



Edmonton

# Secondary Suite Design Guide

Development Services

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The sources for this guide are:

- National Building Code - 2023 Alberta Edition (NBC(AE)),
- National Research Council (NRC),
- Edmonton Zoning Bylaw (ZBL) 20001.

Every project is unique. Commentary and clarifications are for information only and may not apply to conditions or circumstances specific to a particular project. Refer to the applicable source documents for exact wording and final determination of compliance.

## What is a Secondary Suite?

*A secondary suite, together with the principal dwelling units form a single real estate entity.*

A secondary suite is a dwelling that is subordinate to, and located within, a building in the form of single detached house, semi-detached house, row house, or backyard house. A secondary suite is not a principal dwelling. A secondary suite has:

- A separate entrance from the principal dwelling, either from a common indoor landing or directly from outside the building.
- Less floor area than the principal dwelling.
- Together with the principal dwelling, forms a single real estate entity that cannot be separated by condominium conversion or subdivision.

A secondary suite is commonly below the principal dwelling unit of the House, but may be on the same level or above it and may have more than one storey.

Each unit in a semi-detached house, row house or multi-unit backyard house is considered a “house” for this purpose. A house may not contain more than two dwelling units: the main home, referred to in this guide as the principal dwelling, and the secondary suite, as well as any common spaces. These include storage, service rooms, laundry or halls and stairs used for access and egress (exit) routes.

If a secondary suite is planned to be added in the future, review the [Suite Rough-In](#) section. [Access, egress](#) and many other features should be carefully planned early on.



## Firewall Requirements in a Row House and Multi-Unit Backyard House

The current Building Code, the National Building Code 2023 - Alberta Edition (NBC-(AE)) limits the number of principal houses or backyard house units with secondary suites to 2 unless it is constructed with a firewall. A firewall is a robust type of non-combustible fire separation designed to remain standing if part of the structure on one side of it collapses in a fire.

The City of Edmonton has two policies that help with code compliance in row houses with secondary suites:

### [Policy B23-01: Fire Separation Between Row Houses with More Than Two Secondary Suites](#)

- This policy describes an acceptable party wall construction option deemed to provide a level of safety and performance at least equal to the prescriptive solutions NBC(AE);Div B: 9.10.11.2.(2).
- Use of the policy requires submission of a Letter of Construction Intention.

### [Policy 19-03: Area Separation Walls \(ASW\) for a Row House with Secondary Suite](#)

- This policy describes an acceptable non-masonry firewall construction option deemed to provide a level of protection and performance equal or better than prescriptive solutions found in NBC(AE),
- Use of the policy requires submission of a Letter of Construction Intention.

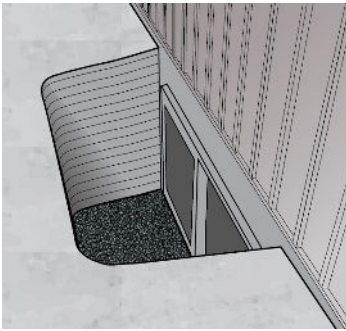
### **Important Notes:**

- Apartment buildings cannot have secondary suites.
- A principal dwelling can only have one (1) secondary suite. Together they form a single real estate entity.

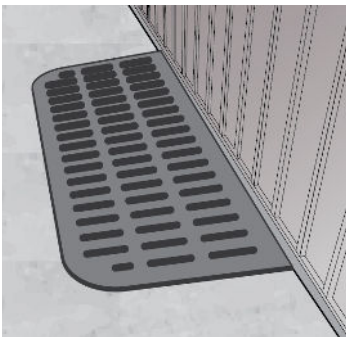
- Row houses with 5 or more units require involvement of a design professional per NBC(AE):Div C:2.4.1.1.(1), however, secondary suites are not counted as dwelling units for this purpose per 2.4.1.1.(2).

## Exterior Access and Egress/Exit Planning

Refer to the [Small Building Access Policy](#) for requirements and visual examples.



Window well, flush with the surrounding sidewalk, cover temporarily removed.



Window well cover, not posing a tripping hazard

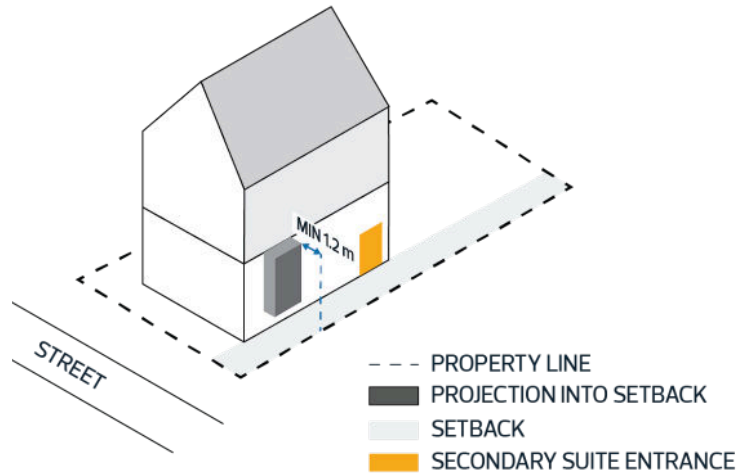
A 'means of egress' is the route from anywhere in a building to the exterior ground level and from there to a safe place such as a public roadway. A secondary suites must adhere to access and egress requirements outlined in the Zoning Bylaw, and the building and fire codes. These regulations mandate a minimum 0.9 metres wide hard surface path leading from the street or alley, if one exists, directly to the main entrance (per [ZBL 20001: 5.80.2.1.1](#) and [Small Building Access Policy](#)). The main entry of the principal dwelling and the Secondary suite may be a separate exterior door or a single door leading to an interior common area landing. Having access to the secondary suite through the principal dwelling only is not permitted. The pathway to the main entrance not only serves as the primary entry point for residents but also as a critical access route for firefighters and other emergency personnel (fire and ambulance). Any gate along this path must be non-locking and capable of opening to 0.9m (see figure below).

Window well covers can be installed over wells that serve both as an access/egress paths and an egress windows if they meet the following conditions:

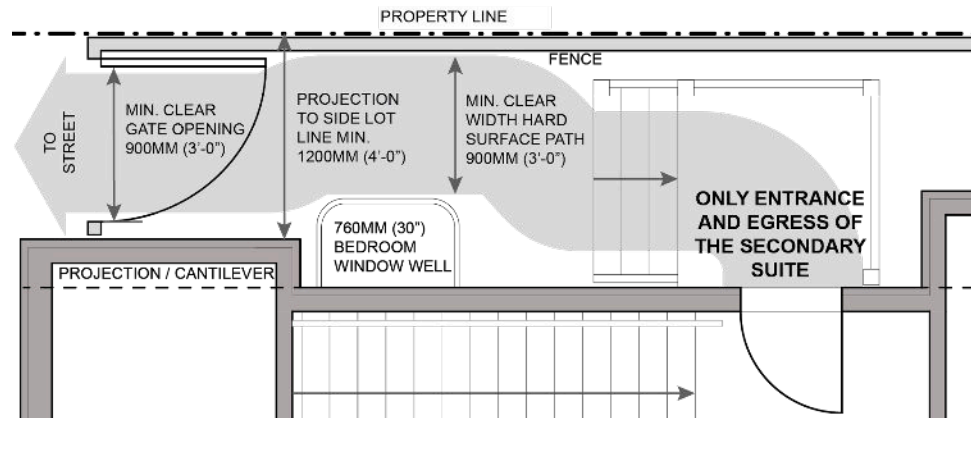
- **Structural Soundness:** Must be strong enough to support foot traffic, (including the weight of furniture or appliances during delivery).
- **Easy Opening:** Openable from the inside without needing keys, tools, or special knowledge of the opening mechanism (as per 9.9.10 egress from bedrooms).
- **No Tripping Hazard:** The best practice guideline is:
  - Installed flush with the surrounding sidewalk, OR
  - A maximum 6mm change in level, OR
  - Bevelled edges with a 1:2 slope (rise to run) and a maximum 7-13mm rise.

- Openings:** Must not have openings greater than 13mm in one direction, and the long dimensions of any openings must be perpendicular to the direction of travel.

*Egress from a side entry door must be provided with acceptable clear egress width to the front street.*



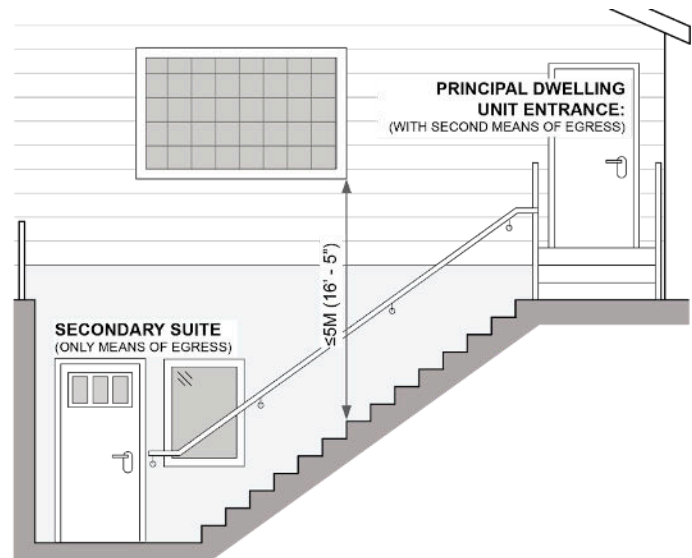
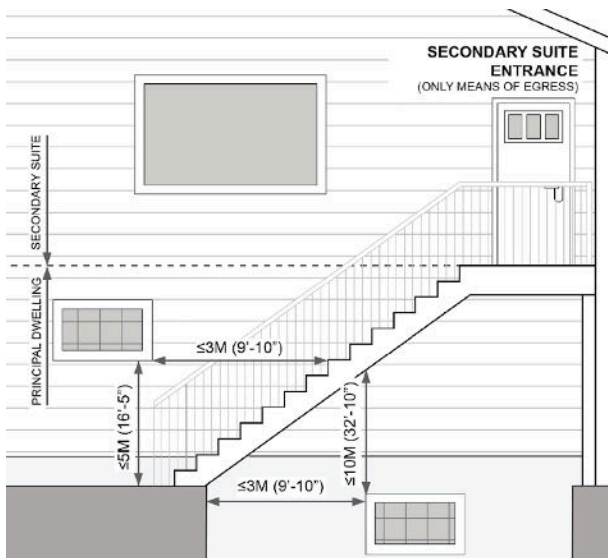
Where the main entrance to a secondary suite is located further from the street than a projection (cantilever) a minimum distance of 1.2m from the interior side lot line to the outside wall of the projection is required (per [ZBL 20001: 5.90.9.1.](#))



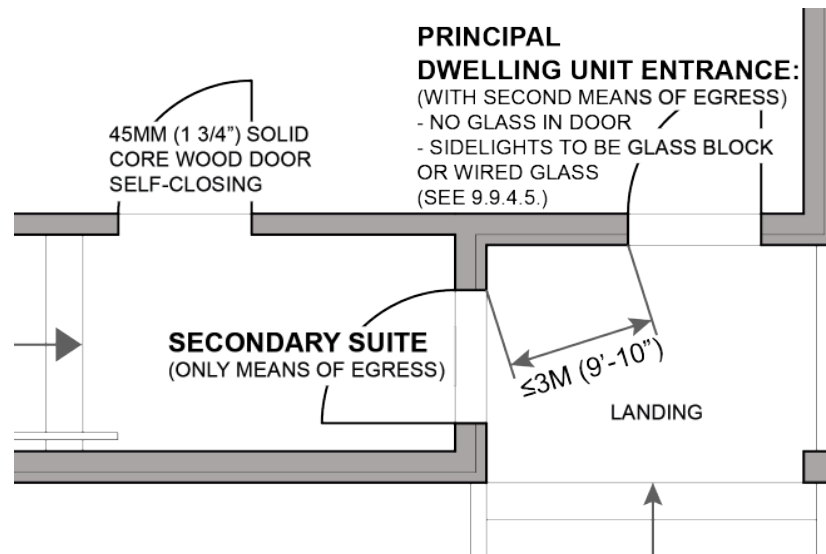
A suite exterior exit doorway, passageway and stair (or ramp) exposed to a window or hazard from the common area or another suite in a house with a secondary suite will need to be protected if there is not an alternate means of egress from the suite. Specifics are discussed here:

*Exits of each suite must be protected from exposure to fire originating from the other suite.*

If there is not a second 'means of egress' **other than by an exterior exit stair**, then that stair must be protected from all the windows of the other dwelling and common spaces located within 3m (10') horizontally of the exit stair, 10m below it, or up to 5m above it. This also applies to windows in exterior doors, and also applies to an exterior exit ramp (see figures below; NBC(AE):B:9.9.4.4.)



If there is not a second 'means of egress' other than by a single exterior exit door, then that door must be protected from all windows of the other dwelling and common spaces located within 3m (10') horizontally of the exit door(s) in facing walls or walls built at angles  $< 135^\circ$ . This also applies to windows in exterior doors (see figure on the right; NBC(AE):B:9.9.4.6.)



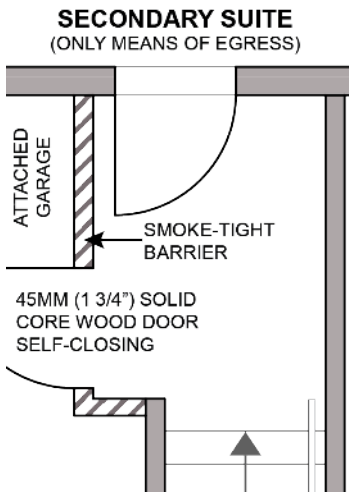
If there is not a second 'means of egress' **other than by an exterior deck or veranda platform passageway** that is located more than 1.5m (5') above the finished ground level, where one dwelling is located above the other dwelling or common spaces, then that passageway must be protected from windows of the other dwelling and common spaces below it by building the passageway with minimum  $\frac{3}{4}h$  fire-resistance-rated floor assembly **or** provide more than one exit stair (or ramp), i.e., provide two ways off the passageway, in opposite directions, so there is an alternate route to safely get down to ground level. (see NBC(AE):B:9.9.9.3.)

**Protection** of window openings may be with wired glass (per NBC(AE): B:9.10.13.5.), or glass block (per NBC(AE): B:9.10.13.7). 20-minute fire-protection rated labeled closures--rated windows, doors or shutters tested in accordance with NBC(AE): B:9.10.3.1. and installed and maintained per NFPA-80 and the manufacturer installation instructions--are also acceptable. Establishing a desirable protective measure after the House is constructed is sometimes impractical and so an alternative solution would be required to provide an equal or better level of safety and performance to the window openings protection; for example, sprinkler-protection may be considered.



## Interior Access and Egress / Exit

The access and exit from each dwelling may not be through the other dwelling, an attached garage or through a service room. All essential functions of a suite must be accessible from within the suite itself, and not through the main dwelling or common areas. Ensure that



*A Secondary Suite's only means of egress may not be through an attached garage.*

- any **hall, corridor or passageway** within a suite or in the common space is to be unobstructed clear width  $\geq 860\text{mm}$  (34"),
- unobstructed clear height of the walking surface leading to the exterior, including over the stairs,  $\geq 1.95\text{m}$  except that the clear height may be  $\geq 1.85\text{m}$  under beams/ducts; an obstruction is anything projecting into required minimum provisions (width X height),
- any doorway providing access to exit and exit from a secondary suite is
  - $\geq 1980\text{mm}$  (78") high,
  - $\geq 810\text{mm}$  (32") wide, and
  - may swing inward.

## Egress from Sleeping Rooms

*Every sleeping room requires an egress window that meets minimum size and operational requirements.*

Every room intended for sleeping in an unsprinklered building requires emergency egress: a door to the exterior OR [egress window, as shown here](#), with the following characteristics:

- openable from the inside without removing sashes or any hardware and without keys, tools or special knowledge,
- any security bars or exterior protective cover must be able to be opened from inside without keys, tools or special knowledge,
- the window has to remain open on its own and have an unobstructed area  $\geq 0.35\text{m}^2$  (3.77ft<sup>2</sup> or 543in<sup>2</sup>) with any/all dimensions  $\geq 380\text{mm}$  (15"), and
- any **window well** must extend  $\geq 760\text{mm}$  (30") ahead of the window or outward-swinging sash. Window well covers may be permitted if

they meet conditions, see [Exterior Access and Egress/Exit Planning](#) chapter.

Two or more areas are considered a combination room if the opening between the areas occupies the **larger** of 3m<sup>2</sup> or ≥ 40% of the area of the wall measured on the side of the dependent area. Where the dependent area is a bedroom, provide direct passage between the two areas.

## Stairs, Ramps and Landings

*Correct and uniform stair, ramp and landing design reduces the risk of slips, trips and falls*

**Stair or ramp width** is to be ≥ 860mm (34") measured from wall to wall. Handrails may project into this width, measured from wall to wall with any projections into the 860mm width not exceeding 100mm (4") in total.

If there is 30" clear between typical obstructions such as a handrail and a wall opposite the handrail, the stair is usually acceptable.

**Stair rise**, the vertical nosing-to-nosing dimension, in all cases must be in the range of 125-200mm (5"-7 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>").

**Stair run**, the horizontal nosing-to-nosing dimension, for rectangular treads must be in the range 255-355mm (10"-14"),

**Height over stairs, ramps or landings** is

- measured vertically from a line drawn tangent to the tread/landing nosings to the lowest point overhead, and
- clear height must be ≥ 1950mm (76 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"), except it may be ≥ 1850mm (72 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>") under beams and ducts in a secondary suite.

**Spiral stairs** that meet the requirements of NBC(AE):9.8.4.7., are permitted to be used as the means of egress from a floor area serving no more than 3 persons (see NBC(AE):B:9.8.4.7.).

**Landings** are required to be at least as wide and long as the width of the stair or ramp flight that leads to it is required, so ≥ 860mm (34") minimum follows on stair width. Where another flight leads to the same landing, that would also result in a dimension ≥ 860mm. Hence, the minimum landing dimension inside a House with the secondary suite is 860mm each way. An

exterior landing is required to be slightly larger at minimum 900mm long, and at least as wide as the stair which is  $\geq 860\text{mm}$ .

## Guards and Handrails

*Guards withstand vertical and lateral forces to reduce the risk of falling.*

**Guards** must be installed on each side

- inside and outside where a difference  $>600\text{mm}$  (24") in elevation exists between a walking surface and a lower adjacent surface within 1.2m exists, where the walking surface is not protected by against a non-climbable wall that is at least as high as the required guard,
- at windows in flights of stairs or at landings  $<900\text{mm}$  (36") above the walking surface or where a window is more than 1.8m above the floor or ground on the other side of the window; OR the window must be with non-openable, strengthened guard glass (labeled), or
- outside, where the difference in elevation is  $>600\text{mm}$  (24") between the walking surface and the adjacent surface ground slopes away at  $\geq 1:2$  ( $\sim 30^\circ$ ) within 1.2m (48") of the step or ramp served by the guard.

**Height of guards** must be

- for flights of steps, measured vertically from a line drawn through the leading edge of the tread nosing to the top of the guard,
- $\geq 900\text{mm}$  (36") for any guard located inside the House with a secondary suite,
- $\geq 1070\text{mm}$  (42") for any guard located outside the House, except  $\geq 900$  (36") where the difference between the walking surface and a lower adjacent surface is  $\leq 1800\text{mm}$  (71").

**Openings in guards** must

- where a guard is required, prevent the passage of a 100mm diameter sphere, and
- where a guard is not required, prevent the passage of a 100mm diameter sphere OR have openings that will permit the passage of a 200mm spherical object to reduce risk of entrapment in the guard.

**Design of guards** must be engineered **unless** the construction provides demonstrated effective performance, as most commonly-accepted wood guards of workmanlike construction do. Any aluminum, steel, vinyl, composite, and/or glass guard/handrail system must have CCMC evaluation

approval, documentation, or engineering indicating compliance with current NBC(AE).

No member, attachment or opening between 140mm and 900mm above the walking surface being guarded may facilitate climbing on a guard protecting a level more than 4.2m (13'9") above the adjacent level.

*Handrails are provided to facilitate movement to a safe place with reduced risk of tripping, slipping or falling.*

**Handrails** must be

- installed on at least one side of flights of interior steps with >2 risers, exterior steps with >3 risers, or a ramp with >400mm rise,
- graspable and with no obstruction on or above them to break a handhold,
- with  $\geq 50\text{mm}$  (2") clearance to the guard or wall ( $\geq 60\text{mm}$  if the surface is rough/abrasive),
- continuous from floor level to any intermediate landings, and through any stair winder, and
- connected to wall/support  $\leq 300\text{mm}$  (12") from ends and  $\leq 1.2\text{m}$  (4') between OR engineered.

**Height of handrails** for flights of steps is

- measured vertically from a line drawn through the leading edge of treads to top of handrail,
- 865mm (34") to 1070mm (42") except 865mm to 965mm for a ramp. Extra handrails, e.g., for children, may be outside this range.

## Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems

*A secondary suite requires a separate and independent heating **and** ventilation system.*

A separate, independently-controlled heating/ventilation system must serve the secondary suite, and may not be interconnected/ducted with the remainder of the house. A heat source alone, without ventilation, is not sufficient. The typical solutions are:

- a separate forced-air furnace for the suite, with independent, dedicated ductwork,
- hydronic radiant heating and independent ventilation such as heat recovery ventilator (HRV), or



- electric baseboard heating with independent ventilation such as an HRV.

**Ventilation air** is filtered, heated fresh air to provide acceptable indoor air quality. Ventilation air is not required in common spaces. Ventilation is often provided through an insulated fresh air duct from outside to the return air duct of the forced-air furnace system where it is warmed and then distributed throughout the space served by the forced air furnace. A primary ventilation fan must be installed; this exhaust fan must be interlocked with the forced-air furnace to introduce a balanced amount of ventilation air into the suite through the fresh air duct. Kitchen and bathroom exhaust fans must be installed to remove smoke, steam, heat and odours.

A Heat Recovery Ventilator (HRV) or Energy Recovery Ventilation (ERV) is another common solution to satisfy the need for ventilation supply and exhausting air.

**Make-up air** is replacement air to prevent excessive depressurization, required to compensate for the operation of appliances and exhaust equipment such as kitchen and bath fans, fireplace, clothes dryer, built-in vac, etc. An air exhaust system or a non-direct-vent fuel-burning appliance removes air from a house, creating a slight negative pressure inside. In certain cases the natural flow of air up a chimney can be reversed, leading to risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Depressurization can also contribute to increased entry of soil gas (radon) through basement floor and wall cracks.

Newer or renovated houses are generally more tightly constructed than older ones, with less draughty windows, newer weather stripping and caulking. This increases the probability that infiltration of air from joints and penetrations in the exterior walls of the house may not be able to supply enough air to compensate for simultaneous operation of exhaust fans, fireplaces, clothes dryers, furnaces and space heaters, so it's necessary to introduce preheated outdoor make-up air to the space.

**Combustion air** proportionate to combined btu/h input of all non-direct-vent fuel-burning appliances must be provided to the rooms containing the appliance(s).

Additionally, check that these miscellaneous conditions are satisfied in the House:

- minimum clearance requirements related to exhaust vents, soffits, and air intakes are per 9.32.3.13 (4) to (6) and [Standata 23-BCV-008 Residential exhaust outlet clearance from air intakes](#).
- no return air grilles or return air duct openings inside a furnace room,
- gas dryer vent pipe is galvanized, otherwise galvanized or aluminum; not corrugated flex duct,
- covers installed on hydronic or electric baseboard radiant heating,
- yellow-jacket CSST flex gas line is **not** permitted to connect directly to an appliance; a labelled factory-made flex gas connector is permitted from appliance to connection point behind it, and
- observe [cooktop clearance to cabinets](#) or hood fan listed here, with any over-the-range microwave/fan unit installed according to the manufacturer's directions.

## Electrical Supply

A completed "[Electrical Inspection Load Calculation](#)" form must be submitted with this application before an electrical permit can be issued.

## Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

[Smoke alarms](#) must be hardwired and located in:

- every bedroom **AND** in the hallway / between the bedrooms and the general floor area,
- common spaces including interior shared means of egress, and
- all ancillary spaces such as storage rooms, washroom, laundry room, or service/furnace/ mechanical rooms that are accessed from the common area (those **not** within the principal dwelling or the secondary suite).

*Smoke Alarms must be hardwired and interconnected.*

Smoke alarms **must** be interconnected so when one sounds then all of them sound. Alarms that use a wireless interconnection system are acceptable, provided they conform with CAN/ULC-S531, "Smoke-Alarms" and are installed per manufacturer direction.

[Carbon monoxide alarms](#) must be located in a House that has an attached garage or any fuel-burning appliances (gas furnace, solid-fuel-burning fireplace, etc.) in:

- every bedroom **OR** in the hallway/within 5m of bedroom doors,
- service/furnace/mechanical rooms with gas-fired appliances not within the suite, and
- any room with a wood-burning fireplace, wood stove or other solid-fuel-burning appliance.

Carbon monoxide alarms in a House with a secondary suite **must** be interconnected so when one sounds then all of them sound. Alarms that use a wireless interconnection system are acceptable, provided they conform with CAN/CSA-6.19, "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices" and are installed per manufacturer direction.

## Sound Separation

*Sound transmission between suites is regulated to reduce the exposure to risk of illness due to high levels of sound originating in adjacent spaces.*

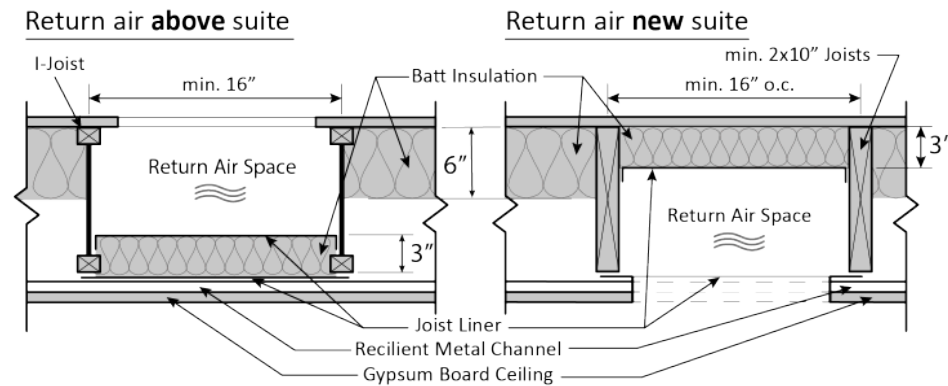
Sound absorbing material (eg. batt insulation or cellulose fill) must be installed in walls and floor-ceiling assemblies between the secondary suite and the principal dwelling, as well as between the suite and non-suite space where noise may be generated (e.g., shared laundry, furnace room).

Sound protection requirement is satisfied where

- ceiling cavities are filled with  $\geq 150\text{mm}$  (6") thick batts or cellulose sound-absorbing material,
- wall cavities are filled (not overfilled) with batts or cellulose sound-absorbing material, and
- resilient channels ('sound bar') are installed on one side of the walls and on the underside of the floor-ceiling assemblies.

Return air runs through floor joist or wall stud cavities may not be blocked with, communicate with, or be exposed directly to fibre materials that may get into the airstream and circulate through occupied space. Use a joist liner to separate non-ducted return air space where resilient channel (sound-bar) and/or insulation is present. Where return air is non-ducted in a House with a secondary suite, it is acceptable to reduce the batt insulation to  $\geq 75\text{mm}$  (3") but isolate it from the airstream with joist liner, gypsum, etc. The HVAC installer needs to ensure that the remaining space is sized to allow sufficient

air flow back to the furnace. In older homes with 2x8 floor joists or in large homes there may be a need to use two joist spaces for the return air to each furnace. An acceptable arrangement related to a secondary suite follows:



Alternatively, select and construct an assembly

- with an STC rating  $\geq 43$ , per the NBC(AE) 'Assembly and Sound Tables 9.10.3.1.-A / 9.10.3.1.B.', **or**
- with adjoining constructions which together provide an ASTC rating  $\geq 40$ .

Or, finally, if the assemblies already exist (e.g., ceiling in) or cannot be found in NBC(AE), provide an acoustical-engineer-stamped report prior to final inspection demonstrating  $\text{ASTC} \geq 40$  ASTC is achieved.

Confirm which compliance path is being followed on the [Sound Separation Declaration](#) form and provide it with the building permit application.

## Fire Protection

*A continuous smoke-tight barrier of 12.7mm (½") thick standard gypsum board is required between the principal dwelling and the secondary suite.*

A continuous smoke-tight barrier of a minimum 12.7mm (½") thick standard gypsum board is required on the underside of floor-ceiling assemblies and on both sides of wall framing to separate:

- the principal dwelling and the secondary suite from each other,
- common spaces including interior shared means of egress from the rest of the house,
- storage, laundry, and other common-area ancillary rooms from the rest of the house, and



- **all** rooms containing any fuel-fired space-heating or cooling appliance, fuel-fired service water heater or gas laundry dryer from the rest of the house.

Doors in smoke-tight barriers must be minimum 45mm solid-core wood, with self-closer.

## Structural and Building Changes

### Changes to beams/columns/bearing walls/floor frame

To accommodate suite construction, a bearing wall may need to be removed and replaced with a beam, or perhaps a column location under an existing beam needs to be adjusted. Structural changes to a house may be made as part of the suite project. Clearly indicate the proposed changes on the drawings. Where structural changes are not strictly designed to Part 9 of NBC(AE) they need to be designed by an engineer.

### Window openings, for egress or general improvement

Engineer-stamped design is required for changes to a foundation wall where any of the following conditions is present:

- the existing typical cast concrete foundation wall is degraded due to poor original quality/placement, age/soil conditions, adjacent driveway stresses or poorly drained soils subject to freeze-thaw cycling, and so on,
- enlarging an existing opening or making a new opening in a typical cast concrete foundation wall will result in a window opening more than 1.2m wide,
- enlarging an existing opening or making a new opening in a typical cast concrete foundation wall where a point load (from any beam or wall opening exceeding 3m in length) is above or within 300mm (12") of the proposed opening,
- the length of foundation wall remaining between any two window openings is less than the average of the widths of the two window openings,
- the sum of the widths of all openings on one foundation wall face after alteration will exceed 25% of that wall length, measured from interior side,

*Many conditions require an Engineer-stamped design for new and changed openings in foundation walls.*

- a window opening is to be cut or enlarged in any PWF, ICF, precast, block or brick wall; OR
- a new basement-level entrance is proposed; engineer design is also required for the retaining wall and new and existing footing frost protection. Show plans for the steps up to grade, weeping tile provisions, and lower landing drains if not a covered entrance.

List any plans for work on these that may need attention before a suite can be established:

- Foundation repair
- Weeping tile installation or replacement
- Sump pit installation (any sump lid must be securely fastened down with a gasket seal)
- [Backwater valve installation](#) (requires a plumbing permit).

## Health

*Be mindful of required health considerations for finishes, materials and systems to protect the health and welfare of secondary suite occupants.*

Waterproof finish(es) shall be provided to a height of

- $\geq 1800\text{mm}$  (72") above the floor in a shower stall,
- $\geq 1200\text{mm}$  (48") above the rim of a bathtub equipped with a shower, and
- $\geq 400\text{mm}$  (16") above the rim of a bathtub not equipped with a shower.

Joints between wall tiles and a bathtub are to be suitably caulked with mildew-resistant sealant.

Glass other than safety glass shall not be used for a shower or bathtub enclosure.

Consult [Soil Gas Vent Termination](#) guidance to complete a soil gas/radon rough-in system, if desired, if testing has demonstrated actionable levels in the house. AHS regulations indicate requirements to address actionable levels of soil gas/radon detected in rental premises. See various established resources, like [The Lung Association](#) or [EvictRadon](#) for more information.

Operable windows require insect screens installed when open. Wall vent hoods and other exterior building envelope penetrations should be properly

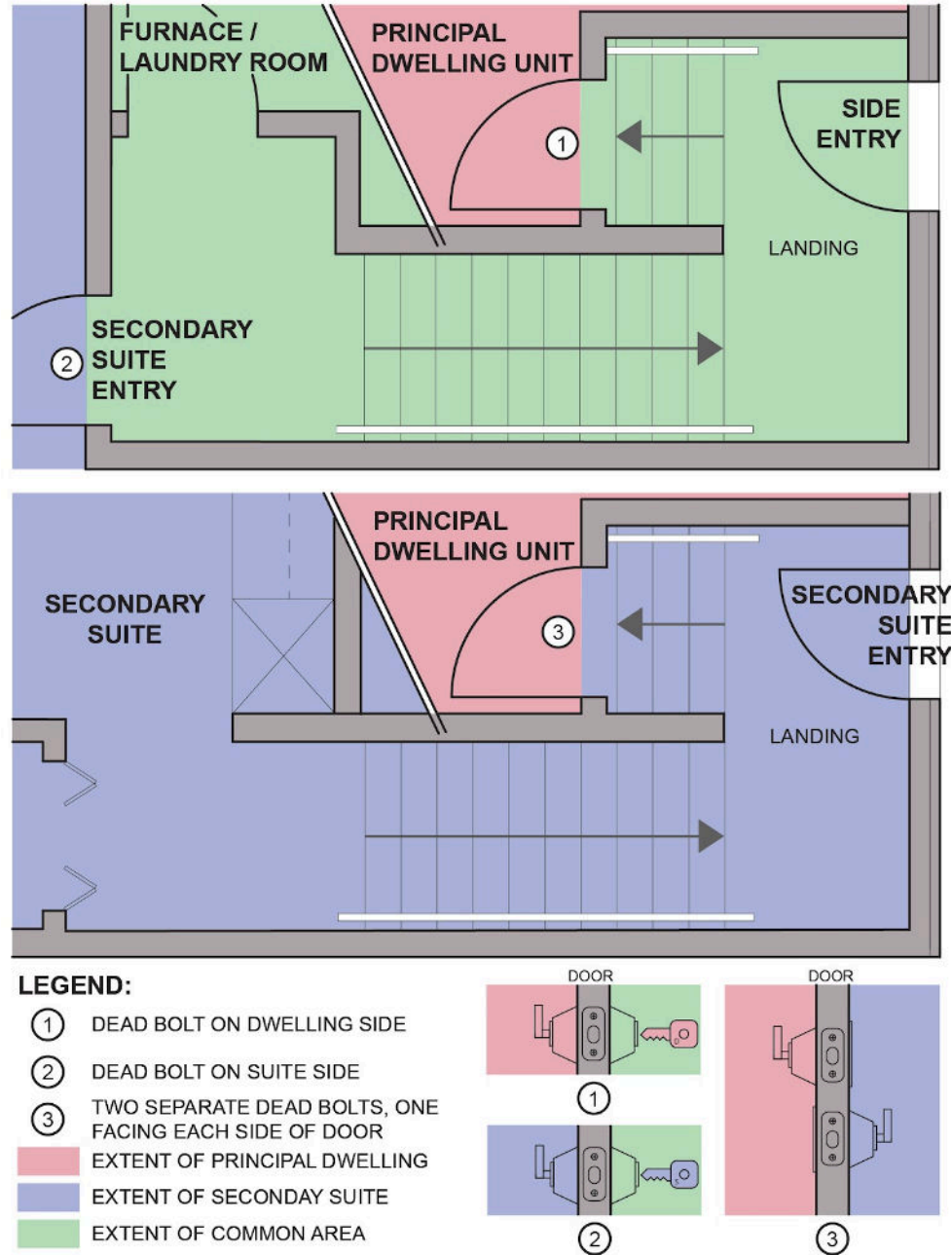
flushed and sealed so precipitation, insects and vermin cannot enter. Review the [Homeowner's Guide to Flood Prevention](#) for good property drainage tips.

## Security

Every entry door into a dwelling--principal dwelling or secondary suite--must be provided with a means of resistance to forced entry--typically a deadbolt lock (NBC(AE):B:9.7.5.2.). This applies to interior suite doors from the common area, and also applies to any door located directly between the principal dwelling and the secondary suite where there is no common area, which must have two separate deadbolts operable from opposite sides not using a common key, so that mutual agreement is required for the door between the two to be unsecured.

*Entrance doors to all dwellings must be resistant to forced entry, including any doors between suites and common spaces.*

For example, if a suite entrance is locked off from the principal dwelling at an interior door such as at a back/side entry, so that the basement stair and entire basement is part of a basement secondary suite, then the 1 ¾" solid-core demising door at the top of the basement stair must have separate deadbolts operable from opposite sides not using a common key. (This is depicted in figures below.)



## General Considerations

The [Residential Tenancies Act](#), the [Public Health Act](#), the [Housing Regulation](#) governing rental accommodation, and the [Alberta Housing Regulation and Minimum Housing and Health Standards](#) help create conditions that enable a safe and harmonious relationship between all occupants of a House with a secondary suite.



When deciding the location of facilities within the secondary suites, such as water shut-offs, furnace rooms, or other areas requiring periodic landlord access for repair and maintenance, consider the obligations outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act regarding providing notice to enter residential premises. Locating these facilities in common areas can help reduce the frequency of landlord entries to the residential premises and the need for providing formal notice.

The building code does not dictate access; however, depending on circumstances, it may later prove a good idea to include some utility control or device relocation in the permit.

## Energy Efficiency

**NBC(AE):B:9.36 Energy Efficiency applies** to any house built with permits issued **after** 31 October 2016 and any further construction such as a secondary suite. Equipment is to conform to Table 9.36.3.10 and Table 9.36.4.2. Where the original house efficiency is determined by the performance path energy model, the provided mechanical system efficiencies are typically of higher efficiency than the minimum prescriptive efficiencies, and may **not** be reduced in the construction of the secondary suite without re-model of the House.

**NBC(AE):B:9.36 does not apply** to a house built with permits issued **prior** to 01 November 2016. Follow [Standata guidance](#) for component and system efficiencies. Generally, 9.25 thermal insulation, air barrier and vapour barrier requirements are the minimum permissible, though any lawfully-existing construction predating the minimum values may remain.

Additional information is under the heading [National Building Code - Alberta Edition 9.36 \(NBC\(AE\) 9.36\)](#). For background and resources, see the [National Research Council Canada](#), or established trade and industry sources such as "[BILD Alberta Codes](#)" (see [edmonton.ca/energycodes](http://edmonton.ca/energycodes)).

*Know where Energy Efficiency requirements may or may not apply to your secondary suite.*

## Asbestos Management

Anyone proposing to alter a building shall provide plans and specifications describing any necessary asbestos management and abatement work to Alberta Occupational Health & Safety (OHS). Be prepared to provide confirmation to your trades and the permit office if asked whether asbestos-containing materials with the potential to release fibres have been dealt with per Alberta Occupational Health and Safety regulations (see NBC(AE):C:2.2.13.1.(4)).

OHS administers oversight of asbestos remediation **if** needed; [guidance is provided here](#). The permit office does not issue permits for abatement work alone. Review the [Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual](#) to learn about asbestos work in a homeowner-occupied house.

## Project Implementation Plan

*Where a **Project Implementation Plan (PIP)** is required, ensure all PIP related documents are on site when requested by the Safety Codes Officer*

It is the building permit holder's and owner's obligation to comply with applicable safety laws during a construction project to protect public safety and health, nearby properties, and infrastructure.

Where exterior work is being done as part of a secondary suite a Project Implementation Plan (PIP) [Letter of Commitment](#) is submitted with the application documents, and the documents that comprise the PIP must be available for review on-site when requested by the Safety Codes Officer. Review the [PIP Guide](#) to plan and prepare for a safe construction site.

## New Home Buyer Warranty

[New Home Buyer Protection Act](#) does not apply to alterations to an existing House for a secondary suite that do not result in substantial above-basement level increase in floor area. You can get more information [here](#) if the secondary suite is part of a new addition project.

## Inspections

All permits require inspection. A secondary suite may be constructed as part of a new house, or as a home improvement project to an existing house.

*More inspection information can be found under [edmonton.ca/residentialinspections](https://edmonton.ca/residentialinspections).*

In a [New House](#) project, the secondary suite is included within the scope of the project and work is expected to proceed on the suite space at about the same rate as the rest. As [inspections generally follow project progress](#), extra inspections for the suite-related parts may be needed if work lags. This applies to trades work as well as building permit-related progress.

In a [Home Improvement Project](#) involving construction of the secondary suite, an interim 'ready-to-cover' building inspection is required **in addition to and only after** respective trade rough-in inspections. This specific building inspection is intended to review work performed that is to be covered up by gypsum board and other concealing materials. The inspector should be able to see many of the elements discussed in this guide: access and egress provisions; sleeping room egress window; stairs and landings; smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarm locations (not yet installed); any structural work (e.g., window openings, column or bearing wall modification, etc.); and sound protection provisions, including the resilient channel called when using the common prescriptive compliance path.

Work for a [Suite Rough-In](#), where some work toward a future suite project is undertaken and documented, also requires inspection for a record of acceptable work at time of construction. Inspections will progress to the stage of work listed on the Suite Rough-In Checklist.

Sometimes a plan changes as work progresses. Some minor changes to plans and specifications for an issued Building Permit may be made after construction begins without engaging in the Permit Revision process. Review the [Part 9 Project Product Swap and Plan Revision Procedure](#) for details. Other changes are managed through the online [Permit Revision](#) process.

Ensure the requirements are met **before** requesting inspection, to avoid an infraction for not building according to plan.

Remember the general rule that work intended to be covered must first be inspected. Standard inspections can be requested under the 'INSPECTIONS' heading on the project dashboard at [SelfServe.edmonton.ca](https://SelfServe.edmonton.ca), or by calling 311 (outside Edmonton, call 780-442-5311).

A set number of inspections is included in any permit, and extra inspection fees will be incurred if the limit is exceeded. Extra inspection can be requested by contacting the respective advisors:

- **HVAC tech desk** for concealed duct inspection or similar:  
[by email](#) or dial 780 496 3118
- **Plumbing & Gas desk** for additional rough-in inspections or similar:  
[by email](#) or dial 780 496 3117
- **Electrical tech desk** for additional rough-in inspections or similar:  
[by email](#) or dial 780 496 6674

## Suite Rough-In Considerations

A project incorporating future suite rough-in provisions requires forward-thinking planning and some construction done in advance to provide a future homeowner with an efficient and simplified path to creating or completing construction of a secondary suite.

*Use the **SECONDARY SUITE ROUGH-IN CHECKLIST** at the end of this guide to plan for a successful **future secondary suite**.*

To capture specific information on projects that incorporate secondary suite rough-in design and construction provisions for **future completion** under **separate** permits, a rough-in checklist provides the current permit applicant, permit office and (future) homeowner with a consistent, shareable report of a planned path to creating or completing a secondary suite under a separate building permit application in the future.

The checklist, intended to be separated out from this guide and submitted with the building permit application, identifies common key stages of suite planning and construction; the current building permit applicant is to indicate which work will be completed within this current building permit scope of work. Currently-proposed construction **and** future suite plans are to be shown on the suite rough-in plans and/or specifications for the specific address, for permit holder, permit office and (future) homeowner reference.



The current Zoning Bylaw requires that a Development Permit be approved before a secondary suite is constructed and operated. In the case of a suite rough-in project, the secondary suite may be operated as a separate dwelling unit only **after** future valid Development Permit approval and successful completion of all necessary future safety codes permits by a (future) homeowner. In addition to a mandatory Building Permit to complete the suite-related work, future trades permit requirements depend on the level of work remaining after the original permits, which document suite rough-in work, are successfully concluded. For clarity, **any permit or permit condition indicating that a project has suite rough-in is not permission to construct or operate a secondary suite, but rather represents a record of work undertaken in support of a future set of permits to construct and operate a secondary suite.**

In any dwelling unit, a wet bar or second/spice kitchen does not in itself constitute a secondary suite or separate dwelling unit, unless an attempt is made to operate that part of the house as a separate dwelling unit in contravention of the Zoning Bylaw and/or Safety Codes Act.

In the context of a house, an “in-law suite”, “granny flat” or any similar accommodation is highly recommended to be constructed as a secondary suite. This offers the most flexibility as it may be:

- occupied by a related party, which may prefer some connection to the main housekeeping unit, or
- rented out to an unrelated party.

While it may be permitted to construct an unseparated basement development with a kitchen for a family member, this can create obstacles down the line. Should you decide to rent the space to an unrelated party in the future, additional permits are required. This can lead to the enforcement of minimum secondary suite standards and unexpected costs.

The balance of work, being all work not listed in the Suite Rough-In checklist and inspected as having been completed, **must** be conducted under separate permits when the house owner elects to proceed to completion of this suite rough-in. This additional work **must** comply with any changes that may occur to plans, property, codes or bylaws after the permits that incorporate suite rough-in are completed.

**The Suite Rough-In Checklist is found on the next 7 pages.**

**PRINT, COMPLETE, SIGN AND SUBMIT THIS CHECKLIST WITH BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION** This checklist represents Building Permit applicant confirmation of planning and partial construction to be done at time of a construction project, for a future secondary suite to be completed at a later date under separate but mandatory permits.

**PLANNING** Suite rough-in plans are to be submitted at time of application for permits for construction, clearly outlining the extent of work to be done with the current project, and must be recorded on this form as well. This record is subject to review and potential amendment at the time of the **future mandatory** Development Permit and Building Permit application to complete the suite, in the context of any changes that may have occurred to the plan, property, codes or bylaws. Code references are to Div B of the National Building Code - 2023 Alberta Edition (NBC(AE):B). Zoning Bylaw (ZBL) references are to ZBL 20001.

- Projections into Setbacks** maintain 1.2m form projection to interior side lot lines where the future suite entrance is further from the street than the projection (per [ZBL 5.90.9.1](#))
- Exterior access path** from street to exterior door serving the future suite entrance is planned to meet:
  - A** an unobstructed width of 0.9m (per [ZBL 5.80.2.1.1](#)); and
  - B** The [Access Guideline](#)
- Exterior egress** path fire exposure protection for the future suite space is addressed by **A, B or C as indicated:**
  - A** the principal dwelling and the future secondary suite both have at least 2 separate means of egress; **OR**
  - B** the entire building is served by an automatic fire sprinkler system; **OR**
  - C** these exit protections are confirmed:
    - no **exit stair/ramp** passes near any glazing of the other dwelling or common spaces [9.9.4.4.]; and
    - no **exit door** is exposed to nearby glazing of the other dwelling and common spaces [9.9.4.6.]; and
    - no **exit passageway deck/veranda/platform** >1.5m (5') above the finished ground level is exposed to windows of the other dwelling and common spaces below it [9.9.9.3.] **or** has at least two ways off the passageway in opposite directions.
- Electrical** service to and into the house is sized per the [Load Calculation Form](#) which **must** be submitted with the building permit application.
- Gas** service to and into the house is sized for any additional planned suite loads.
- Egress window** for emergency egress to exterior from every room used/intended to be used for sleeping is addressed by **A or B as indicated:**
  - A** no egress windows provided as the entire building is served by an automatic fire sprinkler system; **OR**
  - B** egress window (0.35m<sup>2</sup> minimum clear area with 380mm minimum dimensions) **OR** exterior door direct to outside from room.
- Egress window well** specific requirement for below-grade egress windows is addressed by **A,B or C as indicated:**
  - A** no egress window wells required as there are no below-grade windows; **OR**
  - B** no egress window wells provided as the entire building is served by an automatic fire sprinkler system; **OR**
  - C** egress window well extends at least 760mm ahead of window/out-swinging sash for at least one window in each room used/intended to be used for sleeping.
- Interior access and egress** paths do not pass through the other dwelling or a service room.
- Minimum dimensional requirements** after finishes are planned and incorporated into the suite rough-in plan are addressed by all of **A to D as indicated:**
  - A** 860mm hall width in suite and common spaces, and stair width; and
  - B** 1950mm ceiling height in suite, common spaces and stair, with min 1850mm under ducts/beams; and
  - C** 1980mm height doorways of minimum 810mm width that do not swing over stairs for doors/doorways along the access to exit or at the exit; and
  - D** clearances to various appliances and fixtures to be installed in service rooms.
- Proposed heat source** (forced air or electric furnace, etc.) is specified on the suite rough-in plan and aligns with an appropriate 9.36. energy efficiency path.

- Row house suite firewall** requirement where there may be 3 or more suites in the row house is addressed by **A, B, C or D as indicated:**
  - A** not applicable - this project involves a single detached house or semi-detached house only; **OR**
  - B** firewall(s) constructed; **OR**
  - C** application of Policy [B23-01 Fire Separation Between Row Houses with More Than Two Secondary Suites](#), including submission of Letter of Construction Intention; **OR**
  - D** application of [Policy 19-03: Area Separation Walls \(ASW\) for a Row House with Secondary Suite](#), including submission of Letter of Construction Intention

**CONSTRUCTION** per NBC(AE) of the proposed suite rough-in construction. Steps to be taken in conjunction with the current project, for both suite and common space:

**PARTITION FRAMING** in wood [9.23.1.] or metal [9.24.1.] per suite rough-in plan submitted with building permit application.

**SUITE SPACE** includes future suite and its wall/floor/ceiling boundaries

- A** no suite space interior and boundary partitions framed **OR**
- B** partition framing of the suite space is done as follows:
  - partially completed suite space framing (shown on suite rough-in plan)
  - all suite space partitions framed
  - bulkhead, furring, box-outs for installed duct, beam , etc. framed

**COMMON SPACE** not contained within the suite space nor the principal dwelling

- A** no common space partitions framed **OR**
- B** partition framing of common space is done as follows:
  - partially completed common space framing (shown on suiterough-in plan)
  - all common space partitions framed
  - bulkhead, furring, box-outs for installed duct, beam , etc. framed

**SOUND PROTECTION** for walls and floor-ceiling assemblies between dwellings and between a dwelling and a space where noise may be generated [9.11.1.1.], per suite rough-in plan submitted with a building permit application. See [Secondary Suite Design Guide](#) section for Sound Protection for concealed duct and forced-air furnace return air space treatment suggestions.

- no sound protection is yet installed for the suite space boundary to the other dwelling or to common space where noise may originate, **OR**
- sound protection is addressed by **1, 2 or 3** and done as follows:
  - 1** prescriptive solution
    - 6"+ thick batt/cellulose sound-absorbing material in floor-ceiling assembly
    - batt/cellulose sound-absorbing material in wall framing
    - resilient channel installed underside joists
    - resilient channel installed one side of wall frame
  - 2** assembly with minimum STC 43 provided **or** ASTC 40+ specified adjoining constructions, per [Sound Separation Confirmation](#) submitted with building permit application
  - 3** acoustical sound test to be performed before final occupancy inspection, per [Sound Separation Confirmation](#) submitted with building permit application

**FIRE & SMOKE PROTECTION** of smoke-tight barrier of ½" gypsum board (floor-ceiling and on both sides of walls), with joints taped and fasteners coated. Complete both columns as applicable.

**SUITE SPACE** includes future suite and its wall/floor/ceiling boundaries

- no fire- and smoke-protection gypsum board is installed **OR**  
 installed gypsum board protection listed in **1, 2 and 3** and done as follows:

**1 Service room within suite space** is addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** no service rooms contained within the suite space **OR**  
 **B** service room is contained within suite space and the following is done:  
 no gypsum yet installed within the suite space service room  
 suite space service room ceiling gypsum board installed  
 suite space service room ceiling gypsum board fire taped  
 suite space service room walls gypsum board installed  
 suite space service room walls gypsum board fire taped

**2 General area within suite space** is addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** no gypsum yet installed within the general suite space **OR**  
 **B** the following is done:  
 suite space general area ceiling gypsum board installed  
 suite space general area ceiling gypsum board taped  
 suite space general area walls gypsum board installed  
 suite space general area walls gypsum board taped

**3 Bulkhead/furring, etc.** for duct, beams, etc. is addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** no bulkhead, furring, box-out, etc. is required **OR**  
 **B** bulkhead/furring, etc. is called for and the following is done:  
 no bulkhead/furring, etc. gypsum yet installed  
 suite space bulkhead gypsum board installed  
 suite space bulkhead gypsum board taped

**COMMON SPACE** not contained within the suite space or the principal dwelling

- no fire- and smoke-protection gypsum board is installed **OR**  
 installed gypsum board protection listed in **1, 2, 3 and 4** and done as follows:

**1 Common space stair and/or corridor** is addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** there is no common space stair/corridor **OR**  
 **B** common space stair/corridor exists and the following is done:  
 no gypsum yet installed in the common space stair/corridor  
 common stair/corridor space ceiling gypsum board installed  
 common stair/corridor space ceiling gypsum board fire taped  
 common stair/corridor walls gypsum board installed  
 common space stair/corridor walls gypsum board fire taped

**2 Common space service rooms** are addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** there are no common space service rooms **OR**  
 **B** common space service rooms exist and the following is done:  
 no gypsum yet installed in the common space service rooms  
 common space service room ceiling gypsum board installed  
 common space service room ceiling gypsum board fire taped  
 common space service room walls gypsum board installed  
 common space service room walls gypsum board fire taped

**3 Common ancillary space** is addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** there are no common space ancillary spaces **OR**  
 **B** common ancillary spaces exist and the following is done:  
 no gypsum yet installed in the common ancillary space  
 common ancillary space ceiling gypsum board installed  
 common ancillary space ceiling gypsum board fire taped  
 common ancillary space walls gypsum board installed  
 common ancillary space walls gypsum board fire taped

**4 Bulkhead/furring, etc.** for duct, beams, etc. is addressed by **A or B** as indicated:

- A** no bulkhead, furring, box-out, etc. is required **OR**  
 **B** bulkhead/furring, etc. is called for and the following is done:  
 no bulkhead/furring gypsum yet installed  
 common space bulkhead/furring gypsum board installed  
 common space bulkhead/furring gypsum board taped

**DOORS** in a smoke-tight barrier wall are required to be minimum 45mm solid-core wood (SCW), latching, and with self-closer, addressed by **A or B as indicated:**

- A** no solid-core wood doors are required in the project **OR**
- B** solid-core wood doors are required, and the following is done:
  - no SCW doors yet installed
  - SCW door to suite space service room(s) installed
  - SCW door to suite space installed
  - SCW door to the principal dwelling installed
  - SCW doors for doorways through smoke-tight barriers served from the common space installed

**ALARMS** for smoke detection and carbon monoxide (CO) detection, addressed by **A or B as indicated:**

- A** only alarms required in absence of suite space installed and operational; otherwise none done **OR**
- B** additional smoke and CO alarms are required and the following is done:
  - no provisions yet made for additional required alarms
  - all required smoke and CO alarm wiring is roughed-in and labeled
  - all required smoke alarms are interwired and operational
  - all required CO alarms are interwired and operational

**SECURITY and PERSONAL PROTECTION** in each dwelling is provided by a means of resistance to forced entry [9.7.5.2.] provided by **A or B as indicated:**

- A** no interior locks required as there are no interior doorways between the principal dwelling and suite space **OR**
- B** locks are required and the following is done:
  - no interior locks yet installed
  - single-side keyed locks to SCW doors for suite space and principal dwelling doors from common space are installed
  - 2 keyed locks at the boundary SCW door (one facing either way) and *not* sharing a key as there is no common space

**TRADES PERMITS** Depending on the level of work successfully inspected in each of the following disciplines, **IF** the applicable green highlighted text box is checked and work completed, no additional trade permit is required to complete that trade work.

**HVAC SYSTEMS** duct and HRV circulation may not occur between principal and secondary suites; common areas do not require active ventilation systems.

**HEATING SYSTEM** to serve the suite space is provided by **1, 2 or 3 as indicated:**



- 1 Forced air furnace heating/ventilating specified**, and the following is done:
  - no forced air furnace installation started
  - supply/return ducts only installed for future tie-in to future furnace
  - supply/return ducts only installed, tied to main furnace duct/plenum, requiring future modification
  - separate furnace operational
- 2 Hydronic Radiant Heating specified**, and the following is done:
  - no hydronic heat system installation yet started
  - only boiler/approved hot water heater installed
  - underfloor radiant lines installed, air-tested, capped, labeled, thermostats roughed-in
  - underfloor radiant heating operational
  - radiant wall heat system operational
- 3 Electric Radiant Heating specified**, and the following is done:
  - no electrical heat system installation yet started
  - conductors, thermostat(s) rough-in only
  - electric radiant heating operational

**VENTILATING SYSTEMS** listed in **1, 2, 3 and 4**, and done as follows:

- 1 General Venting** to serve the suite space is provided as indicated:
  - suite space forced-air furnace intended to provide general ventilation
  - no general ventilation provisions yet installed
  - suite space HRV or ERV piping roughed-in only, labeled
  - suite space HRV or ERV system operational
- 2 Bathroom Venting** to serve the suite space is provided as indicated:
  - no WC/bathroom ventilation provisions yet started
  - exterior vent termination(s) completed
  - only bath fan(s) duct rough-in completed to exterior
  - bath fan(s) installed/vented/operational **OR**
  - HRV or ERV operational
- 3 Kitchen Venting** to serve the suite space is provided as indicated:
  - no kitchen ventilation provisions yet started
  - exterior vent termination completed
  - kitchen fan duct rough-in only completed to exterior; labeled with max permissible fan cfm **and** reason for limitation
  - kitchen canopy fan installed/vented/operational
- 4 Clothes Dryer Venting** to serve the suite space is addressed by **A or B as indicated**:
  - A** no dryer venting required **OR**
  - B** dryer venting required and the following is done:
    - no dryer ventilation provisions yet started

- exterior vent termination completed
- dryer duct rough-in completed to exterior

**PLUMBING SYSTEM and GAS SYSTEM listed in 1 to 7**

**1 Drains and venting** is done as follows:

- no underfloor wastewater drain provisions yet started
- underfloor wastewater drains are rough-in installed, capped, labeled
- above floor wastewater drains and venting are installed, capped and ready for fixture installation

**2 Water supply** is done as follows:

- no water supply lines installed
- hot and cold water supply lines are installed, connected to supply, valved and/or capped at termination points

**3 Plumbing fixture** connection:

- no plumbing fixtures yet installed/connected to previously-inspected rough-in supplies/drains
- shower or tub installed, connected to drain only/supply lines roughed-in
- shower or tub installation [including bathtub/shower splash and wall protection within the BP]
- water closet installation
- lavatory installation
- kitchen sink installation

**4 Clothes Washer** to serve the suite space is addressed by **A or B as indicated:**

- A** no dedicated suite clothes washer planned **OR**
- B** suite clothes washer to be provided for and the following is done:
  - no suite laundry provisions yet installed
  - suite laundry plumbing rough-in to drain/vent, to water supply lines (valves)
  - suite clothes washer installation

**5 Gas supply** to serve the suite space is addressed by **A or B as indicated:**

- A** no suite gas supply required **OR**
- B** suite gas supply required and the following is done:
  - no suite gas supply provisions yet started
  - gas supply piping installed; tested, valved, capped at termination, labeled
  - gas supply piping installed, connected to supply, tested, valved capped at termination point, labeled

**6 Flue gas venting** to serve the suite space is addressed by **A or B as indicated:**

- A** no suite flue gas venting is required **OR**
- B** suite flue gas venting required and the following is done:
  - no flue gas venting provisions for future appliances yet started
  - flue gas venting provisions for future appliances installed

**7 Gas-fired appliance** connection

- gas-fired space heating and water-heating appliance installation
- gas-fired decorative appliance installation (e.g., fireplace) - specify on plan
- gas range or exterior barbecue connection to previously inspected gas piping
- gas-fired clothes dryer appliance connection to previously inspected gas piping

**ELECTRICAL SYSTEM** listed in **1 and 2**

- The [Load Calculation Form](#) is completed and submitted.

**1 Panel and service** to serve the project is done as follows:

- no electrical provisions started;
- separate service/distribution panel and panel plug installed
- subpanel installed and panel plug installed

**2 Branch circuits** to serve the suite space are done as follows:

- only perimeter (frost wall) convenience receptacles operational
- some branch circuits roughed-in, shown on plan
- all branch circuits roughed-in, including kitchen receptacles, shown on plan
- some branch circuits for power and lighting operational, shown on plan
- receptacle installation complete
- light fixture final installation complete

The balance of work, being **all** work not listed above as having been completed, must be conducted under separate permits when the house owner elects to proceed to completion of this suite rough-in project. **A permit or permit condition indicating that a project has suite rough-in is not permission to construct or operate a secondary suite, but rather represents a record of work undertaken in support of a future set of permits to construct and operate a secondary suite.**

I will notify the Building Permit issuer if the construction intention is modified during the project.

SIGNATURE OF BUILDING PERMIT APPLICANT PRINT NAME

CITY FILE NO. or PROJECT MUNICIPAL ADDRESS: PRINT DATE:

PRINT NOTES: