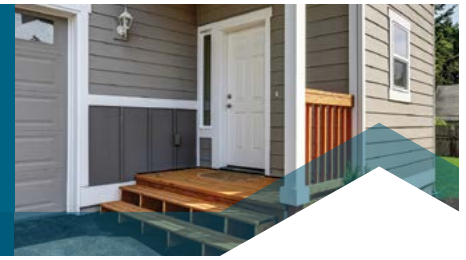


# Secondary Suites – Municipal Case Study



## TOWN OF WASAGA BEACH

This section provides an overview of the Town of Wasaga Beach's secondary dwelling unit policy based on the 2016 survey response, a follow-up interview with Town staff, and information from the Town's website and Guide to Second Dwelling Units. Wasaga Beach has implemented second units in multiple housing types and produced a "how to" guide to help homeowners create them. There remain some concerns, however, about ancillary secondary suites being used for vacation properties and understanding barriers to developing these units.

### Secondary Suite Policy (as of 2014)

Permission for second dwelling units in Wasaga Beach came into effect in spring of 2014. Currently, the development of an authorized second unit, whether currently existing or new construction, requires a building permit and a review for Zoning By-law compliance. Considerations include: health and safety; residential zoning; building, fire and electrical codes; property standards; and occupancy standards. Owners are required to obtain 'authorization' for the second dwelling unit through a **Final Occupancy Permit** before renting the second unit in order to demonstrate that the unit and home meet suitable standards.

In order to maintain the character of the main residential use, the Town's Official Plan states that "alterations or additions shall not significantly change the appearance of the main residential dwelling and shall have regard for any applicable urban design guidelines".

### Regulations

Second dwelling units are not permitted in all areas of the Town and must meet Locational Criteria in the Zoning By-law. Locational Criteria includes permissions for second units only in homes that are:

- Located outside of natural hazard lands
- Connected to full municipal water and sanitary services
- Located on and have access from a public street



- Used as the primary residential dwelling on a property (i.e. excludes ancillary structures such as a garage, 'bunkie', or shed) due to concerns that they will be rented for short-term vacation properties).

The main rationale for requiring access from a public street was to address parking concerns, mainly within condominium townhome developments which have narrow rights of way and already higher density land use.

If the above Locational Criteria are met, the next step is to apply for a building permit, the unit must also meet the following Zoning By-Law Requirements:

- A maximum of **one additional dwelling unit** may be permitted in a single detached, semi-detached, link, or a street townhouse dwelling (additional restrictions apply for townhouses).
- The **main residential dwelling must be a minimum of 93 square metres (1,000 sq.ft.)** in size, exclusive of the accessory dwelling unit.
- The **minimum area of a second unit must be 37 sq.m. (400 sq.ft.)**, and must not exceed 45% of the size of the entire main residential dwelling (including the second dwelling unit).

- The **minimum lot frontage for a street townhouse dwelling that may contain a second unit must be 10.3 metres** (34 feet), and the minimum driveway width shall be 5.6 metres (18 feet).
- **One parking space for the second unit** must be located on the property, in addition to the two parking spaces for the main residential dwelling (driveway or garage). Tandem parking shall be permitted.
- The driveway width must not exceed 55% of the width of the lot frontage. A minimum of 45% of the front yard shall be landscaped open space.
- A second unit may be permitted to be located in a basement or cellar only if the sanitary sewer or storm sewer serving the building is below the finished floor level of the basement or cellar, and **meets the Ontario Building Code**.
- **A business (home occupation) is not permitted to be operated in a second unit.**
- A second unit must **not be rented as a short-term** vacation or tourism rental accommodation.

In general, current regulations are aimed at providing provisions for second units while also maintaining the general character of existing neighbourhoods (i.e. frontage, size, landscaping) as well as meeting current Code requirements.

Wasaga Beach is a 'seasonal' community and staff have expressed some concerns with secondary suites being used as short-term vacation accommodation in residential areas; therefore the restriction to exclude ancillary structures was included as well as the requirement that the unit not be rented on a short-term basis. Staff felt that establishing regulations to regulate this use was challenging and was not in keeping with the objectives of the second unit policy.

In addition to obtaining a Building Permit and final Occupancy Permit (required to rent the second unit), the Town requires that the owner install signage and numbering for the second unit in accordance with the **Municipal Addressing By-law**. Second units are assigned the letter "B" following the numeric address of the main dwelling; this is vital to emergency service response.

## Implementation

In general, the Town's implementation of the second dwelling unit policy is done through the Planning Department. The Building Department is also involved at the building permit stage and public works is involved with respect to the Addressing By-law. By-law enforcement would also be engaged in the case of any community complaints.

While the Town does not have a specific incentive program for second units, the County of Simcoe has an incentive program to assist homeowners in creating secondary suites. Financial support is in the form of a forgivable loan up to a maximum of \$25,000. The unit must meet certain requirements including an agreement to maintain an affordable rent level for 15 years.

There may also be grants and subsidies available through the Wasaga Distribution for energy efficiency.

*"We know they (second units) exist and we want them to be authorized from a health and safety standpoint – so we want to simplify the process"*  
- Planner, Town of Wasaga Beach

## Monitoring Secondary Suites

The Town does not have a licensing program rather second units are tracked through the building permit process and an annual report is completed. While the number of new units are monitored, the type of development is not (i.e. new construction, legalization of existing suite). Town of Wasaga Beach staff noted that this is something the Town would like to start tracking. The Town's policy is aimed at finding a balance between ensuring the health and safety of existing unit while not creating roadblocks to authorizing them.

## Planning Strategies

Second dwelling units are supported by both the Town's Housing Strategy (2013) and Age-Friendly Community Plan (2016). The Housing Strategy is the main guiding document for housing policy and supports the development of second unit policy to assist in addressing affordability for existing homeowners as well as increasing affordable rental opportunities. The Town's Age-Friendly Community Plan identifies secondary suites as a strategy to address the need for affordable and rent geared to income housing stock, particularly for the large senior's population in Wasaga Beach.

## Local Support

Overall, the Town had good support from both community members and Council for developing and implementing its second dwelling unit policies. Local staff attribute some of this support to the Town's Housing Strategy. Developing the Housing Strategy helped to identify the need for affordable housing in the community and also generated greater support for policies to encourage more affordable housing options, including second dwelling units.



The Town has not experienced many barriers with respect to implementation but has had some confusion expressed by homeowners and contractors with regard to the maximum size requirements. They have received a number of questions on this issue and are aiming to clarify the wording in the future.

One challenge that was expressed by staff is that there currently is not a strong understanding of the number of existing units within the Town making it difficult to monitor the success of the policy in authorizing/legalizing existing units.

*“It’s not just a provincial requirement, it is good planning. A way to diversify housing options without building new stock”*

- Planner, Town of Wasaga Beach

## Success Factors

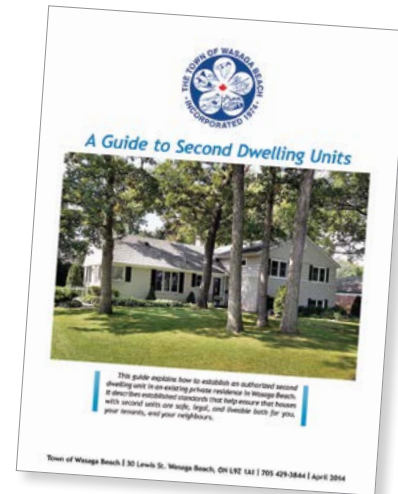
Overall, staff believe the Town’s second dwelling unit policy has helped in achieving some of their objectives around affordable housing. While acknowledging they haven’t seen as much take-up as they would like (averaging approximately 9 units/year), it is adding to the rental housing stock and is diversifying the Town’s housing supply. In speaking with landlords going through the authorization process, several of the units are being developed for aging parents. In this scenario, the town would entertain site specific applications for ‘garden suites’ through a temporary use by-law as a means of legally establishing a detached accessory dwelling unit.

In speaking about the factors that have led to the support for the policy, staff emphasizes the importance of building an understanding and consensus in the community of the importance of second units and why second unit provisions are positive for the community, “People in our community saw the benefit”. Much of this support, adds staff, was an extension of developing the Town’s Housing Strategy, and the public consultations held as part of this initiative. The Strategy identified the shortage of affordable housing in the Town and people understood the need to provide housing for all residents. While the Town still wants to do more education on second units and affordable housing, it highlights this as a key aspect of gaining initial support.

Coordinating with various municipal departments was also a positive contributor to getting the policy implemented.

## Community Impact

There have been approximately 25 new (authorized) second dwelling units created since the policy was implemented in the spring of 2014. Most have been created in basements and at least two units have been purpose-built within new home construction.



The Town’s ‘Guide to Second Dwelling Units’ is a comprehensive resource to homeowners looking to establish or create an authorized second dwelling unit. In addition to a step-by-step outline of the process, the Guide also provides additional insights to landlords. This includes information on potential impact to property taxes. The Town finds that usually a property’s current value assessment (CVA) does not increase until there is a 5% increase in total property value or at least \$10,000. Depending on the location of the unit, a second unit will not generally increase the value of a home by enough to result in a CVA increase. The exception being if a second unit is created by way of an addition.

The Guide provides additional information on impacts to insurance, income tax and outlines general responsibilities of the landlord through the Ontario Residential Tenancies Act.

## Next Steps

As noted, the Town would like to have a better understanding of the impact of the second dwelling unit policy and plans to look at further monitoring in the next year. The Town would like to see more second dwelling units getting built and will explore possible barriers and opportunities to facilitate further development.



## Further reading:

[Town of Wasaga Beach: A Guide to Second Dwelling Units](#)

[Town of Wasaga Beach Official Plan \(consolidated February 29, 2016\)](#)

[Town of Wasaga Beach Comprehensive Zoning By-law \(consolidated February, 2016\)](#)

[Municipal Addressing for Second Dwelling Units](#)

[Ontario Secondary Suites Research Study](#)

[Accessible and Adaptable Housing](#)



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