



SECONDARY SUITES BUILDING AND FIRE CODE AMENDMENTS

The following regulations apply to secondary suites in new or existing dwellings. Examples of situations where the BUILDING code applies are as follows.

- 1) A new dwelling unit with a secondary suite included at the time of construction.
- 2) An existing dwelling unit with an unfinished space being converted to a secondary suite.
- 3) An existing dwelling unit with a finished space being converted to a secondary suite.

Construction or renovation for a new secondary suite would require a development permit and a building permit. Inspections are required at different stages of construction in accordance with the Alberta Building Code and local municipal bylaws.

The FIRE code applies to existing secondary suites that were constructed without permits prior to December 31, 2006. Existing secondary suites would require an inspection by the local authority (fire, building, electrical, mechanical and plumbing safety codes officers).

BUILDING AND FIRE CODE REQUIREMENTS

A secondary suite means a second self-contained dwelling unit that is located within a primary dwelling unit, where both dwelling units are registered under the same land titles.

A primary dwelling unit is a town house, row house, single or semi-detached home or duplex. Secondary suite construction applies only to a secondary suite in a dwelling unit that will result in a total of not more than two dwelling units, and the alteration to an existing dwelling unit to accommodate a new secondary suite.

- 1) Ceiling heights in a secondary suite shall not be less than 1.95 metres (approx 6'5")
- 2) Each bedroom shall have at least one window or door openable from the inside without the use of keys, tools or special knowledge and without the removal of sashes and hardware.

The window shall have an unobstructed opening of not less than 0.35 sq. m. (approx 3.8 sq. ft) in area with no dimension less than 380 mm (approx 15"). The window must be able to maintain the required opening during an emergency without the need of additional support. Hopper, casement or slider windows would meet these requirements.

If security bars are installed, they must be openable from the inside without the use of tools or special knowledge.

- 3) Exit stairs and corridors shall have a clear width of not less than 860mm (approx 34").
- 4) Landings for stairs shall be at least as wide as the stairs and not less than 900mm (approx 36") in length.
- 5) Handrails and guards are required for stairs. Open sides of stairs shall be protected with guard rails. They shall be a minimum of 900mm (36") in height (measured vertically from the top of the leading edge of the stairs (nosing) to the top of the guard rail). Openings in the guard rails shall not exceed 100mm (4"). The top rail of the guard must be graspable. Handrails are required along the wall next the stairs. They must extend 300mm beyond

the top and bottom of the stairs and must be continuous through the full flight.

Exceptions are: 1) Where there is a continuous guard rail in place for the full flight of the stairs. 2) Where there is flight of stairs of less than three risers. 3) Not required in landings. 4) Where separated by a newel post in a change of direction.

- 6) When an unenclosed exterior exit stair or ramp provides the only means of egress (exit), from a secondary suite, it must be protected if it is exposed to hazards of fire from exterior window openings in the wall of the primary dwelling.
- 7) Every exit door that provides access to exit from a secondary suite shall be not less than 1,980 mm high (6'5"), 810 mm wide (32") and is permitted to swing inward. Exit doors must be provided with a dead bolts and door viewers.
- 8) Each dwelling unit shall be provided with at least one exit that leads to the outside. Dwelling units may share a common exit if they meet the requirements identified in article 9.37.2.13 of the building code (see item 9).
- 9) Common exits shall be separated from adjacent floor areas by not less than one layer of 12.7mm (1/2") gypsum wall board or equivalent material on each side of the walls. Doors shall be weather stripped to prevent the passage of smoke.
- 10) Dwelling units shall be separated from each other by not less than one layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") gypsum board or equivalent material on the underside of the ceilings and the faces of all walls. Public corridors (common to both suites) must meet the same requirements.
- 11) A furnace room shall be separated from the remainder of the building by not less than

one layer of 12.7 mm thick gypsum board or equivalent material on the ceiling and each side of the walls. A door (32" in width) shall be provided to each furnace room.

- 12) Each dwelling unit shall have its own independent heating and ventilation system complying with sections 9.32 and 9.33 of the building code. The Alberta Fire Code waives this requirement for existing secondary suites constructed before December 31, 2006. A single heating source is acceptable.
- 13) Interconnected electrically operated smoke detectors shall be installed at every floor level. They shall be permanently connected to an electrical circuit and wired so activation of one device will cause alarms within both dwelling units to sound. They should be located in corridors in close proximity (within 5 metres) of bedrooms.
- 14) Sound control does not apply to a building that contains a secondary suite.
- 15) Each suite must have its own sanitary facilities (bathroom). Doors to baths and bedrooms must be a minimum of 30" in width.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS NECESSARY FOR THE BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION.

- 1) Two legible dimensioned floor plans. (To scale plans)
- 2) Construction details. (I.E.-door sizes, window sizes and types, room uses and sizes, wall and ceiling finishes, smoke detector locations- both main residence and secondary suite).
- 3) Heating and ventilation sources.

THE SAME INFORMATION IS REQUIRED FOR A DEVELOPMENT PERMIT.
A COPY OF THE TITLE AND A SITE PLAN SHOWING PROPOSED PARKING WILL ALSO BE NECESSARY.

IN ORDER TO PROCESS THE PERMIT APPLICATIONS THREE COPIES OF THE CONSTRUCTION PLANS WILL BE NEEDED (AS NOTED – TWO FOR BUILDING, ONE FOR DEVELOPMENT).