

Guidelines for New Secondary Suites

These guidelines apply in the following situations:

- when developing a new secondary suite in an existing one-unit dwelling, and
- when developing a new secondary suite in a new one-unit dwelling.

These guidelines reflect and summarize some of the key requirements of the National Building Code of Canada, 2010.

Item No.	Article NBCC 2010	Summary
1.	9.1.2.1.	The total <i>floor area</i> of a <i>secondary suite</i> shall be not more than 80% of the total <i>floor area</i> of all <i>storeys</i> of the other <i>dwelling unit</i> (excluding the garage and common spaces), up to a maximum of 80 m ² .
2.	6.2.3.9.	Air cannot be vented from one dwelling unit to another. If a forced air heating system is being used, then each dwelling unit requires its own furnace. Alternately, a furnace could be used for the heating system of one suite, and a non-forced air heating system can be used to heat the second suite (ie. electric, boiler). Also, a single central ventilation system cannot be used to provide ventilation to both dwelling units. If a suite has no forced-air heating system, than fresh air is required, and shall be distributed directly to bedrooms and the main living area.
3.	9.5.3.	Ceiling heights shall be a minimum of 1.95 m (6'-4-3/4"); ceiling heights under beams and ductwork shall be a minimum of 1.85 m (6'-0 3/4").
4.	9.9.10.1.	At least one window in each bedroom shall provide an unobstructed opening with a total area of not less than 0.35 m ² (3.77 f ²) and with not dimension less than 380 mm (15 inches).
5.	9.10.9.14.	Each dwelling unit must be separated from the other (vertically and horizontally) by a smoke tight barrier of not less than 12.7 mm drywall and construction that provides a minimum sound transmission classification rating of 43. This includes the ceiling of common spaces (i.e. furnace room).
6.	9.11.2.1.	The required STC of 43 can be achieved with the following construction: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The floor joist spaces must be filled with sound-absorbing material of not less than 150 mm thickness. The stud spaces must be filled with sound-absorbing material. Resilient channels (sound bar) must be installed at maximum 600 mm o.c. at the underside of the floor joists, and on at least one side of all separation walls.
7.	9.9.4.2.	Each dwelling unit must have one of the following exit facilities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> one separate exit, or one common exit at grade level. Any common exits must be separated from the dwelling units by a smoke tight barrier of not less than 12.7mm drywall.
8.	9.10.9.3..	Doors from shared exits or common areas into dwelling units shall be minimum 45 mm thick solid core wood doors and be equipped with a latch and a self-closing device.
9.	9.10.19.	Electrically operated and interconnected smoke alarms are required on all floor levels of each suite, and shall be installed in every bedroom, as well as in the hallway or living space serving the bedrooms for each suite. Common areas shall also be protected by smoke alarms (i.e. furnace room). ALL SMOKE ALARMS WITHIN THE ENTIRE BUILDING ARE TO BE INTERCONNECTED. In the case of a new secondary suite in an existing dwelling, retro-fitting the existing dwelling unit bedrooms with interconnected smoke alarms is required.
10.	9.32.3.9.	Carbon monoxide alarms shall be installed at or near the ceiling (as per manufacturer's instructions) in each bedroom, or within 5 m (16'-5") of each bedroom door. Properly located combination smoke / CO alarms will likely achieve this requirement.
11.	9.32.	Section 9.32. "Ventilation" applies to each dwelling unit separately. The secondary suite bathroom requires an exhaust fan (can be HRV exhaust intake). Fresh air is required to be distributed directly to the bedrooms and main living area. If the suite heating system is not a forced-air system, than fresh air shall be provided directly by an alternative system (i.e. HRV for the suite).

Secondary Suites - Defined

Secondary suite means a self-contained *dwelling unit* with a prescribed *floor area* 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. (See Appendix A and Article 9.1.2.1. of Division B.)

A – 1.4.1.2.(1) - Secondary Suite

A secondary suite is a self-contained dwelling unit of a prescribed maximum total floor area that is part of a building containing not more than two dwelling units (including the secondary suite) and any common spaces such as common storage, common service rooms, common laundry facilities or common areas used for egress. Secondary suites are typically created within an existing single dwelling unit—commonly called a “house”—either constructed as an addition to an existing house or incorporated during the construction of a new house. A secondary suite may have more than one storey and may be on the same level as the principal dwelling unit of the house or be above or below it.

Examples of buildings where secondary suites are permitted include individual detached houses, or where the secondary suite is located in a portion of a building, semi-detached houses (half of a double) and freehold row houses.

Where a building has multiple occupancies, the secondary suite can only be created in a portion of the building that is of residential occupancy. Apartment buildings have more than two dwelling units and are therefore not permitted to have secondary suites.

Neither dwelling unit in a house can be strata-titled or otherwise subdivided from the remainder of the house under provincial or territorial legislation. This means that both dwelling units are registered under the same title.