

SECONDARY SUITES ON SSI: CRD and the BC Building Code

Islands Trust and the Capital Regional District have different roles to play in considering how legalizing secondary suites might work on Salt Spring Island. When giving feedback to the Islands Trust on changing Salt Spring's zoning to allow secondary suites, home owners will also want to understand what the Capital Regional District (CRD) Building Inspection Office will require in the building permit process.

What is a Secondary Suite?

The BC Building Code defines a **secondary suite** as an additional dwelling unit which:

- has a total floor area of not more than 90 m² (968 ft²);
- has a floor space less than 40% of the habitable floor space of the building;
- is located within a building of a residential occupancy containing only one other dwelling unit; and
- is located in and part of a building which is a single real estate entity (not a strata).

Simply Put:

A secondary suite is an area of a single family dwelling that is separate from the rest of the house. A secondary suite can include common areas with the rest of the house (such as a laundry room) but must contain certain facilities that are completely separated from the rest of the house, including a least one bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. The kitchen would usually include cooking facilities such as a stove or microwave, but a stove plug of 220 volts or a gas line into the kitchen is also considered a cooking facility, since either of these hook-ups would enable quick and easy installation of a stove.

What are the Building Code Requirements?

Once permitted by zoning, a secondary suite must conform to the requirements of the British Columbia Building Code – Section 9.36: Secondary Suites. The BC Building Code (BCBC) has adopted a number of alternative requirements for secondary suites to provide minimum health and safety standards for occupants without imposing undue costs to owners. However, there are a number of other requirements in the BCBC pertaining to secondary suites that are not outlined in Section 9.36.

Fire Safety:

In order to restrict the spread of fire and smoke, and to ensure the occupants a safe exit from the building in an emergency situation, a fire separation must separate the suite from the balance of the house. A fire separation is a construction assembly that acts as a barrier against the spread of fire. Wall and floor systems that are shared by both the suite and the remainder of the house must be separated by a fire separation with a fire resistance rating of 45 minutes. The fire resistance rating can be reduced to 30 minutes when interconnected, photoelectric smoke alarms are installed.

- To achieve a 45 minute fire resistance rating for walls, one layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") Type X drywall on each side of the wall is required.
- To achieve a 45 minute fire resistance rating for ceilings, one layer of 15.9 mm (5/8") Type X drywall is required.
- To achieve a 30 minute fire resistance rating for walls, one layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") regular drywall on each side of the wall is required.
- To achieve a 30 minute fire resistance rating for ceilings, one layer of 12.7 mm (1/2") Type X drywall or two layers of 12.7 mm (1/2") regular drywall is required or one layer of 15.9 mm (5/8") regular drywall.

Your Building Inspector can assist you in determining how you might achieve the required ratings for fire separation.

Safe Exiting:

Doors: Both the secondary suite and the main house must each have at least one exit door that is at least 800 mm (2'8") wide and 1,980 mm (6'-6") high. The door must be equipped with an approved deadbolt lock. The door must also have a door viewer unless there is transparent glazing in the door or in a sidelight.

Shared Egress Facilities: Exit corridors, stairways or exterior passageways shared by the suite and the main house, must be at least 860 mm (2'10") wide. It must be possible to travel from the suite door in opposite directions to two separate exits. A single exit is acceptable if both the suite and the main house have either a separate exit or a window with an opening, which is a minimum of 990 mm (3'3") high, 560 mm (1'10") wide and less than 990 mm (3'3") above the floor. Please note that special precautions must be taken if an exit stair or ramp from one unit passes a window from the other unit.

Bedroom Windows: Each bedroom must have a window, openable to the outside, to provide a second means of escape in case of fire. The window opening must be a minimum of 0.35 m² (3.76 ft²) in area with no dimension less than 381 mm (15"). The window must be openable from the inside without any special tools or knowledge. Security bars are not permitted.

Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are required on each floor level and within 5m (16' 5") of each bedroom. In addition to any existing smoke alarms, hard wired, photoelectric type smoke alarms are required in the house and the suite, for early warning to occupants of a building with only a 30 minute Fire Resistance Rating. The additional smoke alarms must be interconnected so that the activation of one smoke alarm will cause the other alarms to sound.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Detectors: For homes with an attached garage or a fuel fired appliance, a carbon monoxide detector must be installed adjacent to the sleeping areas in both the principal dwelling and the Secondary Suite. CO is odourless and tasteless, and spreads evenly through the space, so the CO detector can be placed almost anywhere. However, so the alarm can be heard, the detector should be located not more than 5 metres (16 feet) from a sleeping area.

Heating Systems

Each room in the secondary suite must have winter heating. Existing secondary suites that are heated with a common forced air system may apply for an equivalent approach to meet this Building Code requirement as follows:

1. A duct type smoke detector shall be installed; and
2. the furnace is provided with a relay to shut down the furnace fan and gas valve if the alarm is activated.

How to Contact CRD:

Phone: SSI Building Inspection 250-537-2711
Fax: 250-537-9633
Mail: 206-118 Fulford-Ganges Road
Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2S4

Gas and Electrical

Electric permits must be obtained from the BC Safety Authority. Please contact the British Columbia Safety Authority, Provincial Electrical

Legalizing an existing suite: How will it work?

One option for consideration by the Islands Trust is to allow secondary suites that exist at the time of bylaw adoption to become "legal" through the building permit process. This may require:

Registration. People with existing suites will be offered a grace period to register their suites with Islands Trust before initiating a process to legalize their suites with a building permit from the Capital Regional District. Once this grace period is over, only registered suites will be eligible for legalization.

When applying for a building permit, the CRD may require a Floor Plan. A Floor Plan will outline such items as room names and dimensions, interior and exterior doors, window sizes and locations.

Inspection. Once the Islands Trust has processed your Registration Form and the Capital Regional District has issued a Building Permit, an appointment to conduct an inspection of the secondary suite will be set up. The Building Inspector will check your secondary suite to confirm that it meets all requirements. If the inspection reveals that additional work needs to be completed to meet the requirements, a re-inspection will be required.

Final Occupancy Permit. Once the Building Inspector is satisfied that your secondary suite meets all the requirements, the Capital Regional District will issue a final occupancy permit and add the information about the secondary suite to its Secondary Suite Registry database. Once included in this registry, the secondary suite will be considered a legal secondary suite with the Islands Trust and the Capital Regional District.



Islands Trust

How to Contact Islands Trust:

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