

# Secondary suites

A guide to developing a secondary suite.



This information is meant to serve as a guide if you are planning on developing a secondary suite. If you have questions, or would like more information on existing secondary suites, please call Development & Building Approvals at (403) 268-5311.

### What is a secondary suite?

A secondary suite (also known as a basement suite, mother-in-law suite or granny suite) is a self-contained accessory living space consisting of a bedroom, bathroom and kitchen developed within, or on the same property as a single family home. A secondary suite must also have a direct access to the exterior of the building in which the unit is contained.

### What's the difference between a duplex and a secondary suite?

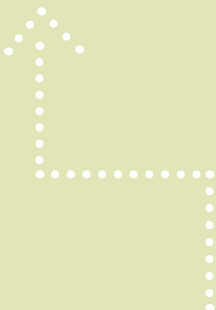
The City of Calgary Land Use Bylaw 1P2007 defines a duplex as a building that contains two dwelling units, one located above the other.

Secondary suites differ from a duplex in that they are limited in size to a maximum of 70 square metres (753 square feet) and offer greater flexibility in form and placement on a property.

**The addition of a secondary suite to a duplex or semi-detached form of development is not allowed.**

### I plan to develop a secondary suite in my home. What do I need to consider?

- Is the secondary suite an allowed use in your land district? (See land use flow chart on page 2.)
- Does your property meet the minimum Land Use Bylaw requirements for a secondary suite in your district? (See Summary of Requirements on page 5.)
- Are you aware of the building code requirements? (See Alberta Building Code requirements on page 6.)



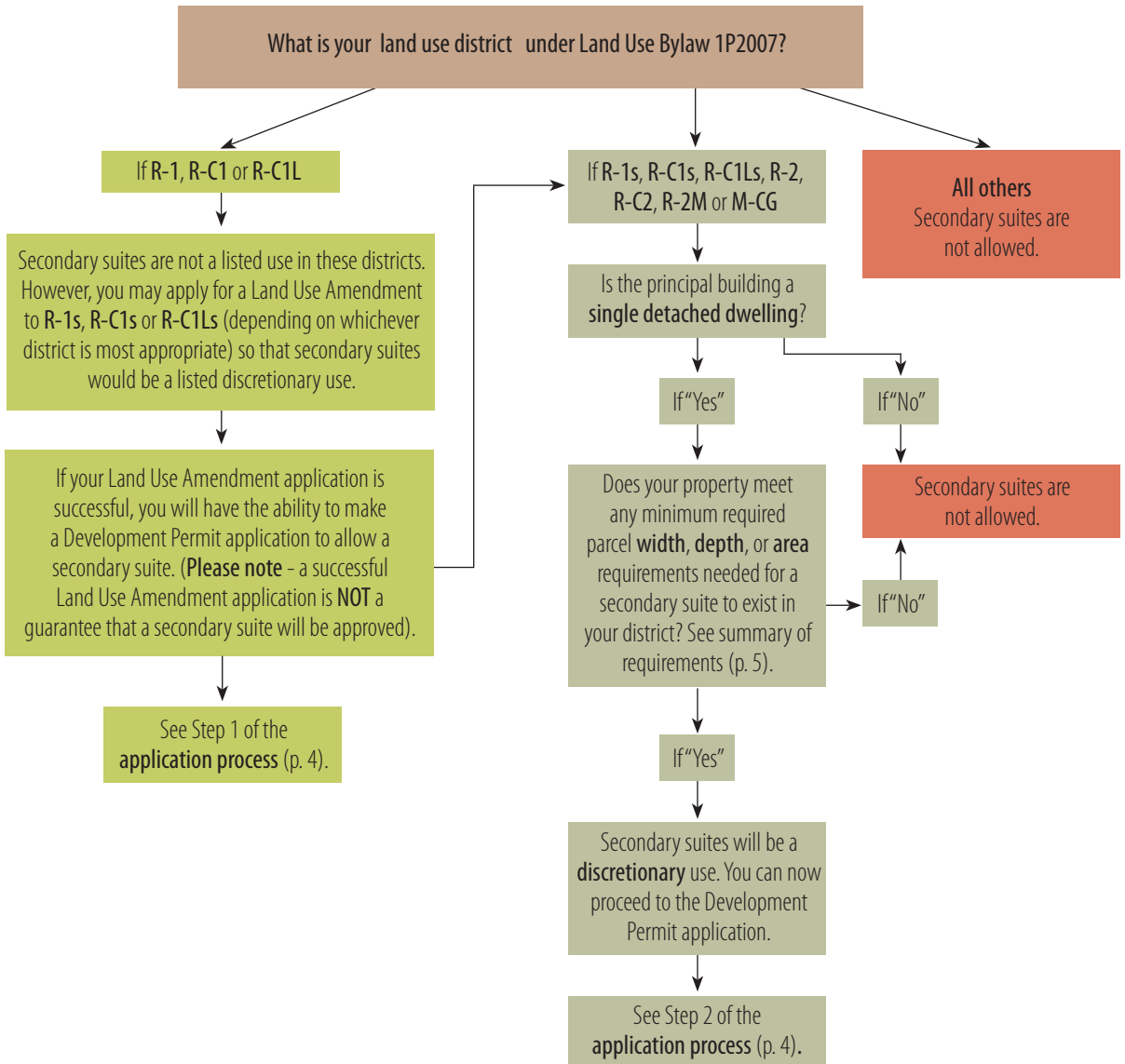
# Determining land use

## How do I find out what my property's land use district is?

Visit The City of Calgary website at [calgary.ca/myproperty](http://calgary.ca/myproperty).

Secondary suites are only possible in certain land use districts and are only allowed on a parcel that contains a single family home.

Your land use district will determine the steps you need to take when applying for a secondary suite. A Building Permit (Step 3 in Table) is mandatory in all scenarios.



## The application process

All application requirements and information on related fees for a Land Use Amendment, Development Permit and Building Permit are available online at [calgary.ca/dba](http://calgary.ca/dba).

If applicable	Mandatory	Mandatory
Land Use Amendment (if applicable)	Development Permit - Change of Use	Building Permit for a secondary suite
<p><b>Important points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only those properties which do <b>NOT</b> have a Land Use District that has secondary suites as a listed use will be required to make an application for a Land Use Amendment.</li> <li>• It is important to be mindful that a successful Land Use Amendment is <b>NOT</b> a guarantee that a secondary suite will be approved. The decision to approve or refuse the addition of a secondary suite is at the discretion of the Development Authority and will be based on your Development Permit.</li> <li>• A Land Use Amendment can be a lengthy process. For more information, call (403) 268-5311.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Important points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All applications for Secondary Suites will require an approved and released Development Permit for a Change of Use <b>before</b> a Building Permit can be applied for.</li> <li>• Be sure to obtain a copy of the Development Permit- Change of Use Checklist to ensure that your application is complete with all the necessary documents and drawings so that we may make a decision in a timely and efficient manner.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Important points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional dwelling units (secondary suites) built <b>after</b> Dec. 31, 2006 must comply with the Alberta Building Code.</li> <li>• Additional dwelling units (secondary suites) built <b>before</b> Dec. 31, 2006 must comply with the Alberta Fire Code by Dec. 31, 2008.</li> </ul>

## Determining property and building code requirements

### Are there any limitations on what size a secondary suite can be?

Yes. Secondary suites must not exceed 70 square metres (753 square feet) in gross floor area (including any servicing and/or mechanical areas but excluding the area covered by stairs).

Below is a summary of the requirements for each district that have secondary suites as a listed use.

*For more detail on the specific requirements for your land use district, please refer to Land Use Bylaw 1P2007 or contact Development & Building Approvals at (403) 268-5311. An electronic copy of Land Use Bylaw 1P2007 can be found on The City's website at [calgary.ca/landusebylaw](http://calgary.ca/landusebylaw).*

### Summary of Requirements

Land Use District	Minimum required parcel width	Minimum required parcel depth	Minimum required parcel area
R-1s	13 metres for a <b>secondary suite – detached garden and attached at grade</b>	30 metres	390 square metres for detached garden and attached at grade
	11 metres for all other forms		330 square metres for all other forms
R-C1Ls	24 metres	30 metres	1,100 square metres
R-C1s, R-2, R-C2, R-2M, M-CG	15 metres	30 metres	400 square metres

## Does my secondary suite need a separate access?

Yes. All secondary suites are required to have a separate and direct access to grade. A secondary suite may not share a foyer with any entrance to the principal dwelling unit.

## Do I need to provide parking for my secondary suite?

Yes. A secondary suite requires that at least one motor vehicle parking stall is provided in addition to those required for the principal residence.

## Will I need to provide any amenity space for the secondary suite?

Yes. Secondary suites must have a private amenity space that is located outside and which is a minimum of 7.5 square metres, with no dimension being less than 1.5 metres. This space may be provided in the form of a balcony, deck or patio.

## Once I develop a secondary suite, do I have any legal responsibilities as a landlord?

Yes. In Alberta, the responsibilities of landlords and renters are covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act*. Additional information can be found at [servicealberta.ca](http://servicealberta.ca) and [landlordandtenant.org](http://landlordandtenant.org).

## Are there any Alberta Building Code requirements I should be aware of before developing a secondary suite?

Yes. Below are some common requirements that must be considered. Please note that this is not a complete list. For detailed and complete building codes and fire regulations refer to the Alberta Building Code and the Alberta Fire Code at [municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/cp\\_secondary\\_suites.cfm](http://municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/cp_secondary_suites.cfm) or contact the Province of Alberta's Municipal Affairs and Housing Safety Services branch at 1-866-421-6929.

### Summary of common requirements

- The minimum ceiling height for living spaces in a secondary suite is 1.95 metres.
  - Each bedroom in a secondary suite must have at least one window for emergency escape in the event of a fire (window must be located at least 1.2 metres from a property line).
  - Must provide fire-protected walls and ceilings between a secondary suite and the main dwelling unit plus around common exits by the use of ½-inch drywall\*.
  - Homes containing a secondary suite must have interconnected smoke alarms installed to cover both dwellings.
  - Gas-fired furnaces and water heaters need to be enclosed in a room with fire-protected walls and ceiling by the use of ½-inch dry wall\*.
  - Secondary suites must be served by an independent heating and ventilation system (suites constructed before Dec. 31, 2006 may have a combined system).
- \* Applies to basement suites only. Other forms are subject to higher building code requirements.



## What other forms of secondary suites can be developed?

Although the basement suite is the most common form, a secondary suite may also take the form of any of the following:

- Above a rear detached garage.
- On the main floor of a detached dwelling.
- Detached (stand-alone) garden suite.

A summary of rules for each of the three forms follows.

### Above a rear detached garage



- Will have a maximum allowable height of 7.5 metres above grade.
- Is subject to the maximum allowable parcel coverage for your district.
- Is subject to the minimum required building setbacks for a **secondary suite - detached garage**, which include:
  - (i) A rear setback of 0.6 metres for that portion of the building used as a private garage; and 1.5 metres for that portion used as a secondary suite.
  - (ii) A side yard setback of 1.2 metres.
- Must be located at least 3 metres from the house.

### On the main floor of a single detached dwelling



- Will have a maximum allowable height of 5.0 metres for that portion of the building that contains the secondary suite.
- The suite must have its own separate and direct access to grade.
- Is subject to the maximum allowable parcel coverage for your district.
- Is subject to the required minimum building setbacks for a secondary suite – attached at grade as outlined in the Low Density Residential General Rules section of the Land Use Bylaw 1P2007.

### Detached (stand-alone) garden suite



- Will have a maximum allowable height of 5.0 metres.
- Is subject to the maximum allowable parcel coverage for your district.
- Is subject to the minimum required building setbacks for a secondary suite - detached garden, which include:
  - (i) A rear setback of 1.5 metres.
  - (ii) A side setback of 1.2 metres.
- Must be located at least 3 metres from the principal building.



Permit applications are accepted  
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**The City of Calgary**

Development & Building Approvals  
Third Floor, Calgary Municipal Building  
800 Macleod Trail S.E.  
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2M5

For the status of your application: (403) 268-5311

To book an inspection: call 3-1-1

For more information: [calgary.ca/dba](http://calgary.ca/dba)



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