

Secondary Suites in Existing Dwelling Units

Alternate Compliance Methods

BC Building Code Table 1.1.1.1(6)

Overview: The following table is an excerpt from the *BC Building Code (BCBC)* detailing alternative methods permitted in existing buildings for some of the Building Code requirements for construction of secondary suites. The alternate compliance methods include alternatives to heights of rooms, doors and stairs, exit exposure, assemblies for sound and fire-resistance ratings, and fire-resistance ratings of columns and walls supporting a fire separation. The alternate compliance methods may only be used where the existing construction acts as a barrier to compliance with the requirements for suites in Part 9 of the BC Building Code. All other requirements of the Building Code relating to secondary suites in dwelling units apply to the installation of a secondary suite in an existing dwelling unit. Refer to our companion guide, [Secondary Suites - Building Code and Zoning Requirements](#), for more information.

This alternate compliance method was adopted 2019-DEC-12 as an amendment to the 2018 BC Building Code.

If alternate compliance methods are proposed to be used in a Building Permit submission, they must be clearly identified on the Building Permit plans submitted.

Code Requirement in Division B	Alternate Compliance Method (References to Division B)
<p>Ceiling Heights of Rooms or Spaces</p> <p>Sentence 9.5.3.1. and Table 9.5.3.1. Ceiling height shall be not less than 2.1m (6' 10-11/16") over the minimum area required in Table 9.5.3.1.</p>	<p>Ceiling Heights of Rooms or Spaces</p> <p>Except as required by Sentence 9.9.3.4.(3), the minimum ceiling heights in a <i>secondary suite</i> over the required minimum area as indicated in Table 9.5.3.1. shall be not less than 1.95m (6' 4-3/4"). It shall be possible to travel from the required area of one room to the required areas of all other rooms within the <i>secondary suite</i> without reduction of the ceiling height to less than 1.95m.</p> <p>Note: 2m (6' 6-3/4") minimum height in an exit corridor (9.9.3.4.(3)).</p> <p>Except as required by Sentence 9.9.3.4.(3), the minimum clear height under beams and ducting, including where located over stairs, in a <i>secondary suite</i> shall be not less than 1.85m (6' 3/4").</p>
<p>Doorway Opening Sizes</p> <p>Sentence 9.5.5.1.(1) and Table 9.5.5.1.: Doorway openings shall be designed to accommodate swing-type and folding doors not less than 1.98m (6' 6") high.</p>	<p>Doorway Opening Sizes</p> <p>Except for <i>exit</i> doors and for doors serving <i>public corridors</i> and <i>exit</i> corridors that serve a house with a <i>secondary suite</i>, doorway openings within a <i>secondary suite</i> shall be designed to accommodate swing-type and folding doors not less than 1.89m (6' 2-7/16") high.</p>
<p>Height over Stairs</p> <p>Sentence 9.8.2.2.(3): The clear height over stairs shall be not less than 1.95m (6' 4-3/4").</p>	<p>Height over Stairs</p> <p>Except for stairs in a <i>public corridor</i> or <i>exit</i> corridor that serve a house with a <i>secondary suite</i>, the clear height over stairs that are located under existing beams and existing ducting in a house with a <i>secondary suite</i> shall be not less than 1.85m (6' -3/4").</p>

Secondary Suites in Existing Dwellings - Alternative Compliance Methods

Code Requirement in Division B	Alternate Compliance Method
<p>Openings Near Unenclosed Exterior Exit Stairs and Ramps</p> <p>Sentence 9.9.4.4.(1): <i>Unprotected openings</i> in exterior walls that are within 3m (9' 10-1/8") horizontally and less than 10m (32' 9-11/16") below or less than 5m (16' 4-7/8") above an unenclosed exterior <i>exit</i> stair or ramp of house with a <i>secondary suite</i> shall be protected where the unenclosed exterior <i>exit</i> stair or ramp provides the only <i>means of egress</i> from a <i>suite</i> and is exposed to fire from <i>unprotected openings</i> in the exterior walls of another <i>dwelling unit</i>, ancillary space, or common space.</p>	<p>Openings Near Unenclosed Exterior Exit Stairs and Ramps</p> <p>Protection of the <i>unprotected openings</i> as described in Sentence 9.9.4.4.(1) is not required when all <i>smoke alarms</i> within a house with a <i>secondary suite</i> are of photo-electric type and interconnected as described in Clause 9.10.19.5.(2)(a).</p>
<p>Openings Near Exit Doors</p> <p>Sentence 9.9.4.6.(1): Where an exterior <i>exit</i> door in one <i>fire compartment</i> is within 3m (9' 10-1/8") horizontally of an <i>unprotected opening</i> in another <i>fire compartment</i> and the exterior walls of these <i>fire compartments</i> intersect at an exterior angle of less than 135°, the opening shall be protected.</p>	<p>Openings Near Exit Doors</p> <p>Protection of the <i>unprotected openings</i> as described in Sentence 9.9.4.6.(1) is not required when all <i>smoke alarms</i> within a house with a <i>secondary suite</i> are of photo-electric type and interconnected as described in Clause 9.10.19.5.(2)(a).</p>
<p>Fire-Resistance and Fire-Protection Ratings</p> <p>Sentence 9.10.3.1.(3): In a house with a <i>secondary suite</i>, where a minimum <i>fire-resistance rating</i> of 30 minutes is permitted, it is permitted to use wood-frame construction where stud and joist spaces are filled with absorptive material, resilient metal channel spaced 400mm or 600mm (16" or 24") o.c. is on one side, and not less than 12.7mm (1/2") thick gypsum board is installed on ceilings and on both sides of walls.</p>	<p>Fire-Resistance and Fire-Protection Ratings</p> <p>Adding resilient metal channel spaced 400mm or 600mm (16" or 24") o.c. and an additional layer of not less than 12.7mm (1/2") gypsum board to one side of an existing finished wall assembly that has not less than 12.7mm gypsum board on each side or an existing finished floor-ceiling assembly that has not less than 12.7mm gypsum on the ceiling side is permitted to be used where a 30-minute <i>fire-resistance rating</i> is required.</p>
<p>Fire-Resistance Ratings for Walls, Columns and Arches</p> <p>Sentence 9.10.8.3.(1): <i>Loadbearing walls, columns, and arches in the storey immediately</i> below a floor or roof assembly shall have a <i>fire-resistance rating</i> of not less than that required for the supported floor or roof assembly.</p>	<p>Fire-Resistance Ratings for Walls, Columns and Arches</p> <p>Except for heavy timber elements and those of masonry or concrete construction, light frame walls, columns, arches and beams as well as <i>loadbearing</i> steel elements that support floors between <i>dwelling units</i> in a house with a <i>secondary suite</i>, including their common spaces, shall be protected by not less than 12.7mm (1/2") thick gypsum board.</p>

Secondary Suites in Existing Dwellings - Alternative Compliance Methods

Code Requirement in Division B	Alternate Compliance Method
<p>Sound Transmission</p> <p>Sentence 9.11.1.1.(2): Each <i>dwelling unit</i> shall be separated from every other space in a house with a <i>secondary suite</i> in which noise may be transmitted by construction having joist and stud spaces filled with sound-absorbing material, resilient channel on one side of the separation, and 12.7mm (1/2") thick gypsum board on ceilings and on both sides of walls, or by either construction providing an STC rating of not less than 43, or by using a separating assembly and adjoining construction providing an ASTC rating of not less than 40.</p>	<p>Sound Transmission</p> <p>The assemblies and adjoining constructions that separate the <i>dwelling units</i> in a house with a <i>secondary suite</i>, including their common spaces, need not comply with Clause 9.11.1.1.(2)(a) where resilient metal channel spaced 400mm or 600mm (16" or 24") o.c. and an additional layer of not less than 12.7mm (1/2") gypsum board is added to one side of an existing finished assembly.</p>

Additional guidelines and forms are available on the City of Nanaimo web site www.nanaimo.ca or at our office, 411 Dunsmuir Street. If you have any questions or require clarification, please contact a commercial building official at our office at 250-755-4429.

This guideline should not be used as a substitute for existing building codes and other regulations. The building owner is responsible for compliance with all codes, bylaws, and other regulations whether or not described in this guideline. The 2018 BC Building Code is available on line at <http://www.bccodes.ca/building-code.html>