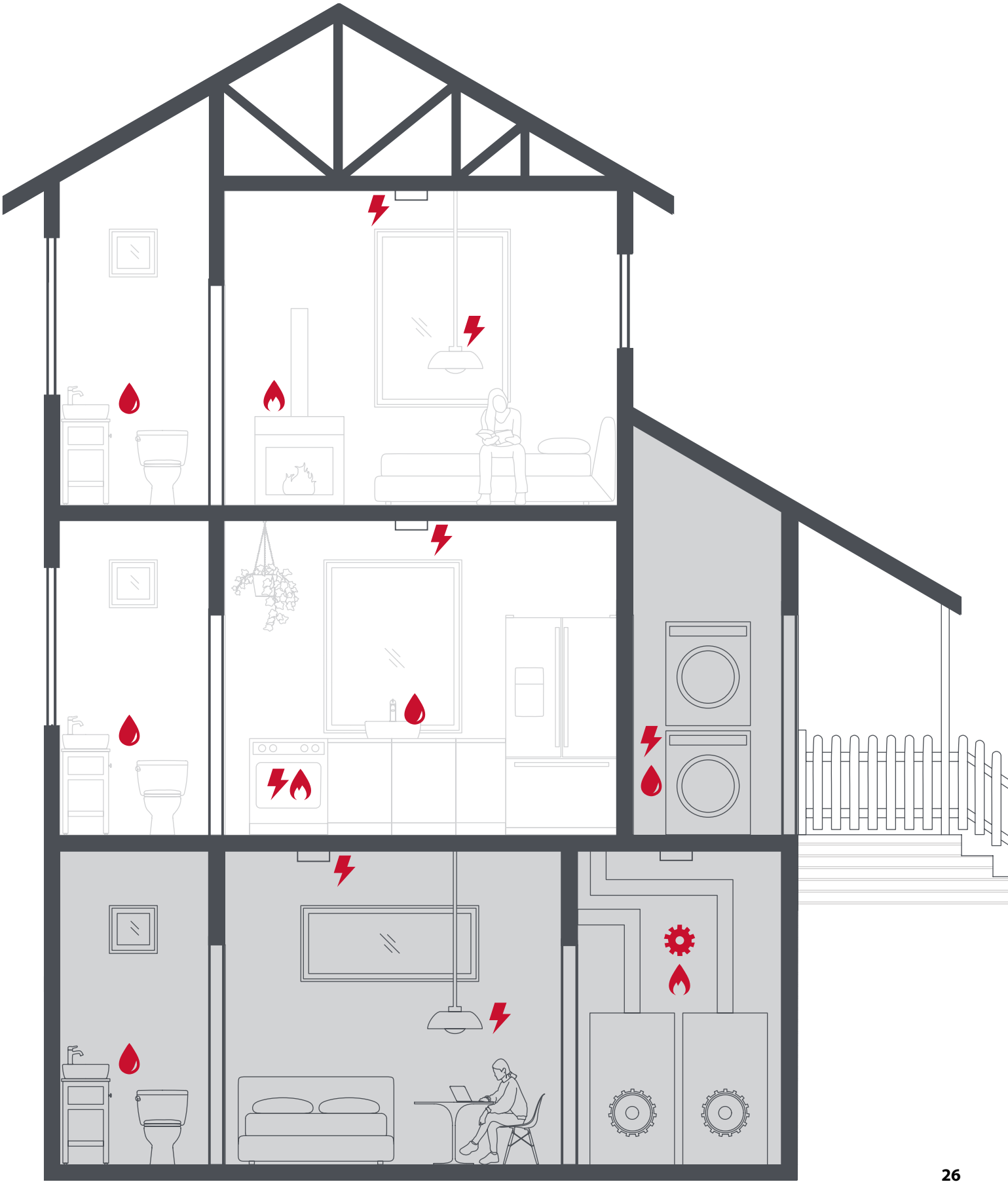
## Mechanical (HVAC) and Gas permits

A homeowner is not permitted to take out a mechanical (HVAC) permit. This type of permit and work can only be done by a qualified, licensed contractor.

You cannot take out a gas permit for your house unless you are a first-class or second-class gasfitter (i.e. journeyman). Otherwise, this type of permit and work can only be done by a qualified, licensed contractor.

**A contractor is required to…**

- Install or replace a hot water tank (in certain situations).
- Install a new furnace and/or heat recovery ventilator.
- Make changes to the gas lines located upstream from the water heater shut off valve.
- Modify the venting system (e.g. size and design).



# Applying for your own permits

## Permit eligibility

As the homeowner, you can obtain homeowner permits for new work, including renovations, if the following conditions are met:

- **You legally own the home** – if you have recently purchased the property, it takes some time for the title to transfer to you. We may request a copy of your purchase agreement as proof of ownership.
- **You live in the home or intend to reside in it** – you must live in the home that you are pulling a homeowner permit for.
- **You are doing the work yourself** – you cannot pull a homeowner permit on behalf of the individual or company doing the work. If you are hiring someone to do the work for you or the work is concealed, a professional will need to apply for the permit.

---

Other considerations include:

### Semi-detached

If the home is a semi-detached dwelling, one side of the property is acceptable (the side the owner lives in). This includes any accessory buildings on the same property.

The electrical and/or plumbing system can only service that home, including a secondary suite contained within it.

### Rowhouse or townhouse

Row-type, individually owned condominium townhouses are acceptable with authorization from the condo board to the unit owner. The permit would apply only to the unit that the owner lives in. Other units in the complex are not included.

There may be additional building code requirements for a secondary suite constructed in a rowhouse or townhouse. For more information, check with your contractor.

### Corporate ownership

If the home is owned by a corporation, a director can pull this if they live there and are completing the work themselves. The City of Calgary will request a copy of the corporation documents to show proof of ownership.

## Creating a myID account

To apply for a permit, you will need to create a myID account. myID is an online service that provides citizens and business owners access to multiple City services using a single account. To sign up or log in, visit **calgary.ca/myID** and follow the online instructions.

With a personal account, you will be able to:

- Modify your profile information.
- Add or remove a social login.
- Change your password.
- Close your account.

To sign up for a myID account, you will need to provide:

- Your full name.
- A valid email address.
- A secure password.
- You'll also need to agree to our terms of use and privacy policy.

## How to hire a contractor

Choosing the right contractor is an important step when completing renovations to your property. You should be cautious, do your homework and have a high level of trust with the professional you decide to hire.

It's important to remember that if you hire a licensed contractor to do the work for you, they will need to apply for the permits. Here's six things you can do to protect yourself when hiring a contractor.

### Check their licence

Contractors are required to hold a valid City of Calgary business licence, and The City has the authority to suspend or revoke this licence.

Contractors that hold a business licence have met The City's licensing requirements and are permitted to operate their business within Calgary. Without a valid business licence, contractors are not able to obtain necessary construction and trade permits. Visit **dbaservices.calgary.ca/publicinq/Default.aspx?PossePresentation=CustomerSearch** to find or verify a licensed trade contractor.

## Documentation

Ask for detailed estimates when requesting a quote from a contractor. When you have decided on a contractor, ask them to provide a comprehensive, written contract that includes both project details and business details. The contract should include:

- Contractor's business license number
- Estimated start and completion dates
- Full renovation plans
- Material and product specifications, including warranty information
- Responsibility for building permits and inspections
- Work schedule
- Price
- Payment arrangements
- Business liability insurance information
- Worker's compensation program information, or if exempt, carries private disability insurance

## Ask for references

Ask for a list of past jobs and contact information to verify the quality and validity of a contractor's previous work. Seeing proof of satisfied customers can help to ensure that you are choosing a qualified contractor.

Many homeowners don't take the time to check references. Instead, they make the assumption that a list of references is proof of good work. This is not always true. Before hiring a contractor, it can be helpful to ask for references about the quality of the contractor's work as well as details about the timeliness, budget, and ease of the renovation process.

## Verify insurance

Contractors should carry liability insurance in case of property damage or injury. Ask for a certificate of insurance as part of your contract.

## Pre-payments

Contractors can only request pre-payments or progress payments for materials, not labour. Contractors must be licensed with the Government of Alberta as a pre-paid contractor in order to do so.

## Professional architects or engineers

An architect or professional engineer may be required to design and inspect your project. Refer to the current National Building Code – Alberta Edition, Division C, Section 2.4.2 or a consultant to determine if professional involvement is required. Where professional involvement is required, plans or documents must be stamped by the corresponding professional(s).

If your project requires engineer's review, then the seal of a professional engineer registered to practice in the province of Alberta for the proposed design should be provided. The engineer should be registered with The Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA). Visit APEGA's website for professional engineer's stamp authentication requirements.

# 4 Secondary Suite Incentive Program

**The Secondary Suite Incentive Program (incentive program) supports safe housing for all. The Incentive program, launched in June 2024, provides qualifying homeowners with up to $10,000 to build and register a secondary suite. Your participation in the program contributes to positive urban transformation. It contributes to housing choice and improving affordability of homes across Calgary.**

# Do I qualify?

The incentive program applies to secondary suites built within the main dwelling, not for backyard suites. Applications are limited to one per person, and you must own the property through the entire process. You must provide proof of any costs you are looking to receive funding for, and you must stay in good standing on your taxes, as the funds will first be used to cover any arears to The City.

Qualifying homeowners must have an active building permit before applying for the incentive. Once you have applied you can begin building. Make sure to keep proof of the secondary suite's initial condition before starting construction. Once construction is done and your paid invoices are received, you will be reimbursed for the cost of installing all required safety elements. You can apply at **calgary.ca/secondarysuite-incentive**

1. **Apply for incentive**
2. **Build a secondary suite**
3. **Send paid invoices**
4. **Receive reimbursement**

## Qualifying safety elements

The incentive program provides reimbursement of up to $10,000 for the cost of installing all required safety elements that aren't already in the space when you apply. The installation of energy efficiency and accessibility components may also qualify for reimbursement. The qualifying safety elements are outlined in the table on the following page.

| Safety elements | Cost* |
|---|---|
| Bedroom egress windows | $1,500 |
| Exterior stairways and protection of secondary suites | $1,000 |
| Heat and ventilation separation | $6,000 |
| Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms | $ 1,000 |
| Smoke-tight barrier | $4,000 |
| **Energy efficiency details** | |
| Certified windows – ENERGY STAR | $50 per rough opening ($250 max.) |
| Natural gas furnace – ENERGY STAR | $500 flat rate |
| Heat/energy recovery ventilator (HRV/ERV) – ENERGY STAR | $150 flat rate |
| Heat pump (ductless mini-split) – ENERGY STAR | $250 flat rate |
| Heat pump (air source/ground source) – ENERGY STAR | $1,000 flat rate |
| **Accessibility standard details** | |
| • Wheelchair accessible entrance to the suite either by an at grade suite entrance (walk out suite scenario and alley in the back) or with a wheelchair lift (exterior or interior).<br>• Exterior door threshold no more than 50 mm in height.<br>• Minimum 1.5 m turning diameter in the living area, kitchen and bedroom.<br>• Minimum path of travel width of 920 mm throughout.<br>• Minimum doorway sizes of 850 mm in fully open position (3' doors) throughout.<br>• Curbless or transition free shower.<br>• Ability to pull a wheelchair alongside a toilet for transfer. This may not necessarily need a 1.5 m turning diameter but space to do a three-point turn is needed at a minimum.<br>• A bedroom with no measurement smaller than 3 m for wheelchair access and transfer.<br>• Grab bars installed in key locations (beside toilet, within shower, any other areas where transfer is needed).<br>• Non-slip flooring.<br>• Lever style door hardware. | Up to $5,000<br><br>**Note:** Not all accessibility criteria must be met. The City holds the right to allow for alternatives to be considered based on their discretion.<br><br>If you are considering this option, please reach out to the program to discuss possible alternatives (this includes specific designs to address other accessibility concerns). |

*Maximum eligibility for safety items is $10,000 per home.

# Before applying for the incentive program

Before you apply for the incentive program, you will need a secondary suite building permit. Review the information for a new secondary suite or a pre-2018 suite before you apply for your building permit. Once you have everything you need for your permit, you can apply at **apply.calgary.ca**. Once you have a building permit number, you can apply for the Incentive program.

If you already have a building permit for your secondary suite, you can apply for the Incentive program.

Before you submit your application, make sure:

- You have not previously applied for the incentive program at a different address.
- The subject property is not in tax arrears.
- You are aware that you or your contractor will need to complete the required eLearning course.
- You understand that funding is only guaranteed if you finish within 6 months of approval of your application.

**Find more information about the incentive program in the frequently asked questions section.**

## Application requirements

- ☐ **One applicant**
  The name on the application must match the name listed on the land titles records.
- ☐ **Parcel address**
  The address of the land the secondary suite will be or currently is located on, not the unique secondary suite address.
- ☐ **Secondary Suite building permit**
  A secondary suite building permit is required prior to submitting your application.
- ☐ **Property tax roll number**
  The unique nine-digit number assigned to each property.
- ☐ **Qualifying safety components**
  The safety components that are still required and have not been installed prior to the day of application.

## eLearning course

The City of Calgary uses an education-first approach that streamlines the process, making it easier, safer and more flexible for homeowners to add or legalize secondary suites.

The Secondary Suites eLearning course is recommended to be completed after you've applied for the incentive program.

The online course will help you learn more about the most important safety elements and the criteria you'll need to follow when constructing a safe secondary suite.

To register your completion, make sure to fill out the form at the end of the course.

You can find the eLearning course at **calgary.ca/secondarysuites-incentive**

# 5 Construction Process

**Before starting your construction process, make sure you know the specific secondary suite code requirements to avoid delays and setbacks. Construction can only begin once your building permit and any trade-specific permits like electrical or plumbing have been issued.**

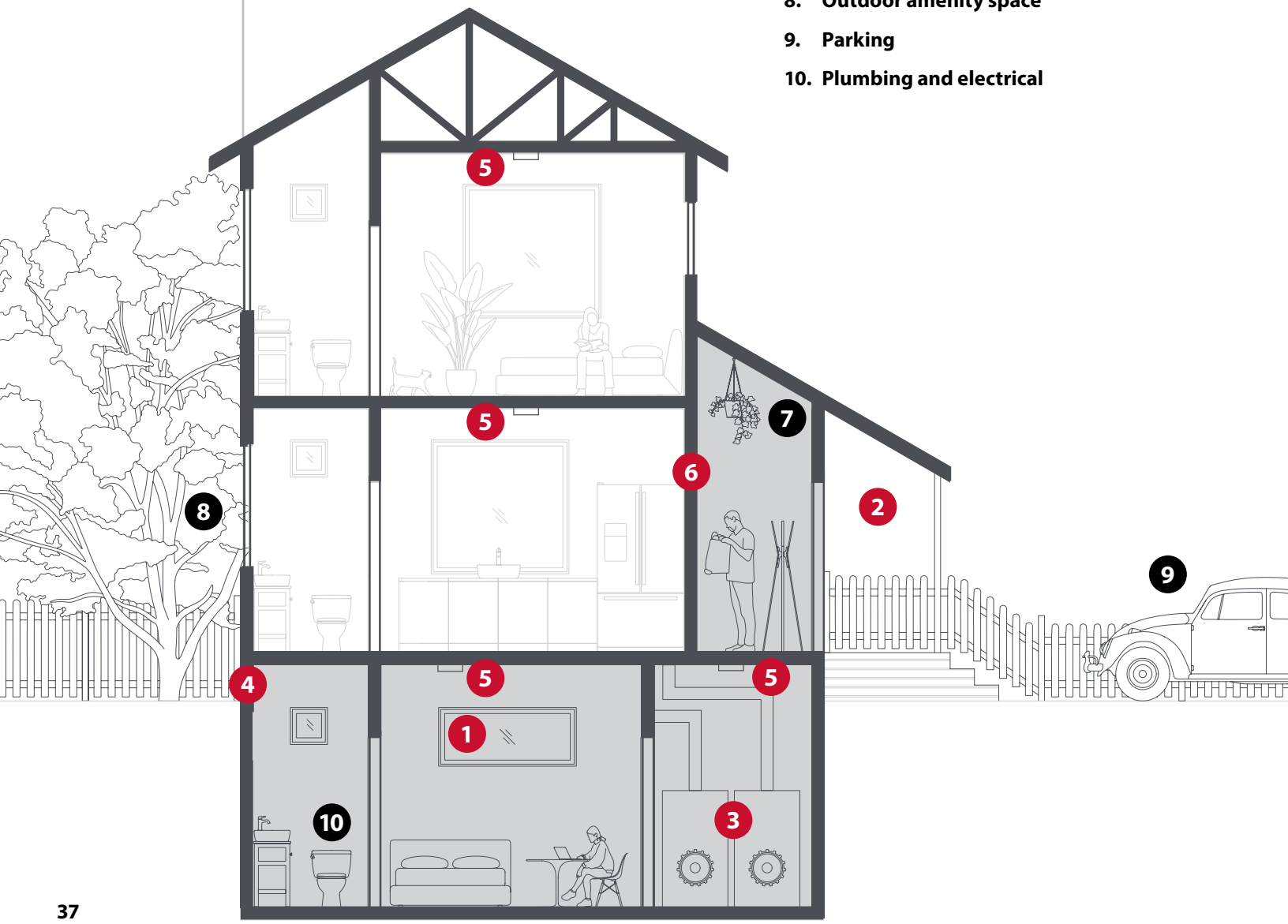
**This section will outline the requirements and their importance when adding or legalizing a secondary suite. You will also find a suggested timeline that will help you understand the order in which your secondary suite should be constructed.**

# Construction elements

There are many elements that are required when constructing a secondary suite. Refer to the graphic below to get an idea of some of the construction elements that your secondary suite will need. Elements highlighted in **red** are key safety components that will be explained later in the guidebook.

- Primary dwelling
- Secondary suite
- Key safety component
- Additional construction element

1. **Bedroom egress windows**
2. **Exterior stairways and protection of suites**
3. **Heat and ventilation separation**
4. **Protection from airborne noise**
5. **Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms**
6. **Smoke-tight barrier**
7. **Ceiling and door heights**
8. **Outdoor amenity space**
9. **Parking**
10. **Plumbing and electrical**



# Construction stages

Below are the typical steps to follow when constructing a brand-new secondary suite. Depending on the status of your secondary suite, not every step listed may be required.

Prior to starting each stage of construction, you will need to ensure that the proper permits have been obtained.

## Foundation and framing

- Pour new concrete or reinforce existing foundation, if necessary.
- Frame walls, floors and any additional structural elements.
- Add sound proofing elements.

## Plumbing

- Install main supply and drain lines, vent pipes and any necessary rough-ins for fixtures like sinks, toilets and showers.
- Book a plumbing inspection once the work is completed.

## Mechanical

- Install ductwork for heating, ventilation and air conditioning.
- Place and connect heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) units ensuring they are properly vented and situated.
- Book a mechanical inspection once the work is completed.

## Gas

- Install gas lines to appliances like water heaters, furnaces, stoves or fireplaces.
- Connect appliances and perform pressure tests.
- Book a gas inspection once the work is completed.

## Electrical

- Run electrical wiring for outlets, switches, lighting and appliances.
- Install electrical boxes, circuit breakers, interconnected fire alarms and ensure proper grounding and bonding.
- Book an electrical inspection once the work is completed.

## Rough-in inspection

- Framing and utilities (plumbing, mechanical, gas and electrical) are complete but have not been drywalled and are still visible.

## Insulation and drywall

- Insulate walls and ceilings for energy efficiency and soundproofing.
- Hang and finish drywall, including taping, mudding and sanding.

## Final inspection

- Book a final inspection once all construction is complete to verify that the secondary suite is approved for occupancy.

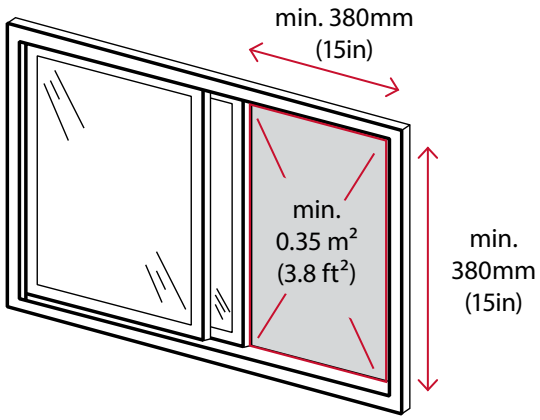
# Bedroom egress windows

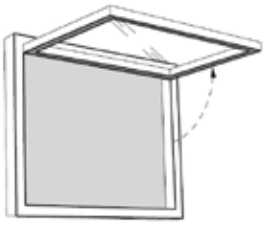
In the event of a fire or other emergency, egress windows in bedrooms provide an escape route. These windows are designed to be large enough for occupants to exit and for emergency responders to enter, ensuring that people can safely evacuate the suite.

Bedroom egress windows that meet building code requirements for safety, also provide natural light and easy ventilation for a more comfortable tenant experience.

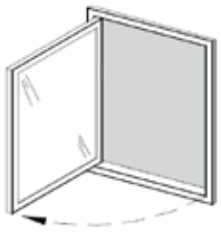
Each bedroom must have at least one window that can be fully opened. For more information, please refer to the Building Advisory A19-005-Egress Window Guidelines.

- Windows must be openable without the use of keys, tools or special knowledge and without the removal of the window frame, glass or hardware.
- Windows must have an unobstructed opening of 0.35 $m^2$ (3.8 $ft^2$) in area and no dimension less than 380 mm (15 in).
- Casement windows must open to a full 90 degrees.
- Awning windows must open at 90 degrees without the need for additional support.

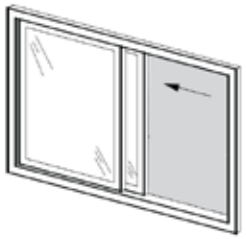


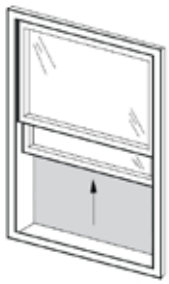
**Awning window**



**Casement window**



**Horizontal sliding window**



**Vertical sliding window**

## Adding or increasing window size

Foundation walls can only have a certain number of openings before the integrity of that wall is compromised. Adding new windows or increasing the size of existing windows in a concrete foundation impacts the wall's ability to resist soil pressure.

The building code restricts opening sizes and configurations by allowing a certain percentage of openings and opening sizes on a single wall.

- For example, a single window may be 1.2 m (4 ft) in width while two windows, spaced less than their average width apart, are considered one large opening.
- When adding multiple windows in one wall, the maximum width of all windows combined cannot be more than 25 per cent of the wall length.

Openings that exceed any of the above requirements must be designed by a professional engineer registered in the province of Alberta. When submitting your building permit application, you will need to provide the engineered stamped drawings with your application.

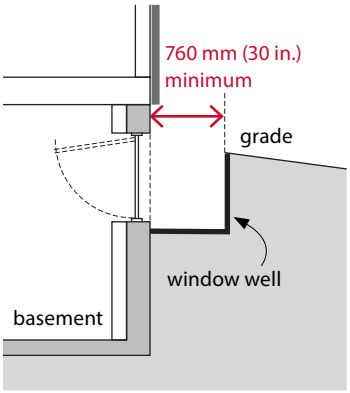
## Window well requirements

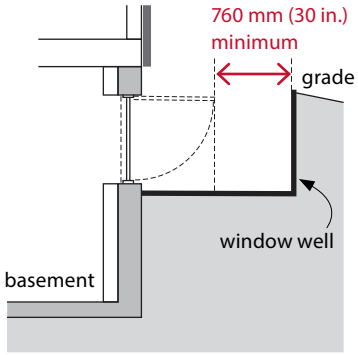
It is important to consider the design of your window wells along with the bedroom egress windows.

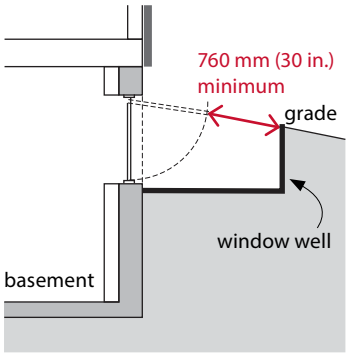
- When installing a new bedroom egress window, the window well must meet current building code and provide a minimum clearance of 760 mm (30 in) in front of the window.
- If any portion of the window is below grade, a window well is required.

## Existing egress window wells

An existing window well must provide a minimum clearance of 550 mm (21.5 in) in front of the window.



# Exterior stairways and protected exiting

When a fire happens, windows will often break, allowing heat and fire to block an exit path. Protected exiting ensures tenants have a safe route out of the secondary suite in the event of a fire. The exterior exit path for a secondary suite must be free and clear of obstacles. It must also be protected from potential hazards, like fire, from the main dwelling unit.

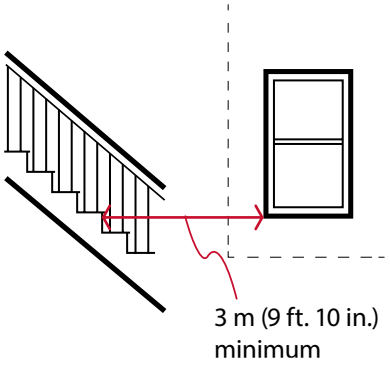
There are additional requirements to consider when the only exit for a secondary suite has an exterior staircase and a window or opening located directly above the stairway:

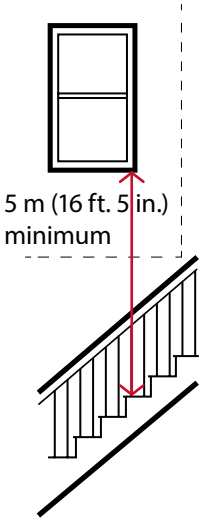
**Option A – Covered entry:** The stairs must be fully enclosed with a roof and walls. The top of the stairs will require a landing within the enclosure, along with a door to the exterior. The wall must be flush with the roof to eliminate any soffit overhang that is not permitted within 0.45m from the property line.

**Option B – Uncovered entry:** Replace the primary dwelling windows with glass block or wired glass in a fixed steel frame or install a fire shutter. This option may not be available if it is a bedroom egress window and is required to open.

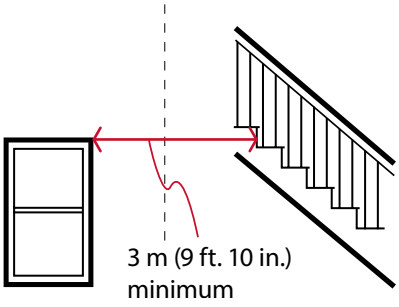
Primary dwelling windows must be replaced if they are less than the required distance from the egress path. See graphic below for more details:

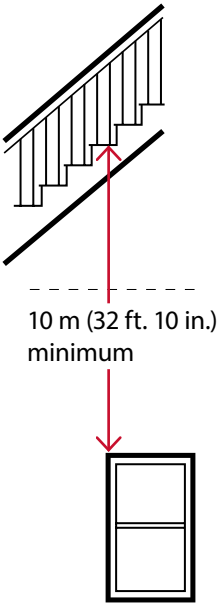
**Unprotected opening above exit stairs**




**Unprotected opening below exit stairs**

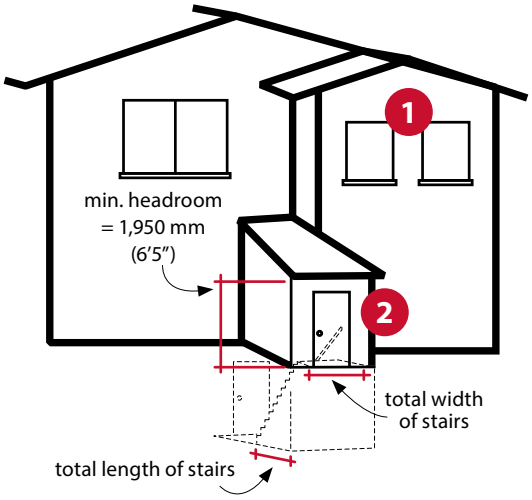


## Option A – Covered entry

The stairs must be fully enclosed with a roof and walls. The top of the stairs will require a landing within the enclosure, along with a door to the exterior. The wall must be flush with the roof to eliminate any soffit overhang that is not permitted within 0.45m from the property line.

This option must maintain a minimum head height of 2,050 mm (80 ¾ in) above the stairs.

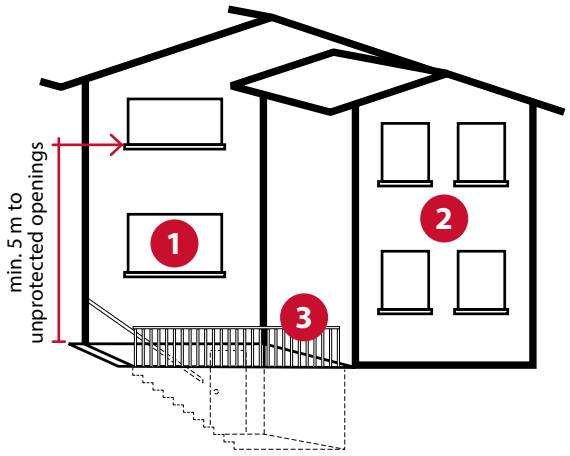



1. These windows are not exposed to the stairwell and do not require protection.
2. Guardrail as required.

## Option B – Uncovered entry

Glass block or wired glass is installed in fixed steel frames on the windows of the primary residence.

- Windows that are less than 3 m horizontally and less than 10 m below or less than 5 m above the exit stairs need to be protected using either Option A or Option B.
- Windows on the same side of the home as the staircase but are not within the above measures, do not need to be protected.
- Only fixed, non-operable windows can be protected in this way.
- Bedroom windows must be operable.




1. Wire glass or glass block required.
2. These windows are not exposed to the stairwell and do not require protection.
3. Guardrail as required.

**Note:** all windows within 5 m vertically or 3 m horizontally of an exit must be protected.

**If your suite entrance is at ground level or a maximum of 0.6 m below or above ground (typically 3 steps up or down) then a protected exit is not required.**

# Heating and ventilation separation

As part of the smoke separation component of building safety codes, secondary suites require their own separate heating and ventilation systems. They cannot be connected in any way to the rest of the house. To meet this requirement, there are two installation options, 1) a regular house furnace or 2) an HRV and an alternative heating system.

## Existing heating and ventilation

The use of a single heating and ventilation system to serve both the main dwelling and the secondary suite can be acceptable if it qualifies as a pre-2018 suite.

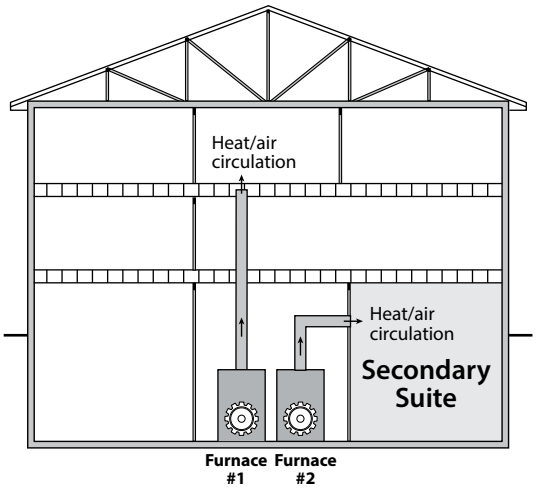
### Option 1 – Regular house furnace

If you plan to add a separate, regular house furnace, you will need to install independent ducting supplying both heat and ventilation to all rooms of the secondary suite.

### Option 2 – HRV and alternative heating system

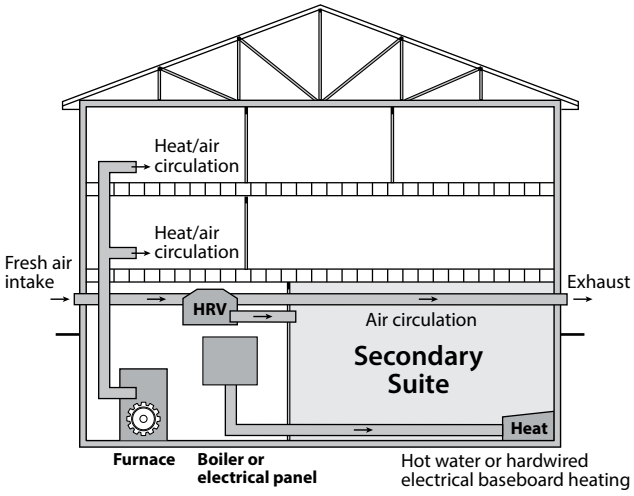
If you choose to install a system that supplies air ventilation, such as a separate heat recovery ventilator (HRV), you will also need to install a separate heat source like baseboard electric heating or boiler-supplied heating (this can either be in-floor or baseboard).

A mechanical permit is required to install a heat recovery ventilator (HRV), and an electrical permit is required to install an electrical heating system.




**Option 1 – Regular house furnace**

A regular house furnace has two main functions: it supplies the house with heat and circulates fresh air throughout the home.




**Option 2 – Heat recovery ventilator (HRV)**

In newer homes, a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) is added to do a better job of mixing outside fresh air with the inside air before returning it to the furnace.

## Adding a heat recovery ventilator (HVR)

If you're planning on adding an HRV unit, ensure that the door to the unit can open fully so that the appliance can be easily accessed for regular cleaning and maintenance. The ceiling drywall needs to be finished above the HRV, to allow the four ducts to enter the top of the HRV.

Consider using the top of the HRV as a template for where the duct holes need to be in the ceiling drywall.

## Alternative heating system

An electrical heating system can be incorporated into your secondary suite by installing electric baseboard heaters, boiler-supplied in-floor or baseboard heating. You will need to make sure that your existing electrical panel has enough power to supply one of these options.

An electrician can calculate the electrical load required for the electric heating system and your existing electrical supply. This will help you determine whether you will need to upgrade your electrical panel to accommodate the electrical heating system.

## Temperature control

A temperature control system, or thermostat, that controls the secondary suite heating system is required and must be accessible to the tenants.

## Heating and ventilation considerations when planning a secondary suite

If you are renovating your home to develop a secondary suite that currently has shared ductwork between the main dwelling and the basement, adding a secondary suite to an existing home, not originally designed for a secondary suite, will require some additional considerations and requirements.

- Any existing ducts located in the basement that are attached to the original heating system will need to be removed or closed off.
- Any existing cold air returns feeding back to the main furnace need to be closed off.
- New exhaust and intake ports will need to be installed on the outside of the house. It is critical that these are placed so that the separation distance between any air intake and an exhaust source is minimum 900 mm.

## Intake vents

All intake vents located on the outside of your home must be installed against the building sheathing, behind the finished siding, so water does not enter the openings.

Proper drip edges are required to ensure water does not enter the building from around the edges of these vents.

Most houses with existing venting should provide an example of how the new vents should look when they're installed. Vents must not be fastened to the outside of the siding and coated over with silicone sealant.

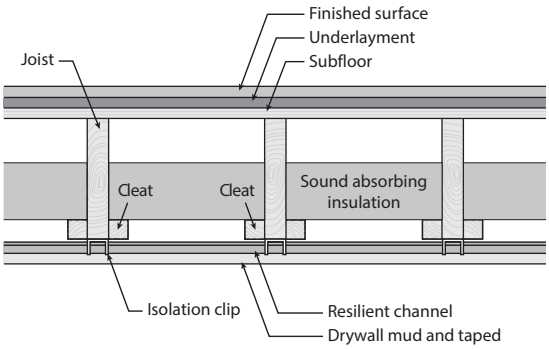
# Protection from airborne noise

Sound protection from airborne noise is a requirement for a secondary suite. Effective soundproofing enhances the tenant's experience by minimizing noise disturbances. This is particularly important in secondary suites where residents may have different schedules or lifestyles. It can also have the same affect for the people living upstairs.

Typically, noise will travel between the floor and ceiling that separates the main dwelling unit from the secondary suite.

To help with sound deadening, the minimum requirements for a secondary suite are:

- 150 mm or 6 in of sound absorbing material like insulation is required between all joist spaces in the ceiling of the secondary suite.
- Resilient channels must be installed perpendicular to the ceiling joists, spaced 400 to 600 mm apart. Resilient channels are thin, flexible metal strips used in construction to improve soundproofing in walls and ceilings. They enhance the acoustical and fire resistance properties of walls and ceilings.
- A minimum of 12.7 mm or ½ in drywall is required on the ceiling and both sides of all interior walls separating the secondary suite from common areas or the other dwelling unit.
- Providing a Sound Transmission Class (STC) rating of not less than 43, (refer to the National Building Code – 2023 Alberta Edition (NBC-AE) or a separating assembly (floor/ ceiling components less than 43) and adjoining constructions, which together provide an ASTC rating of not less than 40.




The image above identifies the assembly elements only and is not an exact representation of sound proofing configurations.

# Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms

Smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms are important safety devices required in every home to alert tenants of potential safety risks. Devices in secondary suites must follow the rules and regulations of the National Building Code (Alberta Edition). It is important to place them in areas at high risk of catching fire or releasing chemical emissions, such as mechanical rooms, as well as in areas where tenants might be most vulnerable, like bedrooms.

An electrical permit is required to add any additional smoke or CO alarms however, a contractor can pull one permit that covers all electrical work. A qualified electrical contractor is required when the work is concealed by drywall.

## Device requirements

For safe secondary suites, smoke and CO alarms are required in different areas of both the primary dwelling and the secondary suite. Devices that are a combination of both smoke and CO alarms are recommended.

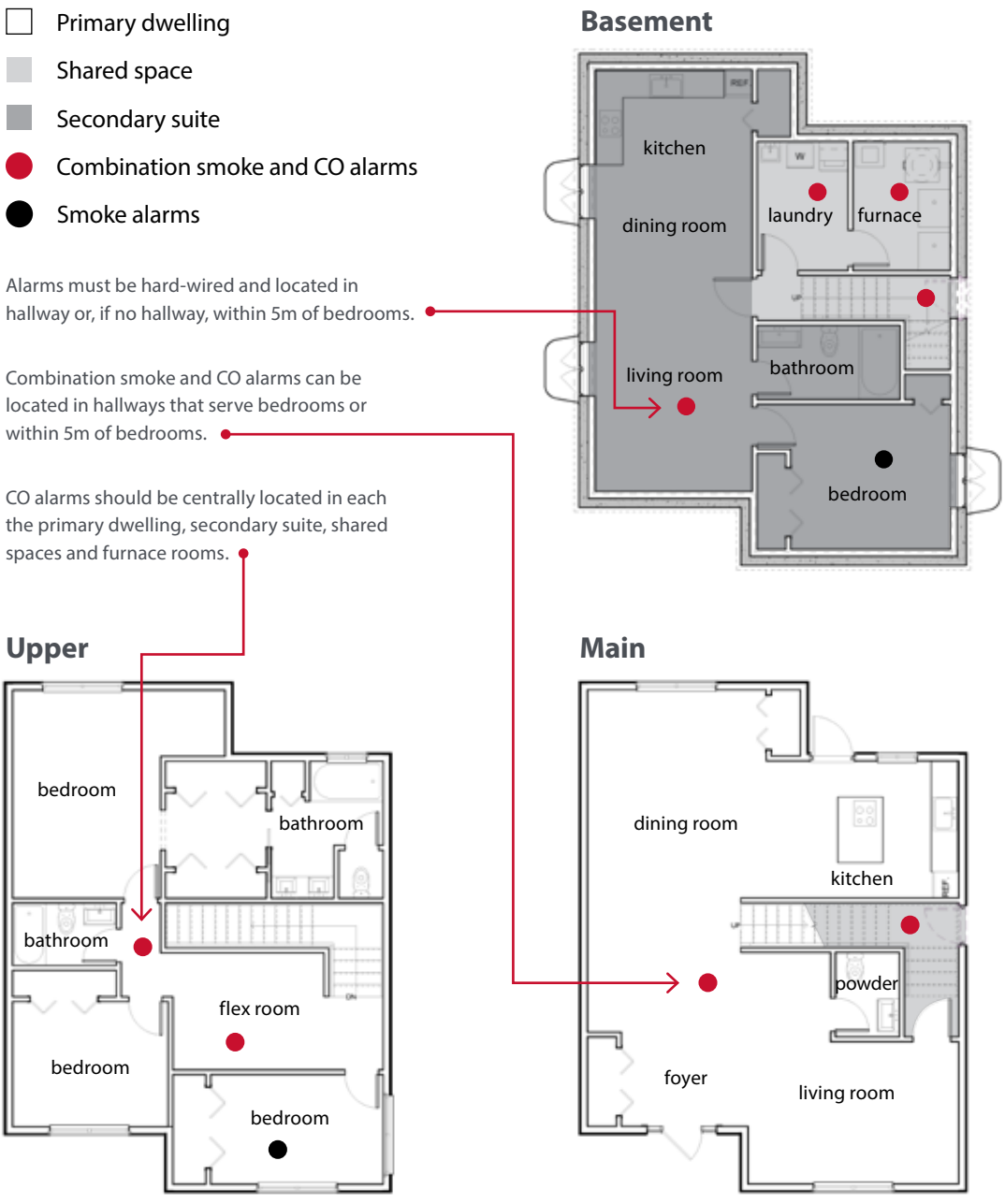
- Smoke alarms must be installed at or near the ceiling of each floor level in both the primary residence and secondary suite.
- CO alarms should be installed at the height specified by the manufacturer and located within 5 m (16 ft) of every bedroom.
- Both smoke and CO device systems must be permanently wired to the electrical panel through a circuit that contains lighting or a mix of lighting and receptacles, if that circuit is protected by an arc fault circuit interrupter and/or a ground fault circuit interrupter, the smoke alarms must contain an integral battery (10-year battery) as a secondary supply source.
- Both smoke and CO device systems must be hardwired and interconnected, so the activation of one smoke alarm will cause all units in the secondary suite and a minimum of one smoke alarm to sound in the main residence.

**Seconds matter**

Average time it takes for someone to get out of a basement during a fire is two to three minutes.

The simplest way to meet the requirements for carbon monoxide alarms is to use combination smoke and carbon monoxide devices everywhere a smoke alarm is required. Combination smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are acceptable when all alarms are:

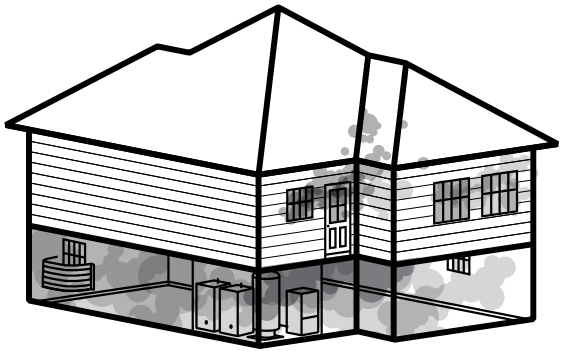
- Installed as per the manufacturer's instructions.
- Smoke alarms may use a wireless interconnection system, provided they conform with CAN/ULC (Underwriters Laboratories of Canada Standard)-S531.
- Carbon monoxide alarms may use a wireless interconnection system, provided they conform with CAN/CSA (Standard)-6.19, "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices".
- Using the same brand is recommended to ensure all alarms are compatible and interconnected.

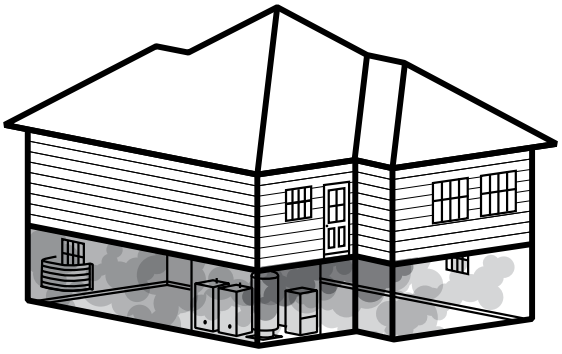


# Smoke-tight barrier

Preventing the spread of smoke and fire is essential for safety. All secondary suites require a continuous smoke-tight barrier, with no separation or breaks of materials. The building code requires the installation of a smoke-tight separation between the main residence and secondary suite, in any common spaces and/or the furnace room.

To maintain the smoke-tight barrier in a furnace room, all walls and ceilings must be covered with a minimum 12.7 mm (½ in) gypsum board (drywall).





Any openings, gaps or spaces in the drywall need to be sealed. Any penetrations through the drywall must be sealed with flexible caulking. All joints in this barrier must be mudded and taped, and all exposed screws must be filled.

If you are adding a smoke-tight barrier to an existing mechanical room, there may be obstructions that make a smoke-tight separation difficult to construct. One option may be to remove all existing HVAC ducts to ease the installation of 12.7 mm (½ in) drywall. Once the separation is constructed, new holes may be cut where required to reinstall the ductwork.

## Where is a smoke-tight barrier required?

A smoke-tight barrier is required on the underside of floor-ceiling assemblies and on both sides of all walls separating the following areas of your home:

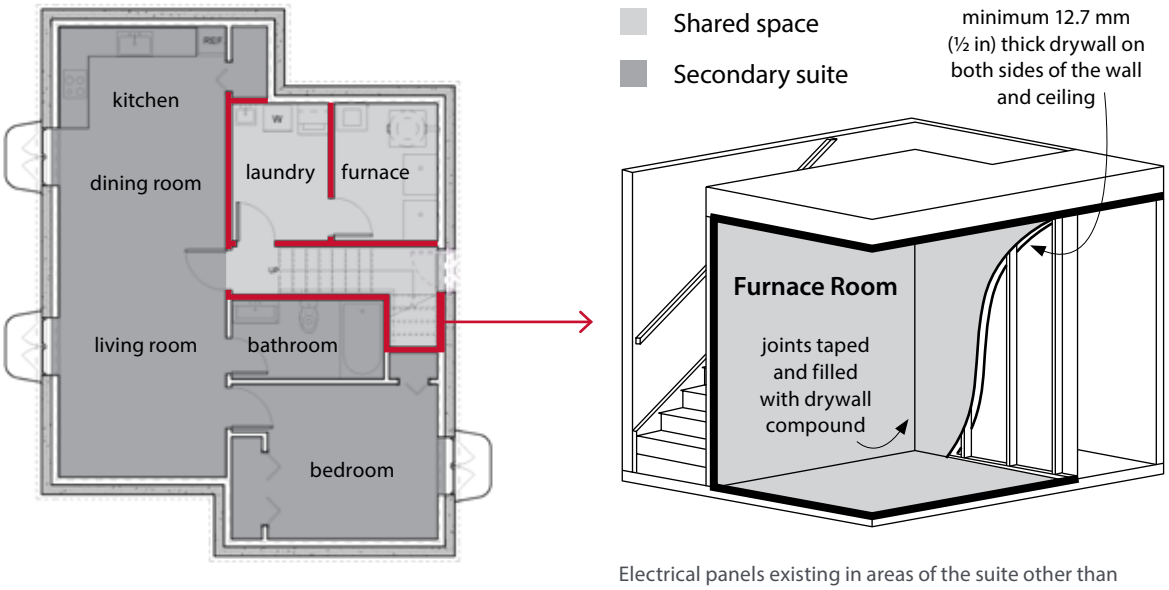
- The main dwelling unit from the secondary suite.
- Common spaces, including shared exits.
- Shared laundry and other areas accessible by both the main dwelling unit and the secondary suite.
- All rooms containing fuel-fired heating or cooling appliances, such as a furnace or utility room. This includes but is not limited to water heaters, furnaces and gas-fired clothing dryers.

## Acceptable materials

Flexible, non-hardening caulking may be used for tighter places where applying mud and tape may prove difficult, like around wiring, pipes, chimneys and vents or ducting.

Mineral wool insulation, can be installed where a smoke-tight barrier is required in a manner that is tight-fitting enough to stop the spread of smoke. Use fire retardant or resistant insulation.

Do not use expandable foam in any of these applications. It is porous and does not prevent the spread of smoke. If used, it must be fully covered with a smoke-tight membrane and should not be within 3 m of a furnace firebox or touch furnace ductwork.

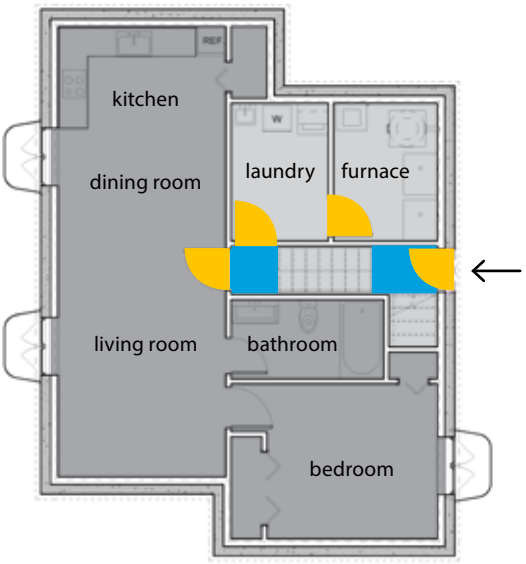



Electrical panels existing in areas of the suite other than the furnace room require the same smoke-tight barrier as a furnace room. Wiring and other open areas around the panel must be sealed off from other areas of the house.

## Furnace room

When planning work to seal off the furnace room ceiling and walls, be sure to maintain the proper clearance around hot pipes such as the furnace exhaust and hot water tank exhaust pipes. These exhaust pipes require a tightly fitted sheet metal fire stop and are required to be at a minimum distance from drywall.

- A double wall (B-Vent) requires a minimum 25 mm (1 in) clearance from ½ in drywall.
- A single wall vent and wall vent connector require a minimum 150 mm (6 in) clearance from any combustible material including ½ in drywall.




Shared space

Secondary suite

Solid core doors

Stair landing

**Note:** a solid core door is already required at the top of the stairs.

## Door requirements

Interior doors that service any of the following spaces must be solid-core doors that are a minimum of 45 mm thick with self-closing devices:

- Separation between the main dwelling unit and the secondary suite.
- Common spaces, including shared exits.
- Shared laundry and other areas accessible by both the main dwelling unit and secondary suite.
- Furnace or utility rooms.

In addition to self-closing devices, secondary suite interior doors that separate access to either the main dwelling unit or the secondary suite require a deadbolt to be installed. A keyed doorknob is not sufficient.

If a secondary suite uses a shared exit with the main dwelling unit, and that exit is accessed through a stairwell, then a door is required at both the top and bottom of the exit stairs.

A landing is required at the bottom of the stairs to ensure the door at the bottom of the stairs can fully open. For example, if the stairs are 760 mm wide, then the door needs to be at least 760 mm away from the bottom riser. A door can only be located directly at the top of the stairs if the door opens away from the stairwell. Doors are not allowed to open over stairs.

## Exposed steel posts

Structural steel posts are not part of the smoke-tight barrier. However, if they are left exposed and not concealed inside of a finished wall, they must be covered in a minimum 12.7 mm gypsum board (drywall) and sealed with mud and tape.

This is to ensure that in the event of a fire, the posts are protected from continual exposure to heat, providing more time for occupants to exit before the structural integrity of the posts and home are compromised.

# 6 Inspections

**Inspections are a crucial part of adding, legalizing or registering your secondary suite. It ensures that the suite meets all safety standards to protect the occupants from potential hazards. Secondary suites must adhere to local building codes and regulations, and inspections verify that the secondary suite complies with rules and requirements.**

# What inspections do I need?

You will need to schedule several inspections to complete your secondary suite. There are two inspections required for your secondary suite building permit, a framing or rough-in inspection and a final inspection. Inspections are also required for any trade permits.

## Framing inspection

A framing inspection is a check to ensure that the structure of a building, like its walls and roof, is built correctly and meets safety standards.

## Rough-in inspection

A rough-in inspection is a formal check of important systems that takes place after installation but before they have been enclosed by walls and ceilings.

## Final inspection

A final inspection is a thorough check to ensure the secondary suite meets all building codes, safety standards and zoning regulations. Once approved, it confirms the secondary suite is legally compliant and safe for occupancy.

See next page for what should be completed before booking an inspection.

**Pre-2018 suites**

For pre-2018 suites, your suite will still require a framing inspection even if the framing is covered with drywall.

| Permit Type | Rough-in | Final |
|---|---|---|
| **Electrical** | • Have all wiring and interior of outlet boxes readily visible.<br>• Remove vapour barrier and insulation where it's covering any wiring. The exception is for wiring fished into walls.<br>• All wiring must be supported.<br>• Remove outer sheath of wiring and terminate all wiring into outlet boxes and fixtures.<br>• Ensure all splices are made and all grounding is complete in outlet boxes and fixtures.<br>• Do not secure devices (plugs, switches) to outlet boxes. Leave all wiring and terminations visible.<br>• Cables may be terminated into the panel board, but wires should not be on breakers.<br>• Rough and underground inspections should be combined.<br>• Expose the trench on at least one end to confirm depth.<br>• Access must be provided to all areas where electrical work has been completed.<br>• Refer to the secondary suite electrical load calculation sheet (in the online resources section) to ensure your electrical service is adequate. When complete, email the form to **electrical.inspections@calgary.ca**. If an increase is required, ask your contractor to contact ENMAX. | • Do not have any exposed live wiring.<br>• Install all devices, receptacles and light fixtures.<br>• Any open outlet boxes or unfinished wiring must be properly secured and installed in a junction box with an approved splice cap and a junction box cover.<br>• Install, terminate and energize all breakers, if safe to do so.<br>• Complete the panel board breaker directory, all breakers must be labeled correctly.<br>• Access must be provided to all areas where electrical work has been completed. $50 per rough opening ($250 max.) |
| **Gas** | • Install and complete any gas system installations. | • The construction should be completed, and the suite should be ready for occupancy. |
| **Mechanical** | • Install and complete any heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) changes. | • The construction should be completed, and the suite should be ready for occupancy. |
| **Plumbing** | • Install and complete all plumbing drainage and venting.<br>• Install and connect water lines to the rest of the water distribution system.<br>• Properly support all drains, vents, and water lines.<br>• Install the bathtub/shower valve. | • Install and ensure all fixtures and equipment are ready for use.<br>• Ensure the bathtub and shower water temperature does not exceed 49°C.<br>• Seal all piping designed for future fixtures with an approved plug or cap.<br>• Provide a shut off valve for all toilets. |
| **Building** | • Install and complete any structural changes.<br>• Install and complete all the wall and ceiling framing.<br>• Install proposed windows and exterior doors.<br>• Rough wiring locations for smoke and CO alarms are in place, and an electrical permit is on file. | • The construction should be completed, and the suite should be ready for occupancy.<br>• All trade inspections should be completed. |

# Inspecting a secondary suite when the work is already complete

If you recently moved into a home with an existing, but not yet legal secondary suite, it is important to get the necessary permits to inspect what's been done.

A contractor will have to obtain all trade permits and check that the completed work complies with the relevant safety code requirements.

**Inspector may ask for drywall to be removed to complete their inspection.**

# What inspectors are looking for

A City inspector will confirm that your secondary suite meets safety, health and legal standards to ensure a secure and livable environment for residents.

Here is a list that Safety Code Officers will be checking when they inspect a secondary suite:

- ☐ **All current code requirements**
- ☐ **Egress windows**
- ☐ **Protected exiting**
- ☐ **Separate entrances**
- ☐ **Window wells**
- ☐ **Fire and smoke separation**
- ☐ **Mechanical room separation**
- ☐ **Sound rating (when required)**
- ☐ **Ceiling height**
- ☐ **Heating and ventilation systems (when required)**
- ☐ **Interconnected smoke and carbon monoxide alarm locations**
- ☐ **Mechanical work (when required)**
- ☐ **Electrical work (when required)**
- ☐ **Plumbing work (when required)**
- ☐ **Solid core doors**

# Identifying a City inspector

Throughout the process of building, renovating or registering your secondary suite, you will require one or more inspection to verify that the work meets Alberta's safety code requirements.

In most cases, you or your contractor will be responsible for booking an inspection but occasionally a City Inspector may conduct an unscheduled visit. When a Safety Code Officer (SCO) or City inspector arrives at your home, there are several ways to identify them.

Inspectors will often be driving a City of Calgary branded vehicle when performing inspections.

## Avoid an inspection scam

If a person comes to your home and wants to inspect it without an appointment, it may not be legitimate. It is important to be cautious of individuals who claim to represent various government organizations without relevant credentials.

### Be cautious of people requesting to inspect

It is essential to be cautious of individuals who claim to represent various government groups and request you to inspect components of your home such as your furnace or water heater to check if it is safe and energy efficient. These individuals will often wear orange vest, carry picture ID and clipboards of documents.

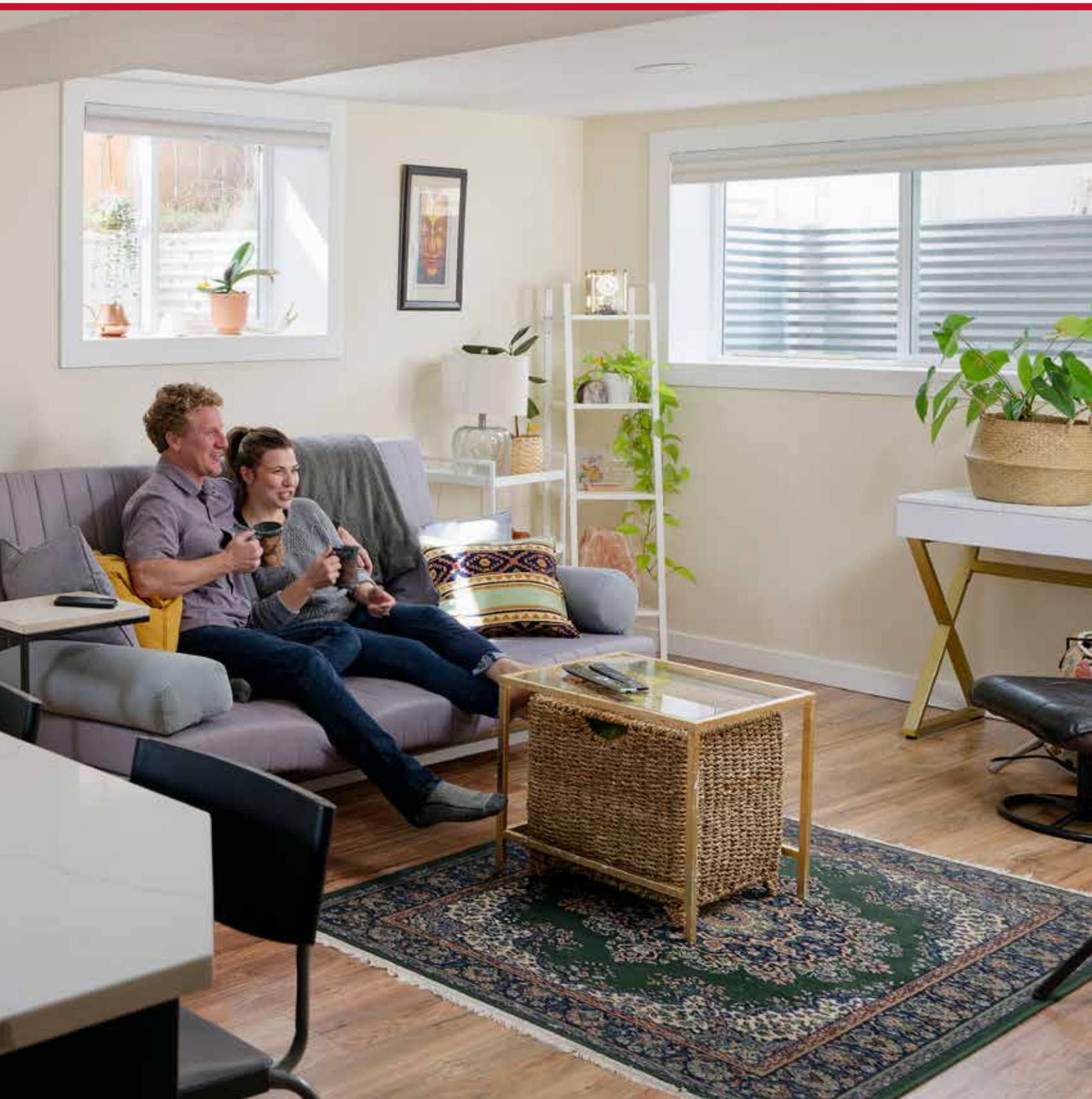
You can verify the identification and credibility of an SCO or City Inspector by:

- **Checking contact information:** Before or during the inspection, you can contact 311 to confirm the inspector's identity.
- **Inspecting the vehicle:** Legitimate City officials will often drive vehicles marked with The City's logo or department name.
- **Contacting the police:** If you suspect the officer is not legitimate or is behaving suspiciously, you can contact the local police and report the incident.

If you are unable to verify the identity of the person looking to inspect your home, do not let them in.

1. **City of Calgary photo ID badge**
2. **City branded hard hat**
3. **City branded safety vest**
4. **City of Calgary vehicle**

# 7 Secondary Suite Registry

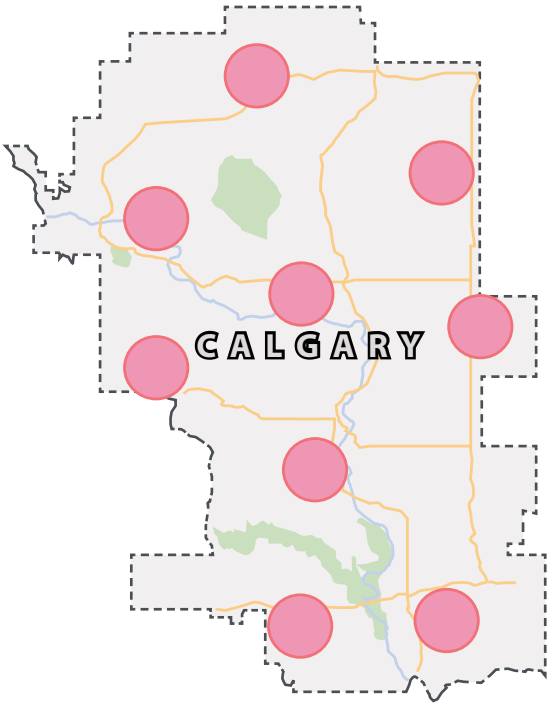


**The Secondary Suite Registry is an online, searchable tool to identify safe and legal secondary suites in Calgary. As of March 2018, it is mandatory for secondary suites to be registered to it.**

The Registry aims to build awareness among Calgarians about the importance of public safety and validates that a secondary suite meets the requirements of the Registry Bylaw, Land Use Bylaw and Alberta's safety code.

It also serves as a resource to confirm that a secondary suite has been permitted, inspected and registered with The City of Calgary before signing a rental agreement.

View the Secondary Suite Registry map at **secondarysuites.calgary.ca**

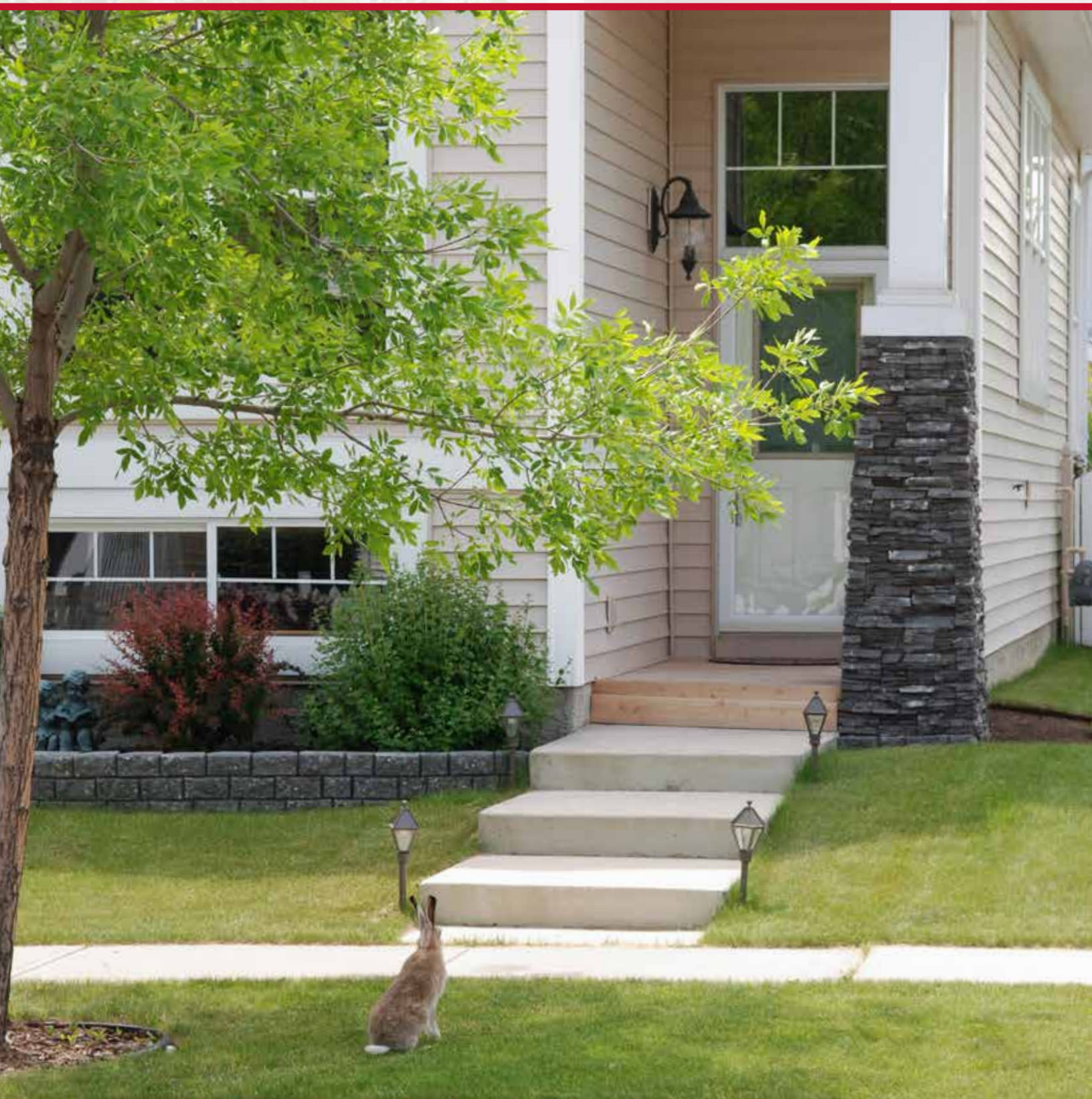



# Registration process

- Secondary suites are automatically added to the Registry once it has passed its final inspection.
- Two to three weeks after the final inspection, you will receive a secondary suite sticker. This sticker informs current and future residents that the secondary suite is part of The City's Registry program.
- We recommend placing the stickers at the main entrance of the secondary suite.
- Currently there is no cost for the Registry as the fees have been waived through the Secondary Suites Amnesty Program until December 31, 2026.

**As of August 2025, there are more than 20,000 suites registered.**

# 8 Additional Resources



**There are a few things to consider once you've finished your secondary suite. Will you be renting the secondary suite out or is it for personal uses? Use this section to figure out if renting your secondary suite is for you. This section will also provide useful information on fire safety regulations that are important for landlords and homeowners to know.**

# Renting a secondary suite

Once you have finished building your suite and verified that it has been added to the Secondary Suite Registry, you have the option to rent your secondary suite.

Tenancy is overseen by The Government of Alberta. These are some resources that can help you decide if renting your suite is best for you:

alberta.ca/information-for-landlords-and-tenants

alberta.ca/starting-a-tenancy

alberta.ca/forms-and-documents

alberta.ca/ending-a-tenancy

alberta.ca/affordable-housing-programs

## Roles and responsibilities

According to the Government of Alberta, your responsibility as a landlord or tenant include the following:

### Tenant responsibilities

Tenants must:

- pay rent on time
- be considerate of the landlord and other tenants
- not endanger other tenants
- not perform illegal acts
- not conduct illegal business on the rental premises
- keep the rental premises reasonably clean
- prevent damage to the rental premises
- move out when the rental agreement ends
- follow the rules in the residential tenancy agreement that do not conflict with the RTA

### Landlord responsibilities

Landlords must:

- make the rental premises available on the date the residential tenancy agreement takes effect
- give the tenant a written "notice of landlord" within 7 days of the tenant moving in or post the notice in a visible place in the building's common area
- not disturb the tenant's peaceful enjoyment of the rental premises (for example, not to bother the tenant beyond what is necessary to do the landlord's business)
- ensure the rental premises are habitable at the beginning and throughout the tenancy (for example, there are no bed bugs and the heat is working)
  - » habitable means the rental premises meet the Minimum Housing and Health Standards under the Public Health Act and Housing Regulation

# Frequently asked questions

Below are some answers to some frequently asked questions regarding secondary suites. If you have any further questions, please visit [calgary.ca/secondarysuites](calgary.ca/secondarysuites) or contact the Planning Services Centre.

## Secondary suite density

**Will my property tax increase with the development of a secondary suite or backyard suite?**

Property tax is calculated and billed annually using the property's assessed value, as found on your property assessment notice, and the Council-approved property tax rate. Home improvement projects (i.e. basement developments) or adding livable space to your home could increase your property taxes. If you have questions about property tax, contact 311.

**What are the parking requirements for secondary suites?**

Under the current Land Use Bylaw, secondary suites require a minimum of one motor vehicle parking stall. This requirement is reduced in some land use districts where certain conditions are met such as a limited floor area, proximity to transit, provision of bicycle parking or where the main dwelling has two or more parking stalls. A relaxation in parking minimums may be considered based on proximity to city centre, amenities and public transit. For more information, please refer to the policy to guide discretion for secondary suites and backyard suites.

**Are suites considered in the Municipal Development Plan (MDP)'s density calculation?**

Yes, indirectly. The MDP has intensity targets for select areas of the city, including activity centres, main streets, transit station areas and new communities. These targets are measured as people and jobs per hectare, which would include people living in secondary suites in the calculation. These targets are not requirements, but rather aspirations.

**Why are secondary suites not counted towards density?**

Density is calculated by the number of primary dwellings on a parcel of land and does not include backyard or secondary suites. These secondary suites do not increase the number of primary dwelling units on a property as they are created either within the existing home or as part of the backyard.

## Secondary suite addresses

The City of Calgary requires a separate address for secondary suites in addition to the main dwelling. The identifier for the secondary suite may be alphabetical or numeric. Secondary suite numbers are shown at the start of the address for the following purposes:

**Emergency response and wayfinding**

If an emergency event occurs in the secondary suite, every second counts and a precise location will assist emergency responders to locate the secondary suite.

**Current and future utility hookups**

The utility company will require the exact secondary suite address where the utilities will be hooked up and for the utility bill to be sent.

**Applications for future business licences**

In order for a resident to secure a City business licence, the exact secondary suite address to where the business will be operating is required.

**Canada Post and other mail delivery services**

Although not a City of Calgary requirement, having a separate address for the secondary suite will assist in the delivery of mail to the correct dwelling unit.

## Secondary suite services

**Does my secondary suite get its own blue, black and green carts?**

Any residential dwelling which currently receives City residential blue, black and green cart service and has a secondary suite can add additional carts to ensure there is adequate capacity to sort your household waste properly. If you require an additional cart, contact 311.

## Secondary Suite Incentive Program

**Can my contractor apply for the incentive for me?**

No, the incentive application must be filled out by the homeowner. The funds will be issued to the name given on the application form.

**Can I start my project before I apply to the program?**

Permits should be issued prior to starting construction. The Incentive Program is focused on providing funds to help complete the key safety elements required. The qualifying amount may be lower than expected if the elements are completed before applying and confirming the missing elements. Funds may be available to in-progress projects if the required safety elements haven't been completed.

**Can I do the work on my secondary suite myself?**

Yes. Homeowners can apply for their own building permit. You can also apply for homeowner electrical and plumbing permits, with restrictions. While hiring a professional can be beneficial, hiring a professional for your secondary suite project is not required.

**How long will it take my application for the incentive to be approved?**

If approved, applicants should receive their acceptance within 5-7 business days of submission. This could be delayed by an incomplete application or incorrect information and may vary depending on volumes.

**How long will it take to get the permits needed for my secondary suite project?**

Permit timelines may vary depending on your project. On average, processing can take two to three weeks.

**I want to build a backyard suite, will it qualify for funding?**

No, at this time backyard suites are not included in the scope of this incentive.

**Will secondary suites with older permits be eligible?**

Yes, any homeowner with a building permit for a secondary suite is eligible for the program regardless of when the permit was obtained. The amount a homeowner will receive will directly depend on missing safety elements at time of review of the incentive application.

**What if I have already started work on my secondary suite?**

The missing safety elements will be verified by the program team before an applicant receives conditional approval for the incentive funding. An applicant can only receive approval for funds for safety elements that have not been upgraded at the time of this verification.

**Do I need to submit proof of costs for construction?**

Yes, to receive your pre-approved amount, you will need to submit receipts or paid invoices for costs directly related to the construction of your secondary suite. Only receipts and payments dated after your date of application to the incentive will qualify for the total amount spent. You will only be reimbursed for the amount supported by the receipts submitted, up to the pre-approved amount.

Example: John applied for the incentive on June 5 and the program team verified he needed: an egress window ($1,500), hardwired and interconnected smoke and carbon monoxide alarms ($1,000) and a smoke-tight barrier ($4,000). John's pre-approval amount is $6,500. To receive his full incentive amount, John must submit receipts or paid invoices for at least $6,500, all of which must be dated June 5 or after.

# Online resources

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| **General** | |
| **Planning and Development Services** | calgary.ca/development/contacts.html |
| **311 online services** | calgary.ca/311.html |
| **Home is Here: The City of Calgary's Housing Strategy** | calgary.ca/communities/housing-in-calgary/housing-strategy.html |
| **Secondary suites** | |
| **Secondary suites** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/secondary-suites.html |
| **Adding a secondary suite** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/new-secondary-suite.html |
| **Legalize an existing secondary suite** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/existing-secondary-suite.html |
| **Secondary Suite Incentive Program** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/secondary-suite-incentive-program.html |
| **Incentive Program eLearning Course** | calgary.ca/content/html/elearning/secondary-suites-safety-components/scormcontent/index.html#/ |
| **Secondary Suite Registry Bylaw** | calgary.ca/bylaws/city-bylaw-library.html#:~:text=October%2017%2C%202023-,Suite%20Registry,-11M2018 |
| **Secondary Suite Registry** | secondarysuites.calgary.ca/ |
| **Subscribe to the secondary suites email list** | calgary.us5.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=717a7bc01b3dda74bd2c04b44&id=063dc21bc8%20 |
| **Planning information** | |
| **Land use districts and zones** | calgary.ca/planning/land-use/districts.html |
| **Land Use Bylaw** | calgary.ca/planning/land-use.html?redirect=/landusebylaw |
| **Airport Vicinity Protection Area** | calgary.ca/planning/land-use/airport-vicinity-protection-area.html |
| **Public tree statement** | Go to the **Development Permit** section on the **Building and Development lists and forms** (CARLs) page at **calgary.ca**. Expand the **General development forms** tab, then click on **Public tree disclosure statement**. |
| **Flood Maps** | calgary.ca/planning/land-use/floodways.html |
| **Asbestos abatement form** | Go to the **Information to consider when demolishing or removing a building** section on the **Demolish a building** page on **calgary.ca**. Expand the **Asbestos removal requirements** tab, then click on **Asbestos abatement form**. |
| **Abandoned well declaration** | Go to the **Development Permit** section on the **Building and Development lists and forms** (CARLs) page at **calgary.ca**. Expand the **General development forms** tab, then click on **Abandoned well declaration form**. |

## Permit application process

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| **Create a myID account** | calgary.ca/myID |
| **Permit status – Job Access Code (JAC)** | vista.calgary.ca/ |
| **Secondary suite permit checklist** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/new-secondary-suite.html#:~:text=Before%20you%20apply-,Permit%20checklist,-Do%20you%20need |
| **Pre-2018 suite permit checklist** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/existing-secondary-suite.html#:~:text=Before%20you%20apply-,Permit%20checklist,-Do%20you%20need |
| **Existing secondary suite information sheet** | Go to the **Building permit** section on the **Building and Development lists and forms** (CARLs) page at **calgary.ca**. Expand the **General building forms**, then click on **Existing secondary suite information sheet** |
| **Development permits** | calgary.ca/development/permits/process.html |
| **Completed building permit advisory** | Scroll down to **What is a complete application?** on the City's **Legalize an existing secondary suite** page, then click on **Building advisory A19-002 building permit complete application**. |
| **Owner declaration** | Go to the **Building permit** section on the **Building and Development lists and forms** (CARLs) page at **calgary.ca**. Expand the **General building forms** tab, then click on **Secondary suite declaration**. |
| **Permit fee schedules** | calgary.ca/development/permits/building-fee-schedules.html |
| **Permit fee estimate** | dbaservices.calgary.ca/feeestimator/ |
| **Help drawing your plans** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/drawing-standards.html |
| **Sample drawings** | Go to the **Adding a secondary suite** page at **calgary.ca**. Scroll down to **How to prepare your application**, expand the **Building permit application requirements** tab, then click on **Sample drawings**. |
| **Sample site plan** | Go to the **Adding a secondary suite** page at **calgary.ca**. Scroll down to **How to prepare your application**, expand the **Building permit application requirements** tab, then click on **Site plan**. |
| **Sample floor plans** | Go to the **Adding a secondary suite** page at **calgary.ca**. Scroll down to **How to prepare your application**, expand the **Building permit application requirements** tab, then click on **Floor plans**. |
| **Sample elevations** | Go to the **Adding a secondary suite** page at **calgary.ca**. Scroll down to **How to prepare your application**, expand the **Building permit application requirements** tab, then click on **Elevations**. |
| **Trade permits** | calgary.ca/development/permits/trade-contractors-applications.html |
| **Secondary suite electrical load calculation sheet** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/trades-permits.html |
| **Trade permit contractor information** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/contracting-tips.html |
| **Homeowners permits eligibility** | calgary.ca/development/home-building/trades-permits.html |

# Glossary

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| **Airborne noise** | Sound that travels through the air. |
| **Airport Vicinity Protection Area (AVPA)** | Provincial rules that control the type of development that can occur in areas near aircraft flight paths. The regulation prohibits noise sensitive uses in certain areas. |
| **Backyard suite** | A self-contained residence physically separated from the home and located in the property's yard. They can be attached to an independent structure within the yard. |
| **Building address** | An address that identifies a unique entryway, unit, suite or building on a parcel of land. |
| **Building permit** | A permit issued by The City to erect a new building or structure or to demolish, relocate, repair, alter or make additions to an existing building or structure. |
| **Development permit** | A document authorizing a development, issued by a Development Authority pursuant to the Land Use Bylaw governing land use within the City, and includes the plans and conditions of approval. |
| **Discretionary use** | Considered to be generally appropriate for the land use district but are evaluated on merits and may not be allowed if the use is considered by the Development Authority to be inappropriate in a particular location. |
| **Dwelling unit** | The primary home for the property. Dwelling units come in many forms like an apartment, single-detached house, semi-detached house or rowhouse. |
| **Egress window** | An unobstructed window that is large enough for a person to open and safely escape through in case of an emergency, without tools or special knowledge. |
| **Elevations** | The front, sides and rear of a building. Drawings of this are required for some permit applications. |
| **Floodway and flood fringe** | The river channel and adjoining lands that would provide a pathway for floodwaters (floodway), and abutting lands that would be inundated (flood fringe), in the event of a one in one hundred years flood. These are defined in the Land Use Bylaw on the Floodway/Flood Fringe Maps. See Division 3 of the Land Use Bylaw for special rules regarding development in these areas. |

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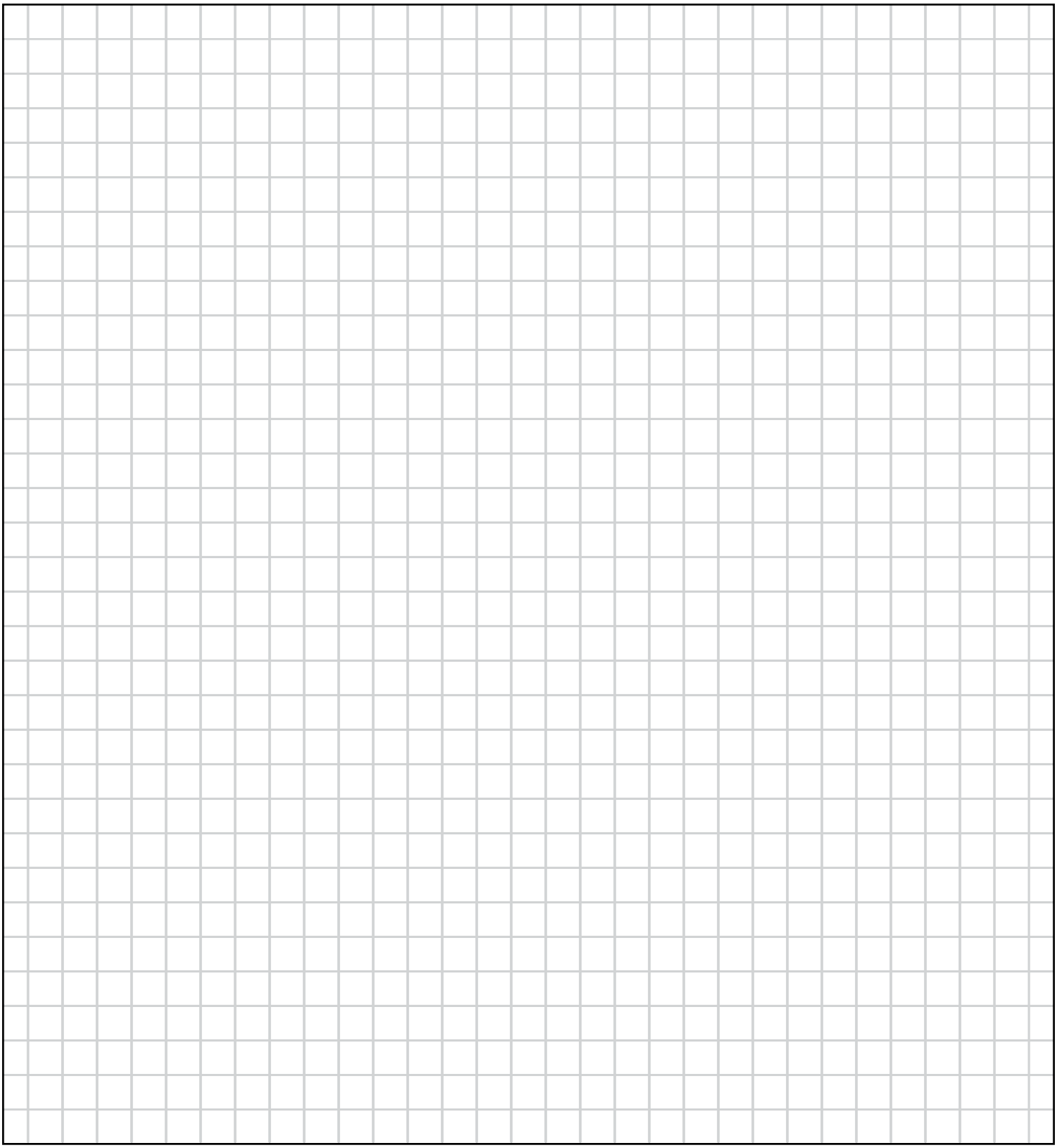
| **Land Use Bylaw** | The bylaw that establishes procedures to process and decide upon land use and development applications, divides the city into land use districts, and sets out rules that affect how each piece of land in the city may be used and developed. |
| **Land Use District** | An area of the city designated for particular uses contained in the Land Use Bylaw. |
| **Low Density Residential Districts** | A land use district that is intended for attached or stacked dwelling units within a shared building or cluster of buildings. These housing types include single-detached housing, duplexes, row houses and townhouses. |
| **National Building Code** | Alberta Edition – Minimum regulations and standards for public health, fire, safety and structural sufficiency. |
| **Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF)** | Lines shown on the AVPA map that indicate levels of aircraft noise in various areas. Generally, residential development is not permitted where 30 NEF is exceeded. |
| **Parcel of land** | A piece of land enclosed by property lines. |
| **Pre-2018 secondary suite** | A self-contained residence with two or more rooms that includes a kitchen, living, sleeping and sanitary facility. The suite has been in place since before March 12, 2018, with no structural changes made since that time and has been verified by a City Safety Code Officer. |
| **Relaxation** | The term used when a change of one of the rules of the Land Use Bylaw is applied in an individual application. |
| **Secondary suites** | A self-contained residence with two or more rooms that includes a kitchen, living, sleeping and sanitary facility. |
| **Site plan** | "Bird's-eye" drawing of the land and all existing or proposed structures on which an application is being made. |

# Notes