

Frequently asked questions regarding the addition of duplexes to most RS zones

How will this impact land values?

As proposed, the new duplex option will not allow an increase in floor area over what is currently allowed in these areas (0.7 FSR). Duplexes are not permitted in conjunction with a laneway house. This approach is expected to limit any potential land value escalation.

What will happen to neighbourhood character?

Allowing duplexes will enable modest densification that is reflective of the scale of other housing types currently permitted in these neighbourhoods.

To build a duplex, do properties have to be subdivided so that each duplex unit has a separate title?

When a new duplex is constructed and has not yet been occupied, a strata plan can be deposited for registration in the Provincial Land Title Office, without requiring any City application or City approval on the strata plan.

Strata title property is a form of ownership in which a property owner owns their individual unit, plus a share of the common areas of the site, or common property. Most strata developments on private land are considered a freehold form of ownership. It is not possible to create separate titles by subdividing into standard “fee-simple” lots, as in most cases the resulting lots would not conform to minimum subdivision standards for width, area and street frontage, and the City would also have to require “party wall” and other types of easement agreements, which would add to the overall project costs. These type of easements are not required for strata plans as they are implied in the legislation (Strata Property Act).

[See an example of a strata plan](#)

Would the construction of a laneway house preclude building a duplex in the future?

As proposed, a laneway house is not allowed to be retained if the home is replaced with a duplex. Combining a duplex and a laneway house would financially out-compete the character incentive program and reduce its effectiveness.

What is the difference between a lock-off unit and a secondary suite?

Lock-off units are small, self-contained units within a larger principal dwelling unit. They have an external door and a shared internal door which can be locked, enabling them to be independent units, or unlocked so they can be used as part of the principal dwelling. This allows households to expand or contract their space needs over time. Lock-off units may be rented, but cannot be strata-titled or sold separately, and do not have their own address.

Secondary suites are self-contained units within a larger one- or two-family dwelling. They have an external door and their own address, and may have shared internal access to the principal unit. Secondary suites are intended to provide long-term secondary rental housing options, and cannot be strata-titled or sold separately.

In order to better differentiate between lock-off units and secondary suites, the size of lock-off units are limited to 320 ft².

If I build a duplex, can each duplex have a suite or lock-off unit?

Duplexes on lots 334 m² or greater, but less than 511 m² can have a suite or lock-off unit. Duplexes on lots with a site area of 511 m² or greater must include at least one secondary suite.

How much parking is required for a duplex?

A minimum of 2 spaces are required for a duplex and a minimum of 3 spaces are required for a duplex with secondary suite(s). Parking for lock-off units (less than 320 ft²) is not required.

Does an “outright” process for duplexes mean that there is no design review?

New duplexes will go through an outright approval process. Staff in the Development Branch will review each application for compliance with the External Design Regulations which are “built into” the zoning, not a separate document like guidelines.

Can I convert my existing one-family dwelling to a two-family dwelling (duplex)?

Duplexes are an option for new construction only.

Converting existing houses to two separate units to be strata titled (sold) would require substantial alterations to the existing house layout to provide 2 separate units, as well as to meet required building code upgrades which can be very costly. There is an option for a second (rental) unit within a one-family house through the secondary suite program, which has less onerous requirements in terms of code upgrades.

In addition, there is a new option in all RS zones which allows pre-1940s character houses to be converted to contain 2 or more strata units. This is intended as an incentive to retention of these homes to preserve neighbourhood character. Additional incentives (density) assist in offsetting the cost of the conversion and building upgrades.

Will this new housing be affordable?

The Making Room Housing Program was designed to address housing affordability and meet specific supply targets. Duplexes will allow for an increase in supply of housing in low-density areas, and a new duplex unit is typically more affordable than a new single-family house. Duplexes can include lock-off units and secondary suites, which provide more affordable rental housing options in these neighbourhoods as well as a “mortgage helper”.

Further work will look at additional choices such as triplexes, four-plexes, townhouses and apartments to produce housing with improved affordability.

What is the process for applying to build a duplex on my property?

For permit enquiries, please contact the Building and Development Services Centre at 604-873-7611.