



# HOW-TO GUIDE FOR SECONDARY SUITES IN SEMI-DETACHED HOMES

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RENDERING BY MATTHEW THOMSON DESIGN

This document is subject to updates. For the most recent version, please visit: [www.burnaby.ca/housingchoices](http://www.burnaby.ca/housingchoices)

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## **CONTACT US**

City of Burnaby, Planning and Development Department

Website: [www.burnaby.ca/housingchoices](http://www.burnaby.ca/housingchoices)

Email: [housingchoices@burnaby.ca](mailto:housingchoices@burnaby.ca)

Building Permits: (604) 294-7986

Other Enquiries: (604) 294-7400

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# INTRODUCTION

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## OVERVIEW

This guide is for property owners who are interested in developing a secondary suite in a semi-detached home on their property. It includes regulations and design recommendations for planning and designing both the suite and outdoor elements.

The City's requirements for suites in semi-detached homes have been created to benefit suite residents, property owners, neighbours, and the larger community. They have been developed through best practice research and consultations with the community. They support the City of Burnaby's broader community goals and policies for housing choices, climate action, livability, and more.

Please note that some of the numbers in this Guide have been rounded.

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### What is a Semi-Detached Home?

A semi-detached home is a two-family home that includes two attached residences. The two residences may be placed side-by-side or front-to-back on a lot.

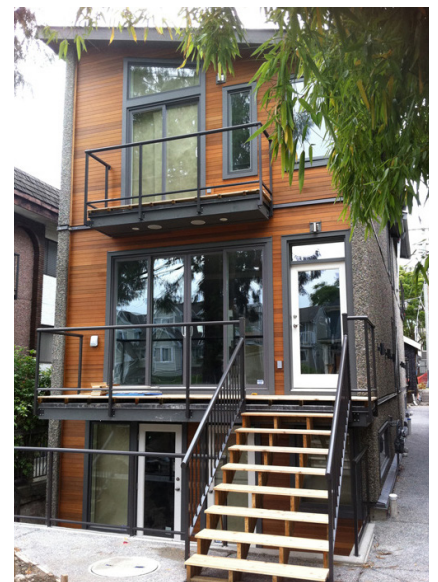
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### What is a Secondary Suite?

A secondary suite is a self-contained unit with another residence, with a separate entrance, kitchen, living area, and bathroom.



*Image Credit: Lanefab*



*Image Credit: Lanefab*


## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Guide contains both regulations and design recommendations. The regulations are required by bylaw and must be followed.

The **design recommendations** are strongly supported by the City and will help ensure that suites in semi-detached homes work well for residents of semi-detached homes containing suites, property owners, neighbours, and the community in general.

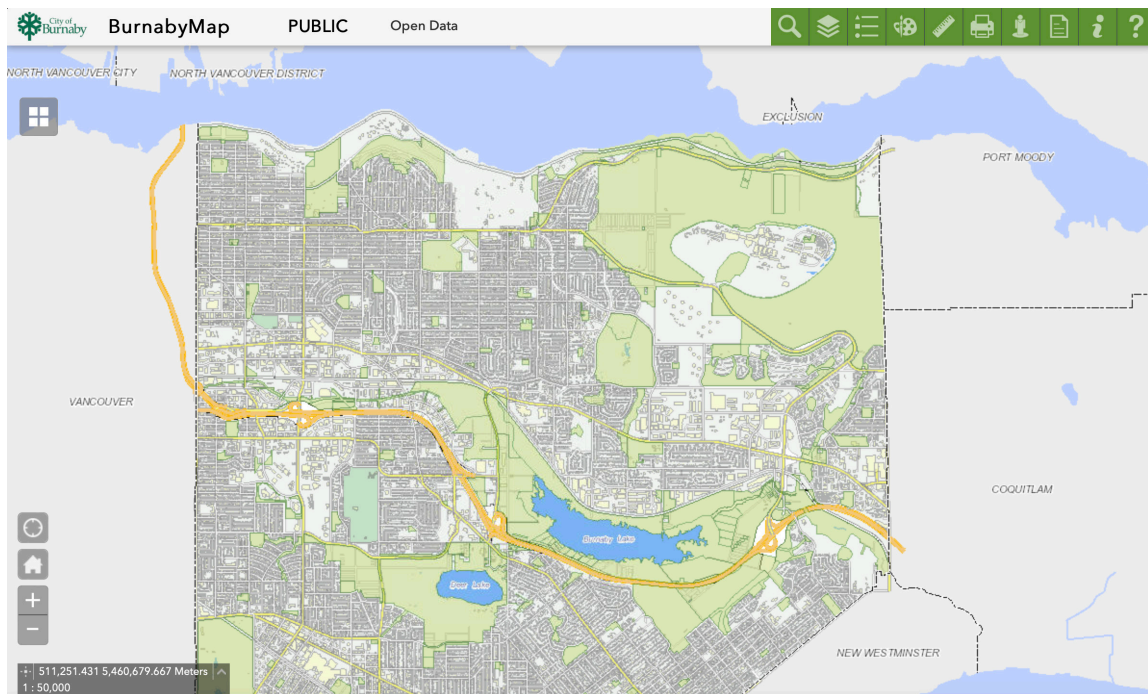
Some regulations are different across zones in Burnaby. For example, allowances for the height of buildings containing suites in semi-detached homes may differ depending on the zone in which the property is located.

### Find Your Zone

1. Visit [gis.burnaby.ca](https://gis.burnaby.ca) to find your Zone on BurnabyMap.
2. The link will take you to a Terms of Use agreement. If you agree to the Terms of Use, a map will open.
3. Click the search icon  at the top of the page to enter your street address. Once your property has been found, look at the tab in the right portion of the screen.
4. Find your zone under “Zoning” and you can open the hyperlink to find your zone specific regulations.

Example:

**Zoning**  
**R4**



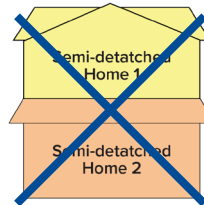
**Above:** BurnabyMap - This is the home screen of the BurnabyMap interface.

# REGULATIONS & DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

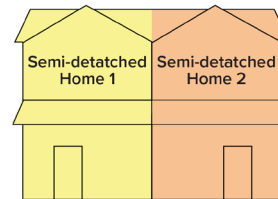
## LOT ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to add a suite, the semi-detached home must be one of two attached units that are placed side-by-side or front-to-back on a lot. BC Building Code does not permit secondary suites in stacked duplexes where the two primary units are built on top of one another.

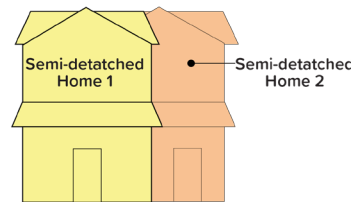
Semi-detached homes are permitted in R4, R5, R6, R12, and RM6 Zoning Districts.



**Not eligible:** Up-down/stacked semi-detached homes with secondary suites.



**Eligible:** Side-by-side semi-detached homes.



**Eligible:** Front-to-back semi-detached homes.

TABLE 1: LOT ELIGIBILITY

Zoning District	Minimum lot size required to add a semi-detached home	Minimum access required to add secondary suites to the semi-detached home
R4, R5, R6, RM6	Minimum Lot Area: 557.4 m <sup>2</sup> (6,000 sq. ft.) and Minimum Lot Width: 15.0 m (49.2 ft.)	Must have access to a road or lane on two sides*
R12	Minimum Lot Area: 306.6 m <sup>2</sup> (3,300 sq. ft.) and Minimum Lot Width: Lots with lanes: 9.2 m (30 ft.); Lots without lanes: 13.7 m (45 ft.)	Must have access to a road or lane on two sides*
R12s	Minimum Lot Area: 306.6 m <sup>2</sup> (3,300 sq. ft.) Minimum Lot Width: 13.7 m (45 ft.)	Must have access to a road or lane on two sides*

\*Properties that have roads on two sides **but do not have access to a lane** will require approval from the City Engineering Department. This includes corner lots without lane access, and 'through lots' without lane access.

## OWNERSHIP

**A semi-detached home may be part of a two-unit strata (i.e. each side may be sold separately).** However a secondary suite may not be separately stratified (i.e. sold separately) from a primary unit.

**A secondary suite may be rented out as a long term rental unit.** Short term rentals are not allowed.

**The owner is not required to live on the property.** If the owner lives off-site, an annual house rental business license will be required. Learn more here: [Business Licenses](#).

## UNITS PER LOT

**Eligible lots may have up to four units.** This may include two semi-detached primary units, each with one secondary suite per unit.

## LOT COVERAGE & LAYOUT

**The maximum amount of lot coverage for a semi-detached home is as per the Zoning Bylaw for the relevant zone.**

**The maximum amount of impervious surfaces for a property with a semi-detached home is 70%.** This includes the house plus surfaces such as sidewalks, driveways, and parking areas that are constructed with concrete or asphalt. Impervious surfaces prevent or slow down the infiltration of water into the soil, and contribute to increased flooding, erosion, and pollution of waterways.

**Minimum setbacks are required for semi-detached homes.** A setback refers to the required minimum distance between a building and a property line. Required setbacks are outlined in the Zoning Bylaw in the R District schedules and in [Section 6.12](#).

# HEIGHT

Height regulations vary depending on two factors: the number of storeys that are fully above grade; and whether there is a ground level suite.

**When a semi-detached home contains a ground level suite, the maximum height for a semi-detached home is two storeys above the suite.** In order to qualify for the extra height, a suite must meet all of the requirements of being a ground level suite. Please refer to [page 8](#) for the definition of a ground level suite. Height limits are as follows:

- Buildings with sloping roofs can be up to 10.5 metres (34.4 feet); and
- Buildings with flat roofs can be up to up to 8.9 metres (29.2 feet).

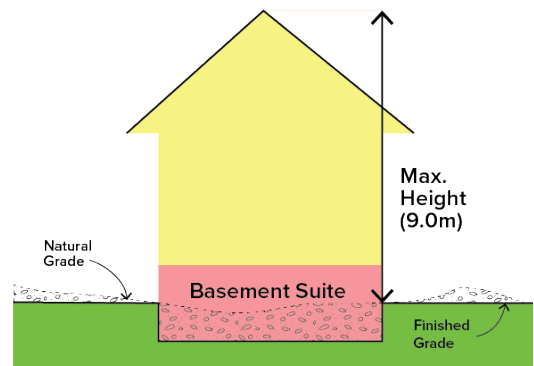
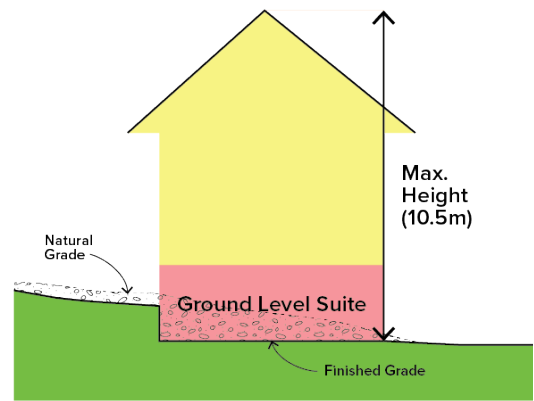
**When the secondary suite is in a basement or anywhere else in the semi-detached home, the maximum height for a semi-detached home is two storeys plus the basement.** Please refer to [page 8](#) for the definition of a basement suite. Height limits are as follows:

- Buildings with sloping roofs can be up to 9.0 metres (29.5 feet).
- Buildings with flat roofs can be up to up to 7.4 metres (24.3 feet).

**A semi-detached home may have only one storey above a basement or ground level suite.** Except in the R12 District, there are specific height limits for one-storey semi-detached homes.

**Height limits for a one-storey semi-detached home with a ground level suite are as follows:**

- Buildings with sloping roofs can be up to 7.62 metres (25 ft.)
- Buildings with flat roofs can be up to 6.1 metres (20 ft.)
- The height limit for all other one storey semi-detached homes is 5.5 metres (18 ft.), regardless of roof style.



**Above: Maximum height** - These examples depict maximum heights for two-storey semi-detached homes with sloping roofs.

## Measuring Height

Height is measured from the lower of the front average elevation or the rear average elevation to the highest point of the structure.

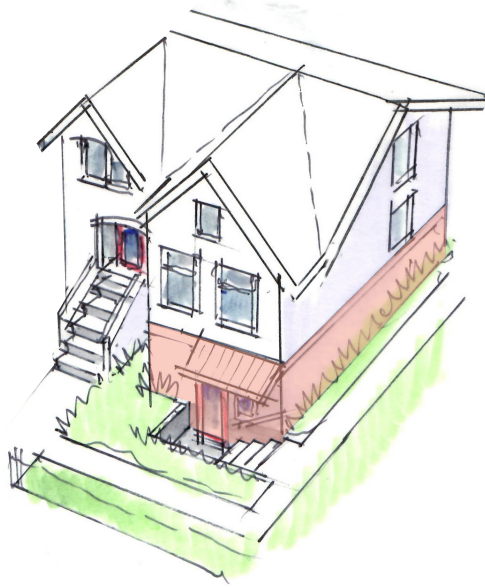
**TABLE 2: MAXIMUM BUILDING HEIGHTS**

	No Suite		Suite - Not Ground Level		Suite Ground Level	
	Sloping Roof	Flat Roof	Sloping Roof	Flat Roof	Sloping Roof	Flat Roof
R4/R5 One-Storey	5.5 m (18.0 ft.)	5.5 m (18.0 ft.)	5.5 m (18.0 ft.)	5.5 m (18.0 ft.)	7.62 m (25 ft.)	6.1 m (20 ft.)
R4/R5 Two-Storey	9 m (29.5 ft.)	7.4 m (24.3 ft.)	9 m (29.5 ft.)	7.4 m (24.3 ft.)	10.5 m (34.4 ft.)	8.9 m (29.2 ft.)
R12	7.62 m (25 ft.)	6.1 m (20 ft.)	9 m (29.5 ft.)	7.4 m (24.3 ft.)	10.5 m (34.4 ft.)	8.9 m (29.2 ft.)

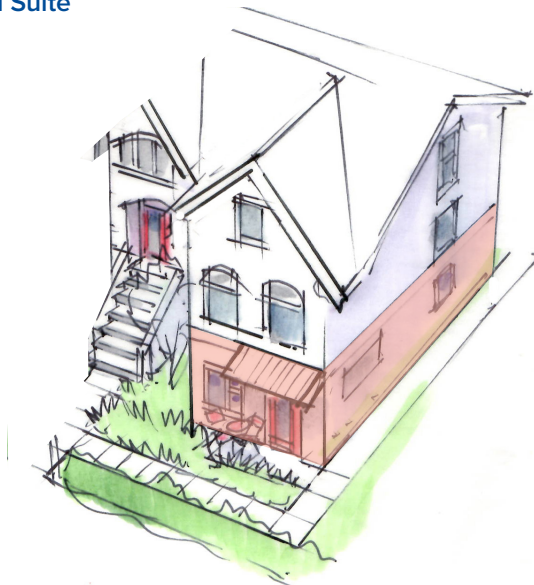
# ACCESSIBILITY

**Semi-detached homes containing *ground level suites* (see box, right) will be provided with additional height to support accessible entryways.** Bringing these suites up to ground level also improves the livability of these spaces. To demonstrate that a ground level suite has been built to a universal design standard, applicants must provide certification from [SAFERhome Standards Society](#) as part of the building permit process.

## Basement Suite



## Ground Level Suite



## Ground Level Suite vs Basement Suite

**Ground Level Suite** - A secondary suite that meets the universal design standard set out by the [SAFERhome Standards Society](#). It may be constructed at ground level (rather than in a basement) to support an accessible pathway to the front door. Additional height is permitted for semi-detached homes that include ground level suites.

**Basement Suite** - A secondary suite in which up to 50% of its height is below grade.

More detailed definitions can be found here: [Zoning ByLaw Definitions](#).

## What is Universal Design?

Universal Design can be applied to the design and construction of a home so that it can be adapted easily and cost-effectively to keep pace with changing accessibility needs without the need for costly upgrades or renovations. A home that is universally designed may also be more marketable. For more information review the [SAFERhome Standards](#).



# SIZE

There is no maximum floor area for a secondary suite, subject to the following:

- The suite must fit within the footprint of the semi-detached home, which is subject to floor area limits. These limits vary by zone.
- A floor containing a secondary suite, including a ground level or basement suite, may be added to a one-storey or two-storey semi-detached home without counting as an additional storey.
- In a semi-detached home, the floor area of a floor containing a secondary suite can not exceed the floor area of the storey next above or below it.

The minimum floor area for a secondary suite is 32.5 m<sup>2</sup> (350 sq. ft.).

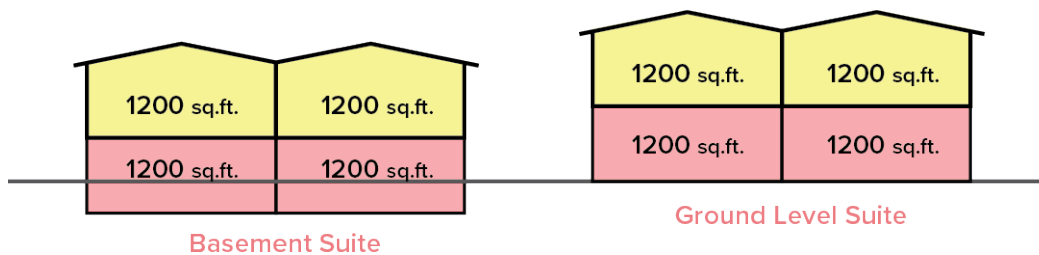
The top floor of a two-storey semi-detached home must be at least one third of the permitted above grade floor area. It has no maximum size but is indirectly limited by the size of the storey below.

## Defining Floor Area

Floor area is the total area of all floors, measured to the outer limit of the building.

## ONE-STOREY SEMI-DETACHED HOME WITH SUITES

(continued on next page)

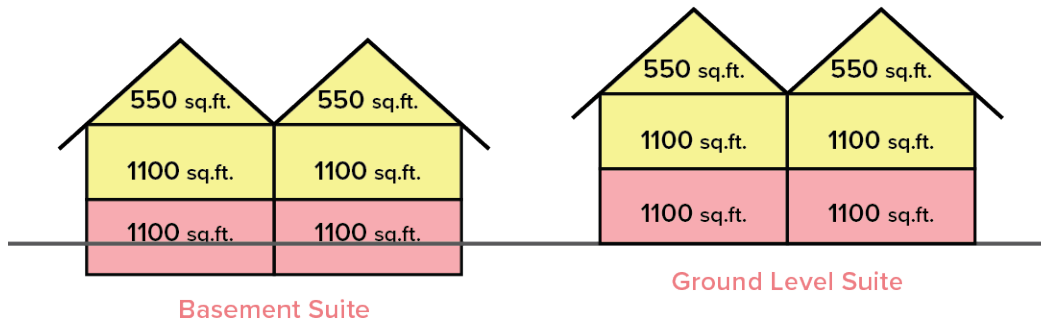


**Above: One-storey semi-detached homes with suites** - These examples are situated on a typical lot size in R4 and R5 zones. They present the maximum allowable floor area based on a lot size of 6,000 sq. ft. All numbers are in sq. ft.

**TABLE 3: MAXIMUM SIZE OF ONE-STOREY SEMI-DETACHED HOMES BASED ON LOT SIZE EXAMPLES**

Lot Size	Building Total (4 Units)	Average Floor Area Per Primary Dwelling (1 Unit)	Average Floor Area Per Secondary Suite (1 Unit)
306.6 m <sup>2</sup> (3,300 sq. ft.) <sup>1</sup>	245.3 m <sup>2</sup> (2,640 sq. ft.)	61.3 m <sup>2</sup> (660 sq. ft.)	61.3 m <sup>2</sup> (660 sq. ft.)
557.4 m <sup>2</sup> (6,000 sq. ft.)	445.9 m <sup>2</sup> (4,800 sq. ft.)	111.5 m <sup>2</sup> (1,200 sq. ft.)	111.5 m <sup>2</sup> (1,200 sq. ft.)
696.8 m <sup>2</sup> (7,500 sq. ft.)	463.5 m <sup>2</sup> (4,989.2 sq. ft.)	115.9 m <sup>2</sup> (1,247.3 sq. ft.) <sup>2</sup>	115.9 m <sup>2</sup> (1,247.3 sq. ft.) <sup>2</sup>
836.1 m <sup>2</sup> (9,000 sq. ft.)	463.5 m <sup>2</sup> (4,989.2 sq. ft.)	115.9 m <sup>2</sup> (1,247.3 sq. ft.) <sup>2</sup>	115.9 m <sup>2</sup> (1,247.3 sq. ft.) <sup>2</sup>

**TWO-STOREY SEMI-DETACHED HOME WITH SUITES**



**Above:** *Two-storey semi-detached homes with suites* - These examples are situated on a typical lot size in R4 and R5 zones. They present the maximum allowable floor area based on a lot size of 6,000 sq. ft. All numbers are in sq. ft.

**TABLE 4: MAXIMUM SIZE OF TWO-STOREY SEMI-DETACHED HOMES BASED ON LOT SIZE EXAMPLES**

Lot Size	Building Total (4 Units)	Average Floor Area Per Primary Dwelling (1 Unit)	Average Floor Area Per Secondary Suite (1 Unit)
306.6 m <sup>2</sup> (3,300 sq. ft.) <sup>1</sup>	306.6 m <sup>2</sup> (3,300 sq. ft.)	92 m <sup>2</sup> (990 sq. ft.)	61.3 m <sup>2</sup> (660 sq. ft.)
557.4 m <sup>2</sup> (6,000 sq. ft.)	511 m <sup>2</sup> (5,500 sq. ft.)	153.3 m <sup>2</sup> (1,650 sq. ft.)	102.2 m <sup>2</sup> (1,100 sq. ft.)
696.8 m <sup>2</sup> (7,500 sq. ft.)	580.6 m <sup>2</sup> (6,250 sq. ft.)	174.2 m <sup>2</sup> (1,875 sq. ft.)	116.1 m <sup>2</sup> (1,250 sq. ft.)
836.1 m <sup>2</sup> (9,000 sq. ft.)	650.3 m <sup>2</sup> (7,000 sq. ft.)	195.1 m <sup>2</sup> (2,100 sq. ft.) <sup>2</sup>	130.1 m <sup>2</sup> (1,400 sq. ft.)

<sup>1</sup> Smallest permitted lot size (R12 District only).

<sup>2</sup> Maximum permitted floor area of a primary dwelling unit in a two-storey semi-detached dwelling is 2,200 sq.ft. in the R4 District and 2,000 sq.ft. in the R5 and R12 Districts.

# PARKING

Two parking spaces are required on the property, one for each side of the semi-detached home. They must be uncovered or in a carport.

If a semi-detached home includes a regular secondary suite the required parking space must measure:

5.5 metres (18.04 feet) long  
2.6 metres (8.53 feet) wide  
2.3 metres (7.55 feet) high.

If a semi-detached home includes a ground level secondary suite the parking space must measure:

5.5 metres (18.04 feet) long  
3.4 metres (11.15 feet) wide  
2.3 metres (7.55 feet) high

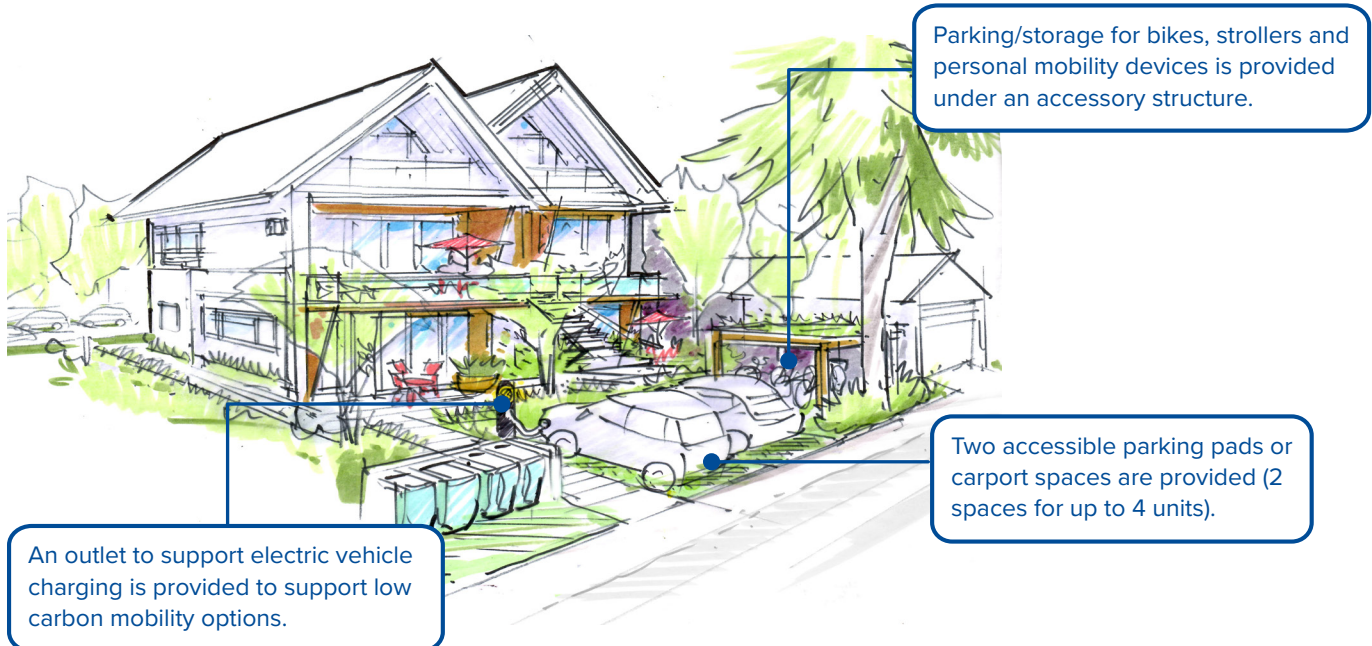
The parking area must include an energized outlet capable of providing Level 2 charging for an electric vehicle.

Garages and other detached accessory buildings may be up to 800 sq. ft in the R4, R5, R6, and RM6 zones.

Required parking must be accessed from a lane or, subject to the approval of the City of Burnaby's General Manager of Engineering, a side or rear street.

- **Parking/storage for bikes, strollers, and personal mobility devices is strongly encouraged**, and can be provided in detached accessory buildings, attached "bikeports", or bike lockers.
- **Additional parking spaces may be added but are not required.** If additional parking is provided, they can be uncovered, in a carport, or in a garage.

## Design Recommendations



# ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Newly constructed semi-detached homes with secondary suites must meet BC Energy Step Code Level 3.



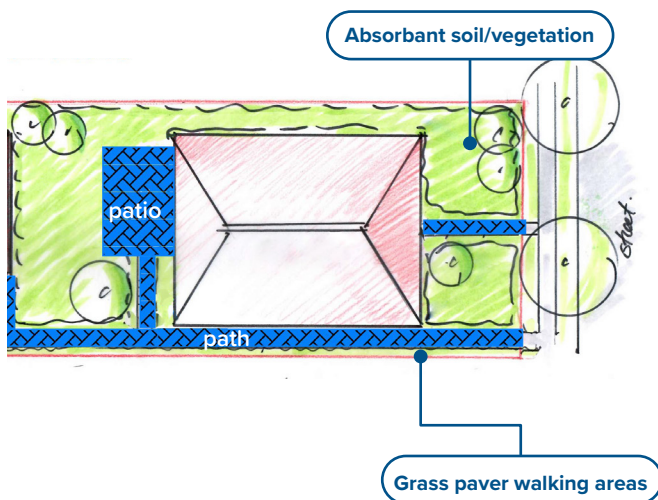
## BC Energy Step Code

The BC Energy Step Code is a performance-based Provincial standard that provides an incremental and consistent approach to achieving more energy-efficient buildings. It establishes measurable requirements for energy efficiency in new construction. It supports the City of Burnaby's Climate Action Framework.

Step 3 requirements such as making homes more airtight result in 20% greater energy efficiency. Learn more here: [Energy Step Code](#).

# RAINWATER MANAGEMENT

While a maximum of 70% of the lot may be impermeable (refer to [pg. 6](#)), this percentage can be further reduced through measures shown in the illustrations to the right. Permeable surfaces include green roofs, rain gardens, grass paver parking areas, and infiltration trenches.



## The Value of Permeable Surfaces

The purpose of decreasing impermeable surfaces (or increasing permeable surfaces) is to increase the amount of rainwater that infiltrates the soil. This infiltration replenishes groundwater, reduces run-off, lowers localized flood risk, and filters out many pollutants and sediments from the rainwater before it arrives in downstream waters. Further best practices can be found here: [Homeowner's Guide to Stormwater Management, Metro Vancouver](#).

**Left: Permeable Surfaces** - The diagram visualizes the relationship between permeable green spaces that allow for rainwater infiltration and impermeable surfaces, such as standard roofs and streets.

## PLANT SELECTION

The following resources provide recommendations for garden designs and plants that are unique to the climatic conditions in the Lower Mainland: [Grow Green Guide \(Metro Vancouver\)](#) and Gardening with [Native Plants in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley](#).

### *Design Recommendations:*

- **Non-invasive, eco-friendly plants should be selected wherever possible to create and maintain a sustainable garden, lawn space, or balcony containers.**

## TREE PROTECTION

Burnaby's Tree Bylaw applies to development on private property and includes requirements for replacement tree planting, if removal of a significant tree is required for development. The Tree Bylaw is currently under review to better protect mature trees. More information can be found here: [Burnaby Tree ByLaw FAQs](#)

### *Design Recommendations:*

- **Newly constructed buildings should be planned and designed to retain existing trees where possible and prioritize opportunities to plant new trees.**

### **What Are Non-invasive, Eco-friendly Plants?**

Non-invasive, eco-friendly plants thrive in the local climate without needing chemicals or lots of water. They help conserve water, absorb rainwater, control invasive species, and increase biodiversity.

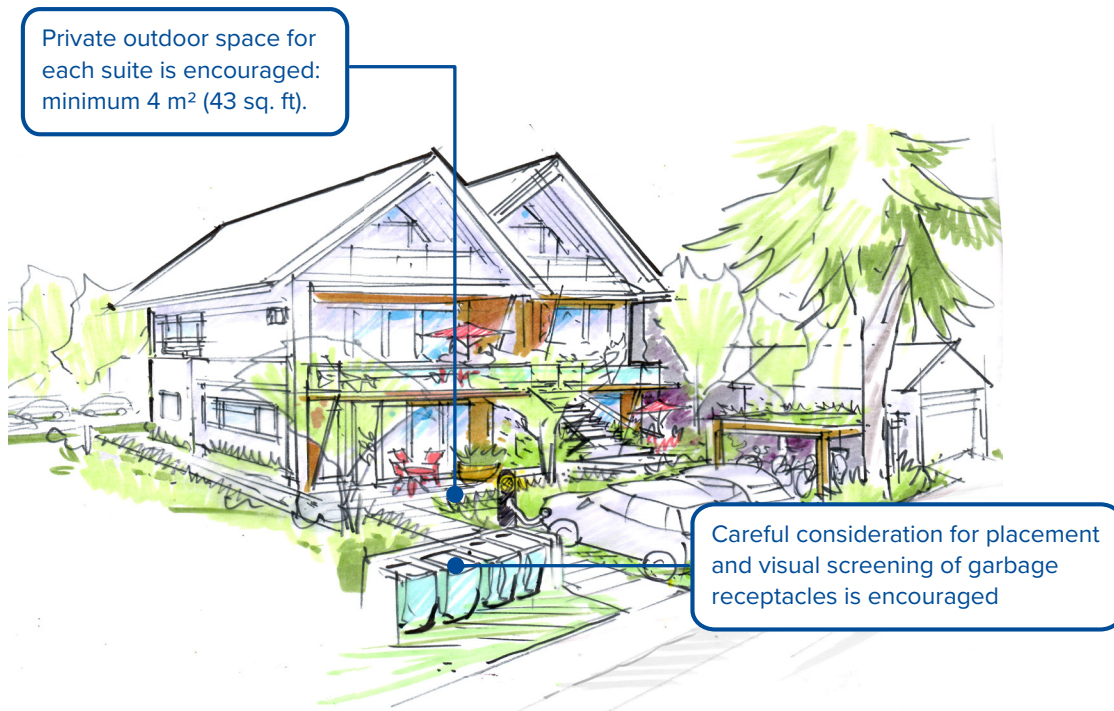
### **Why Do We Strive to Protect Trees?**

Trees offer a diverse range of valuable functions, including shading, canopy cover, soil stability, weather protection, and more. Trees and shrubs improve soil and water conservation, store carbon, moderate local climate by providing shade, regulate temperature extremes, increase wildlife habitat, and improve the land's capacity to adapt to climate change.

# OUTDOOR SPACES

## *Design Recommendations:*

- **A minimum of 4m<sup>2</sup> (43 sq. ft) of private outdoor space per suite is encouraged.** Examples of private outdoor space include yard space, patios, decks, or balconies.
- **Careful consideration should be made for placement and visual screening of garbage and recycling containers.** Refer to [pg. 15](#) ("Servicing and Utilities") for further information.
- **Garbage and recycling containers for both the suites and semi-detached homes should be located together** for efficient use of space.
- **Containers should be situated in a way that provides sufficient clearance for City truck access.** Clearance should be at least 1 metre (3 feet) of space on all sides and 3 metres (10 feet) above.



## ADDRESSING & ENTRANCES

“S” prefixes will be added to the main address to identify secondary suites (e.g. S1 – 1234 Main Street).

### *Design Recommendations:*

- An address number that is a minimum of 15 centimetres (6 inches) high and visible from the street should be provided for all units. A mailbox that is also visible from the street should be provided for each unit, and should be either numbered with the address or be situated adjacent to the address numbers.
- A dedicated exterior door that has a welcoming and covered (i.e. weather-protected) entrance should be provided for the suite.

## SERVICING & UTILITIES

Servicing for secondary suites in semi-detached homes is the same as that in secondary suites in single-family homes. More information can be found here: [BC Building Code Requirements](#).

An annual supplementary utility fee is charged for each secondary suite that is rented out. Further information can be found here: [Residential Utility Fees](#).

No additional garbage/recycling receptacles is required for a new secondary suite.

A semi-detached home may have up to one garbage container per side. These can be any size, to a maximum of 360 litres each. Standard residential garbage rates apply, based on the size of the container. Garbage disposal fees can be found here: [Residential Utility Fees](#).

Secondary suite entrances are dedicated and visible from the street, and are encouraged to be covered in order to offer protection from inclement weather.



Clear addressing is visible from the street.

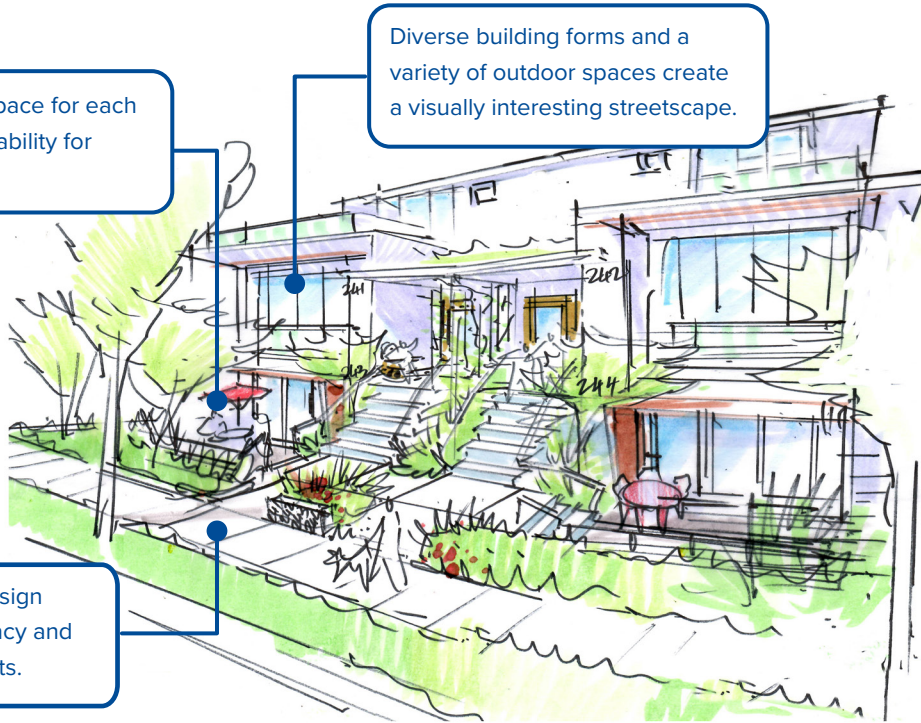
## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Secondary suites in semi-detached homes provide the opportunity to offer more housing diversity and affordability in Burnaby's neighbourhoods. They can also contribute to the livability of the neighbourhood, as shown in the illustrations below.

Private outdoor space for each suite improves livability for residents.

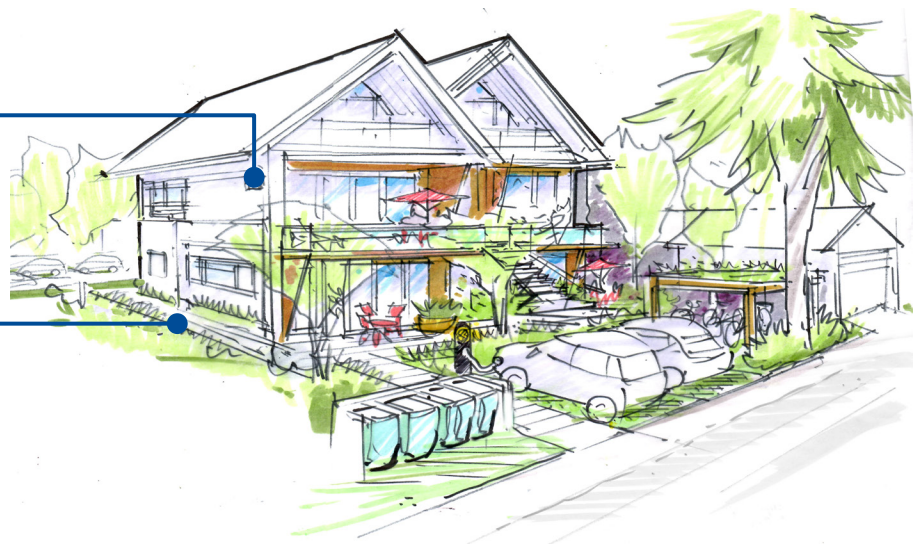
Diverse building forms and a variety of outdoor spaces create a visually interesting streetscape.

Landscape design balances privacy and visibility of units.



Inclusion of down-lit features for lights higher than 8 feet help keep light pollution away from neighbouring living spaces.

A continuous fire access path from the street provides safe and efficient access to emergency personnel.





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# GETTING STARTED

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## Building Permit

To build a suite in a semi-detached home in Burnaby, you will need a building permit. A building permit provides assurance that the building complies with life safety, health, and zoning requirements of the Province and City. The building permit process includes the following steps:

1

**Get started.** Refer to: [Development, Permits & Construction](#) for informational brochures and guides on how to get started. This also provides general building information and application forms.

2

**Apply for Engineering preapplication approval.** Staff will review your property and provide direction on what is needed for the Building Permit Application.

3

**Submit a complete building permit application.** Staff will assess the application prior to intake. You may be asked to provide additional information at this time. If your project includes a ground level suite, plans must be stamped by the SAFERhome Standards Society prior to submission.

4

**Plan review.** Staff will review the submitted plans for compliance with municipal and provincial regulations. You may be asked to provide additional information at this time or submit revised documentation.

5

**Receive your Building Permit.** When the application is approved, you will then receive a building permit to start construction.

6

**Start construction.** Construction must start within 180 days of receiving a building permit. Any revisions to the plans at this stage will require a revision to be submitted and a revision fee will be charged.

7

**Schedule inspections.** You will receive a detailed list of the inspections that are required. You will need to schedule these inspections at the work progresses.

8

**Certificate of occupancy.** When the final inspection has been completed, you will receive a Certificate of Occupancy and can move in!

## Variances

If you are unable to meet all of the zoning regulations due to hardship and require minor changes to the suite in semi-detached home development, you may be able to apply for a variance. Potentially permitted variances include encroachments into required setbacks, heights, number of storeys, and building depth. Variances on density are not permitted.

## Heritage

The City of Burnaby's heritage program offers incentives for owners of heritage houses to preserve and retain older character homes in the City.

For more information about opportunities available for your property, please contact [heritage@burnaby.ca](mailto:heritage@burnaby.ca) or 604-294-7435.

## Preapproved Plans

The City is setting up a pre-approved plan program to assist with the development process. This will involve providing access to building plans that demonstrate best design practices and comply with BC Building Code and City of Burnaby regulations. Pre-approved plans will still need to be reviewed for site-specific compliance as part of the building permit process. More information on this program will be provided on the Housing Choices website as soon as it is available.

**CITY OF BURNABY**  
PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT

***Phone***

Building Permits:  
(604) 294-7985

Other Enquiries:  
(604) 294-7400

***Email***

[housingchoices@burnaby.ca](mailto:housingchoices@burnaby.ca)

***Website***

[www.burnaby.ca/housingchoices](http://www.burnaby.ca/housingchoices)