

April 3, 2020

RESIDENTIAL SECONDARY SUITES BULLETIN

NATIONAL BUILDING CODE 2019 ALBERTA EDITION REQUIREMENTS

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 Single Family Dwelling unit with a secondary suite included at the time of construction.
2. An existing Single Family Dwelling unit with an unfinished space being converted to a secondary suite.
3. An existing Single Family Dwelling unit with a finished space being converted to a secondary suite.

Construction or renovation for a new secondary suite will require a development, building and all associated trade permits. Inspections are required at different stages of construction by the local Authority (building, electrical, and mechanical Safety Codes Officers).

BUILDING CODE REQUIREMENTS

A secondary suite means a self-contained dwelling unit that is located in a building or portion of a building of only residential occupancy that contains only one other dwelling unit and common spaces and where both dwelling units constitute a single real estate entity. Examples of buildings where secondary suites are permitted include individual detached houses, semi-detached houses (half of a double) and freehold rowhouses. Secondary suites are not permitted in duplexes where both dwellings of the duplex are on the same land title. Duplexes on a single parcel must be sub-divided to create two separate real estate entities and be separated by a residential firewall (party wall) with a one-hour fire rating.

A secondary suite is only permitted where approved by the current City of Medicine Hat Land Use Bylaw enforced at the time of the permit application.

1. **9.5.3.** Ceiling heights in a secondary suite shall not be less than 1.95m (6'-5") and clear height under beams and ductwork not less than 1.85m (6'-1").
2. **9.5.5.1.** Entrance door and all doors in at least one line of passage from the exterior to the basement furnace/utility room must be minimum 810mm (2'-8") wide and 1.980m (6'-6") high. Bedroom and bathroom doors must be minimum 760mm (2'-6") wide and 1.95m (6'-6") high.
3. **9.8.2.1.** Exit stair and corridor widths shall be minimum 860mm (2'-10") and 1.950m (6'-5") clear height above the stairs. Clear height can be reduced to 1.850m (6'-1") under beams and ducting only.
4. **9.8.4.1.** Stair riser height must be between 125mm (5") – 200mm (8").
5. **9.8.4.2.** Stair tread width must be between 255mm (10") – 355mm (14").
6. **9.8.5.2.** Ramp width minimum 860mm (34") and clear height of 1.95m (6'-5").

7. **9.8.7.1.** A continuous handrail is required on interior stairs that have more than 2 risers and exterior stairs with more than 3 risers. Height of handrail between 865mm (34") – 1.070m (42") and extend 300mm (12") beyond the top and bottom of each flight.
8. **9.8.7.7.** Handrail must be fastened to solid backing within 300mm (12") from the ends and spaced not more than 1.2m (4") along its length.
9. **9.8.8.1.** Guards are required on open sides of stairs or landings where there is a difference of 600mm (24") between the walking surface and the adjacent surface.
10. **9.8.8.3.** Guards must be minimum 900mm (36") in height.
11. **9.8.8.5.** Maximum openings in guards shall be 100mm (4").
12. **9.9.4.4.** 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.
13. **9.9.10.11.** 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 (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 a window well is to be used, it must have 760mm (30") clearance in front of the window. If a protective enclosure is installed over the window well, it shall be openable from the inside without the use of keys, tools or special knowledge.
14. **9.10.9.3.** Door to dwelling unit and suite must be solid core at least 45mm (1-3/4") thick and be self-closing and weather stripped if they are located in a common area.
15. **9.10.9.14.** A smoke tight barrier is required (1/2" drywall taped) on walls and floor/ceiling framing that separate the dwelling unit and the secondary suite including common spaces and exits.
16. **9.10.19.3.** A smoke alarm is required on each storey, including basements, in each sleeping room, in a location between the sleeping room and the remainder of the storey and if the sleeping rooms are served by a hallway the smoke alarm must be located in the hallway.
17. **9.10.19.5.** Smoke alarms must be hardwired to the electrical service and interconnected so the activation of any one smoke alarm causes all alarms to activate.
18. **9.11.1.1.** Sound transmission class rating not less than 43 is required. Can be achieved by filling the floor joist space with 150mm (6") of sound-absorbing material, wall studs filled with sound absorbing material, resilient channel on one side of the separation spaced 400mm (16") 600mm (24") apart, and 1/2" drywall taped on ceiling and both sides of walls.
19. **9.32.1.2.** A self-contained ventilation system is required.
20. **9.32.3.9.** Carbon monoxide alarm is required in each bedroom or within 5m (16'-5") of bedroom doors and common spaces. Alarms must be interconnected so the activation of any one alarm causes all alarms including common spaces to sound.
21. **9.33.1.1.** Heating and air conditioning duct systems shall not be directly interconnected with other parts of the house.
22. **9.36.** Energy Efficiency Section only applies to a new constructed dwelling unit with a secondary suite.

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS NECESSARY FOR THE BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION

1. Two legible dimensioned floor plans (to scale).
2. Construction details (i.e. door sizes, window sizes and types, room uses and sizes, wall and ceiling finishes, smoke detector locations, carbon monoxide detector locations – both main residence and secondary suite).

This Bulletin is produced by the City of Medicine Hat's Planning & Development Services (P&DS) department, and has no legal status and cannot be used as an official interpretation of the various Codes and Regulations currently in effect. Users are advised to contact the P&DS department for assistance as the City of Medicine Hat accepts no responsibility to persons relying solely on this information.

3. Heating and ventilation sources.

Note, the above information is also required for a Development Permit plus a copy of the title and site plan showing proposed parking. In order to process the permit applications, three copies of the construction plans will be needed (as previously noted – two for building, one for development).



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