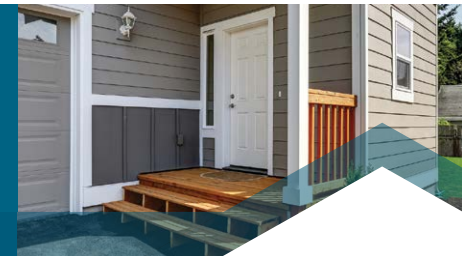


Secondary Suites – Municipal Case Study



CITY OF OTTAWA

This section provides an overview of the City of Ottawa's secondary dwelling unit policy based on the 2016 survey response, a follow-up interview with City staff, as well as current City policy documents and reports.

The City allows for second units in multiple types of housing. In 2016, the zoning By-law for coach houses was approved by Committee and Council.

Secondary Suite Policy (2014)

Currently, the City of Ottawa permits secondary dwelling units within detached, linked-detached, semi-detached or townhouse dwellings in any zone that permits that type of housing subject to Zoning By-law requirements.¹ With the exception of townhouses, secondary units were permitted in the City since about 2005. Prior to the City's amalgamation, many former municipalities (5 of 11) permitted secondary dwelling units since 1994. Regulations were expanded in 2014 to include townhouses. The City is currently looking at expanding regulations further to permit secondary units in accessory structures.

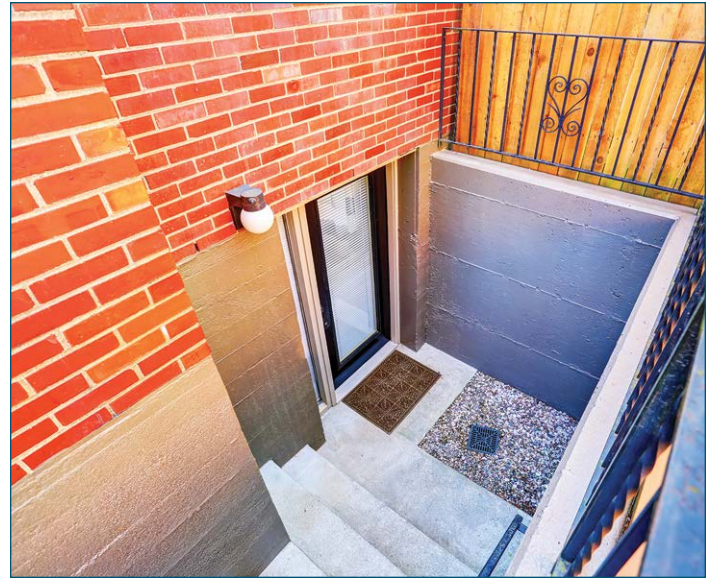
The secondary dwelling unit must meet the following requirements:

- It does not change the streetscape character along the road on which it is located
- It is not a stand-alone, principal unit capable of being severed
- It must be located on the same lot as its principal dwelling unit
- It only exists along with, and must be contained within the same building as, its principal dwelling unit.

Building a unit involves obtaining a building permit with additional requirements under the Fire Code and Ontario Building Code.

Overall, these requirements are aimed at permitting secondary dwelling units across the City in all residential zones while still maintaining the character of existing neighbourhoods and ensuring intensification of land use meets the objectives of the policy.

¹ Second units are not permitted in the community of Rockcliffe Park.



Regulations

The City's Zoning By-law identifies the following regulations for secondary dwelling units:

- **A maximum of one secondary dwelling unit** is permitted per principal dwelling unit in the case of detached, linked-detached, semi-detached and townhouse dwellings.
 - For duplexes, only one secondary unit may be permitted in the basement of an existing (as of July 2013) duplex dwelling.
- If located at or above grade (or a combination of at or above AND basement), the secondary dwelling unit **must not be greater in size than an amount equal to 40% of the gross floor area** of its principal dwelling unit. If located only in a basement, it may occupy the whole of the basement.
 - Where an attached garage is converted to create the secondary dwelling unit or a portion of the secondary dwelling unit, such attached garage is included in the calculation of the gross floor area of the dwelling.

- The creation of a secondary dwelling unit **must not result in any new doorway entrance** added to the front wall. In general, entrances must be on the ground floor.
- The **principal and secondary dwelling units must share the parking area** and yards provided for the principal dwelling unit, and no new driveway may be created (exceptions for corner lots).
- **No (additional) parking is required for a secondary dwelling unit**, but where provided, parking must be in conformity with the parking provisions of the by-law, and must not be located in the front yard (except in the case of a secondary dwelling unit within a duplex dwelling existing as of July 17, 2013).
- Where a secondary dwelling unit is located on a lot, **neither a garden suite nor any rooming units are permitted on that lot.**
- Secondary dwelling units must not be limited by, nor included in, any density control requirement, including for example, number of dwelling units and unit per hectare counts.

Changes were made to the City's parking regulations for second dwelling units no longer requiring additional parking spaces. In recent years, there was a growing understanding that parking for each development is not necessary and may result in poorer design. Staff note that they did not want parking requirements to impact the existing character of neighbourhoods and have a negative impact on the streetscape.

Implementation

The City of Ottawa has had a policy permitting second dwelling units in residential areas for over ten years and, in general, have made very few changes to the policy over time.

The City's Official Plan identifies secondary dwelling units as an appropriate form of affordable housing. The City's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan commits to increasing affordable housing options to address the current low supply and high demand that currently exists in the City. Based on recent survey results, the City has had "good support" from Council for the provision of secondary dwelling units.

Monitoring Secondary Suites

The City does not have a licensing program or tracking system. Developments for second units do go through the building permit process and therefore are captured within this data system.

Barriers

The City has not experienced significant barriers to implementation, just a need for consumer education.

One issue is that homeowners may not be aware of various processes and requirements around building secondary suites.

For example, City staff noted that there have been also been some issues regarding minimum floor area requirements (i.e. units must not be greater in size than an amount equal to 40% of the gross floor area of its principal dwelling unit). The intent of the regulation was to ensure that secondary dwelling units were, in fact, secondary and *smaller* in size compared to the primary dwelling unit. However, in isolated cases this has resulted in applications to create large suites (i.e. 2,000 ft²) in larger homes. He suggests that if the intent is to make the second dwelling unit smaller than the primary unit, applying a proportion works but if the true intent is to create smaller, perhaps more affordable units, then consideration of an absolute maximum floor space (rather than simply a maximum floor area relative to the main dwelling) may achieve these results better than a proportion.

Success Factors

Staff suggest planners focus primarily on the requirement to implement the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and Strong Communities Affordable Housing Act; requiring municipalities to permit secondary units. In addition, they recommend conducting extensive public education and consultation about second units and the Planning Act requirements.

"[A Secondary Suite] Does not change character of neighbourhoods and adds a small important component of affordable housing"

– Planner, City of Ottawa



Community Impact

In general, secondary dwelling units are creating some benefits such as increasing supply of rental housing and providing an option for ‘aging at home’ or extended families but more specific impacts are not really known.

Next Steps

Based on the existing policy and regulations, the City of Ottawa requires a zoning-by-law amendment to permit a secondary unit within an accessory structure, such as a detached garage. The City is currently evaluating this by-law, and work is underway with a policy to permit secondary dwelling units in accessory structures. The City, using the term “Coach Houses”, prepared a discussion paper in 2015 to outline a proposed definition and potential benefits for consideration in developing Official Plan Policies and zoning regulations for Coach Houses. The proposed amendments to the Official Plan would add an additional policy to allow Coach Houses as an appropriate form of secondary infill housing under “Generally Permitted Uses”.

Following the provincial requirements, any changes to policy would still only permit one secondary dwelling unit on a lot (either within the primary home OR within an accessory structure).

The City is currently evaluating considerations such as:

- Where in Coach Houses should be permitted
- The appropriate lot type and size to permit a Coach House
- The appropriate height and size of a Coach House
- Any desirable design elements (i.e. window and entrance placement)
- How units will be serviced.

The Zoning By-law was recently approved by Committee and Council (October 2016). The reports were amended to include a two-year review period after which staff will report back on the effectiveness and implementation of the Coach House regulations.

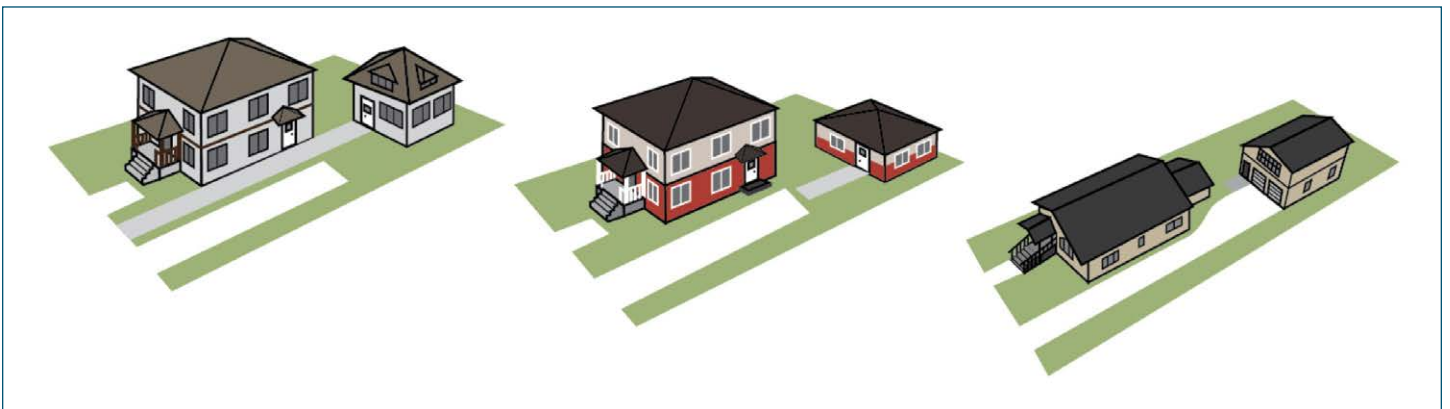


Photo source: City of Ottawa (2016)

Further reading:

[City of Ottawa Zoning By-law \(No. 2008-250\) Section 133](#)

[City of Ottawa \(2015\). Coach Houses: Secondary Dwelling Units in Accessory Structures](#)

[City of Ottawa Council \(October 25, 2016. Agenda 40\)](#)

[Ontario Secondary Suites Research Study](#)

[Accessible and Adaptable Housing](#)



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