



## **TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT SECONDARY SUITES**

Secondary suites can be controversial, but there are a number of reasons to investigate policy change.

A secondary suite is a self-contained, accessory dwelling unit that has its own kitchen, sleeping, and bathing facilities.

New secondary suites are not permitted in Quesnel unless the property is rezoned, but the City of Quesnel is reviewing this policy.

At one point, secondary suites were permitted in some zones,

which is part of the reason why there are numerous suites in existence. In some instances, however, secondary suites have been built without proper permits.

If the City were to change its secondary suite policy, that decision is not expected to cause a rush of suites being created in any neighbourhood. Creating a suite is a good option for some homeowners, but most are not anticipated to take this option.

## **Reasons to discuss secondary suite policy changes**

### **Safety.**

Permitting legal suite construction ensures building code requirements are met. Many people build suites now without permits and inspections.

### **Affordable Rental.**

Secondary suites would increase the number of affordable housing units in Quesnel. Very few multi-family and rental units are being built.

### **Affordable Home ownership.**

Having a suite provides income, making owning a home or building a new home more attainable.

### **Housing for Seniors.**

A suite can provide safe, affordable housing for seniors. And seniors who have a tenant in a suite gain a level of comfort and income, allowing them to stay in their homes longer.

### **Environmental responsibility.**

Secondary suites turn one dwelling unit into two without requiring more land and infrastructure, helping control urban sprawl.

### **Community support.**

A 2010 telephone survey showed two in three respondents support allowing secondary suites. The support was similar from home owners and renters in all neighbourhoods.

### **Demographics.**

Quesnel has a lot of single-family dwellings and few smaller dwelling units. As household and family sizes decrease, secondary suites offer the size of housing needed in Quesnel.

### **Students.**

No multi-family housing has been built since the construction of the North Cariboo Community Campus. Students often have a difficult time finding appropriate, affordable living space.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Any discussion of secondary suites is bound to generate questions. Here are a few of the more common ones the City has been asked over the years.

*Q: My neighbour has an existing suite I think is illegal. Will this policy make it legal?*

A: As zoning bylaws have changed over the years, it is difficult to tell if an existing suite is 'illegal' or not. Complaints would have to be investigated on a case-by-case basis. The goal of any policy changes is to be future thinking and ensure new suites are: built with the proper building permits; meet minimum BC Building Code safety standards; and provide adequate parking.

*Q: Can I add to my duplex and make it a triplex or fourplex? Can I add two suites to my house?*

A: No. Secondary suites can only be added to single-family dwellings. Only one suite is allowed per single-family dwelling. To convert an existing building into a triplex or fourplex requires meeting a higher building standard than adding a suite, and would likely require a different zoning designation.

*Q: I am okay with allowing suites, but only for a relative, like an ageing parent or a child with special needs. Can you allow suites for only these reasons?*

A: No. Municipalities can't create land-use policies that apply to some people (like family members) and not to others. They may create policies that define the 'what' (like adding a kitchen) but may not dictate who lives there.

*Q: I think it's better if suites are only allowed when the homeowner lives in the house. Can the City ensure the suite and the main house are both not rented out?*

A: No. Again, municipalities are not permitted to create land-use policies that apply to some people (like home owners residing in the house) and not to others.

*Q: I'm worried that secondary suites in my neighbourhood would make my street too busy and there will be cars parked all over the street.*

A: Traffic and parking was the area of greatest concern for respondents to the survey. All secondary suites will be required to provide one additional off-street parking space when a suite is created.

*Q: Will property owners with suites pay their share of utilities and taxes?*

A: Yes. The City charges water, sewer, and garbage rates for all known suites at the same rate as all other dwelling units. A house with a secondary suite will pay the same utility fees as a duplex. Taxes are charged based on assessed value. If BC Assessment determines a house with a suite has an increased assessed value, the property owner will pay more taxes.

*Q: I don't want secondary suites in my neighbourhood because I don't want crime to increase. How can the City make sure there won't be any illegal activity in secondary suites?*

A: City staff have found no substantiated connection between secondary suites and criminal activity. The City has no control over who lives in any dwelling, secondary suite or not. If you suspect criminal activity is taking place in any residence, contact the RCMP.

*Q: I know someone who lived in a suite that I thought was really unsafe. Will the City start to ensure existing secondary suites meet the building code?*

A: The proposed change would see suites now allowed in the Zoning Bylaw. This is to ensure newly constructed suites are not 'driven underground' and that builders will obtain building permits. The BC Building Code is not intended to be applied as a retroactive code to existing units. Ensuring safety in existing private dwellings is a complex concept that extends beyond the issue of allowing new secondary suites. The City would have to explore this concept through other tools or bylaws under a separate process.

*Q: Will suites have to be registered or licensed with the City?*

A: The building permitting process would be the primary 'suite registration' process. All newly constructed suites will have to obtain a building permit. Tenants and home buyers are welcome to inquire with the City if a building permit was obtained. A separate suite registration process for existing suites would be costly. The advantages of such a process are unclear as the City is unable to inspect or assess the safety of pre-existing suites under its existing bylaws.

*Have questions? Call the Planning Department at 250-992-2111*