

Building Inspections

Secondary Suites – Building Code Requirements

The following information is a summary of Section 9.36 of the *BC Building Code* requirements regulating the construction of Secondary Suites. This summary is not an exhaustive list of the requirements, but rather an overview of the regulations in the *BC Building Code*. This summary is provided by the City of Nanaimo for information only. An official copy of the *BC Building Code* and Section 9.36 can be obtained by contacting the Queen's Printer in Victoria.

SCOPE

It is intended that Section 9.36 of the *BC Building Code* apply to the construction of a Secondary Suite, whether this construction be a renovation or an addition to an existing building or a new building that incorporates a Secondary Suite. This Section may also be used as a standard for assessing an existing Secondary Suite in a house.

For purposes of the *BC Building Code* regulations, in order for an additional dwelling unit to be considered a Secondary Suite, the following criteria must be met: (other criteria under the Municipal Bylaws of the City of Nanaimo will apply)

1. The Secondary Suite is in a house (single-family dwelling). i.e. not in buildings of mixed use (commercial, industrial, etc.) or buildings of multi-residential use (duplex, etc.).
2. The area of the Secondary Suite cannot exceed 90 m² (approx. 970 ft²) of finished living area (this does not include the areas used for common storage, laundry facilities or egress).
3. The area of the Secondary Suite cannot exceed 40 percent of the total living floor area of the building it is located. (the floor area of the building does not include attached storage garages).
4. Under the *Condominium Act* a Secondary Suite cannot be subdivided from the building it is part of.

FIRE SEPARATION INFORMATION

Fire Separations for Exits

- 9.36.2.7.** Except when the building is sprinklered, every exit other than an exit doorway shall be separated from adjacent floor areas by a fire separation:
- a) having a fire-resistance rating of 45 minutes, or
 - b) having a fire-resistance rating of 30 minutes where the dwelling units are equipped with smoke alarms as referenced in Article 9.36.2.19.

Openings Near Unenclosed Exit Stairs and Ramps

- 9.36.2.8.(1)** Where an unenclosed exterior exit stair or ramp provides the **only means of egress** from a dwelling unit in a building that contains a Secondary Suite and is exposed to fire from unprotected openings in the exterior wall of another fire compartment, the openings shall be protected with wired glass in fixed steel frames or with glass block.

Separation of Residential Suites

- 9.36.2.15.(1)** Dwelling units in a building, which contains a Secondary Suite, shall be separated from each other by the following:
- a fire separation having a 45 minute fire resistance rating for a one storey unit or a one-hour fire resistance rating for a two storey unit.
 - a fire separation having a fire-resistance rating of not less than 30 minutes where the dwelling units are equipped with smoke alarms in conformance with Article 9.36.2.19., or
 - a fire separation having no required fire resistance rating where the building is sprinklered.

Separation of Public Corridors

- 9.36.2.16.(1)** A common corridor serving a building, which contains a Secondary Suite, shall be separated from the suites by the following:
- a fire separation with a fire resistance rating of 45 minutes.
 - a fire separation having a fire-resistance rating of not less than 30 minutes where the dwelling units are equipped with smoke alarms as indicated in Article 9.36.2.20., or
 - a fire separation having no required fire resistance rating where the building is sprinklered.

SAFETY

Bedroom Windows

- 9.9.10.(1)** Except where the suite is sprinklered, each bedroom shall have at least one outside window or exterior door openable from the inside without the use of keys, tools or special knowledge and without the removal of sashes or hardware.
- (2)** Such windows shall provide an unobstructed opening of not less than 380 mm (15") in height or width and .35 m² (543") in area and maintain such an opening during an emergency without the need for additional support.

Travel Distance to Exit or Egress Doors

- 9.36.2.10.(1)** In a building which contains a Secondary Suite, the travel distance from a floor level in a dwelling unit to an exit or egress door may exceed one storey provided the floor level within the dwelling unit is served by an openable window with an unobstructed opening 1000 mm high x 55 mm wide located so the sill is not more than 1 m above the floor and not more than 7 m above the grade outside.

Shared egress facilities

- 9.36.2.11.(2)** Each dwelling unit shall be provided with a second and separate means of egress or an opening window conforming to Sentence 9.36.2.10. where the egress door from either dwelling unit opens onto an exit stairway which serves both suites, a public corridor servicing both suites and served by a single exit stairway, exterior passageway or balcony serving both suites and served by a single exit stairway.

Smoke Alarms

- 9.36.2.19.(1)** Except as permitted in Section (3), an additional smoke alarm of photo-electric type conforming to CAN/ULC-S531 “Standard for Smoke Alarms”, shall be installed in each suite.
- (2) Smoke alarms required in Sentence (1) shall be interconnected so that the activation of the additional alarm in one suite will cause the additional alarm in the other suite to sound.
- (3) The additional interconnected smoke alarm is not required to be installed in each suite provided:
- (a) the fire separations required in Articles 9.36.2.16. and Article 9.36.2.17 have a fire resistance rating of 45 minutes or greater, or
 - (b) the building is sprinklered.

PLUMBING AND HEATING

Combustible Drain, Waste and Vent Piping

- 9.36.2.14.(1)** Combustible drain, waste and vent piping is permitted to be located within or penetrate a fire separation required to have a fire-resistance rating provided:
- a) except for the permitted penetration in clause (b), the combustible piping is located within an assembly protected by a membrane of a minimum 12.7 mm gypsum board,
 - b) the pipe must be tightly fitted in the opening in the gypsum board,
 - c) the combustible piping does not penetrate the gypsum board protection membrane on the underside of a horizontal fire separation.
- (2) Combustible drain, waste and vent piping enclosed in an assembly or protected as described in Sentence (1) is permitted on both sides of a fire separation.

Air Ducts and Fire Dampers

- 9.36.2.17.(1)** Heating and ventilation systems between suites must be separate or be designed and inspected by a Mechanical Engineer.
- (2) Ducts penetrating fire separations need not be equipped with fire dampers provided they are noncombustible and all openings in the duct system serve only one fire compartment.

ROOM / EGRESS DIMENSIONS

Height of Rooms or Spaces

- 9.36.2.1.(1)** The minimum height of rooms or spaces in a Secondary Suite shall be not less than 2.0 m (79”) in all finished living areas.

Exit Stairs

- 9.36.2.3.(1)** Exit stairs within or serving a building, which contains a Secondary Suite, shall:
- a) have a minimum width, measured between wall faces or guards of not less than 860 mm, and
 - b) conform with Type II stair requirements:
 - minimum rise: 125 mm
 - run: 210 mm
 - maximum rise: 200 mm
 - run: 355 mm

Means of Egress

9.36.2.6. The width of every common corridor that serves a building that contains a Secondary Suite shall be not less than 860 mm.

Doors in a Means of Egress

- 9.36.2.9.(1)** Every exit door or door that opens into or is located within a public corridor or other facility that provides access to exit from a suite shall:
- a) be not less than 1980 mm (78") high, and
 - b) have a clear opening of not less than 800 mm (31.5"), and
 - c) be permitted to swing inward.

SPATIAL SEPARATIONS

Exposing Building Face of Houses

- 9.36.2.18.(1)** The exposing building face requires a fire-resistance rating of not less than 45 minutes where the limiting distance is less than 1.2 m (4') and where the limiting distance is less than 0.6 m (2') the exposing building face must be clad with noncombustible material.
- (2)** Window openings in the exposing building face referred to in Sentence (1) shall not be permitted if the limiting distance is less than 1.2 m (4') and shall be limited in conformance with the requirements for unprotected openings in Article 9.10.14.1 where the limiting distance is 1.2 m (4') or greater. (ie: 8 percent openings permitted @ 1.5m).