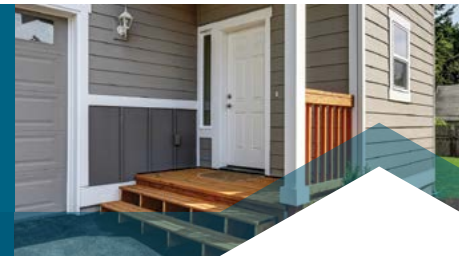


Secondary Suites – Municipal Case Study



CITY OF WELLAND

This section provides an overview of the City of Welland's Secondary Suite policy based on the 2016 survey response, a follow-up interview with City Staff, and information from the City's website. The City also has plans to amend its Zoning By-law next year to better conform to Provincial requirements.

Secondary Suite Policy

The City of Welland's Official Plan from May 2010 has a policy which permits one accessory dwelling unit in single-detached and semi-detached dwellings through a Zoning By-law or minor variance application. In addition, the current Zoning By-law allows duplexes, which could include secondary suites, in certain areas of the City.

The main goal for developing the City's secondary suite policy in 2010 was to meet the City's goals of intensification and to comply with Provincial policy. The City is currently exceeding Provincial requirements for intensification in its built up areas and it sees secondary suites as a way to support its municipal goals of intensification. The City of Welland also recognizes that secondary suites are a way to address the issue of the aging population as well as the increasing house prices in the area.

"Upfront public consultation is key."

– City of Welland Staff

Current Regulations

The current Official Plan policy (Section 4.2.3.13) only permits one accessory dwelling unit in a single-detached or semi-detached dwelling if it meets the following criteria:

- The floor area of the accessory unit is equal to, or less than, the gross floor area of the principal unit without any modification to the building's bulk or massing;



- The accessory dwelling unit is not located in an attached garage;
- One additional on-site parking space is provided exclusively for the accessory dwelling unit (tandem parking is allowed);
- The outdoor private amenity area is adequate for the amenity and leisure needs of all occupants;
- The accessory dwelling unit meets the requirements of the City's Zoning By-law, the Building Code and the Fire Code.

As previously mentioned, the City has developed a draft Zoning By-law which conforms to Provincial requirements and permits secondary suites without the need for an amendment or minor variance application. This new draft Zoning By-law will permit one secondary suite in all single-detached, semi-detached (now called two-unit dwellings), townhouses, and triplexes. In addition, the secondary suite can be located within the principal dwelling or within an accessory building detached from the principal dwelling, such as a garage.

Once this new Zoning By-law is adopted by Council, secondary suites will be permitted in three out of the four residential zones of the City¹ (the fourth zone is currently high density rental). In addition, secondary suites will be allowed in agricultural and rural zones either within the main dwelling or as an accessory detached dwelling. Secondary suites will also be permitted in institutional zones as these zones allow single-detached and two-unit dwellings.

The City is getting a large number of inquiries about secondary suites from residents who would like to have their elderly parents nearby as well as from developers of new subdivisions. In the interim, those applying to add a secondary suite to their dwelling are advised to apply for a Zoning By-law amendment or minor variance application. Applicants who are willing to wait until the new Zoning By-law is approved are asked to fill out a form to show their support for secondary suites in the City. Prior to the Province's "Promoting Affordable Housing Act" which exempts some secondary suites (above garage apartment or basement unit in new homes) from development charges, the City had also permitted secondary suites as-of-right in new subdivisions to assist developers to meet Provincial density requirements (50 jobs/ people per hectare). Many developers are highly supportive of secondary suites as they see it as a marketing tool in addition to allowing them to meet density requirements.

Implementation

Once the Zoning By-law is approved, implementation will be through the building permit application process. People interested in adding a secondary suite to their existing home will have to apply for a building permit and meet Building Code and Fire Code requirements.

Monitoring Secondary Suites

Monitoring will be done through building permit statistics. City staff prepare a status report twice a year to monitor where and what type of dwelling units are being built so monitoring of secondary suites will be part of this process. The City is also considering developing a separate monitoring process for its Zoning By-law, which will include regulations for secondary suites.

In developing the policy and regulations, it was the City's goal to make the process as simple as possible so that the process would not act as a barrier for building legal secondary suites. As such, the Zoning By-law was also developed to be as permissive as possible.

Incentives

The City of Welland is located in the Region of Niagara. The Region has incentives for the creation of secondary suites in single-family homes. Funding of up to \$25,000 is available as a fully forgivable loan which is written off at an equal amount over a 15-year period if the homeowner complies with the conditions of the Letter of Agreement. The loan amount includes a grant portion for accessibility modifications, if required, up to \$5,000 that does not need to be repaid. Eligibility requirements include the home value being at or below the median price for a single-detached home in the area, a maximum income level for the tenant of the secondary suite and maximum rents for the suite.

Success Factors

According to local staff, the City's secondary suite policy and the new draft Zoning by-law has already garnered considerable interest from residents who want to add a secondary suite to their existing dwelling so their elderly parents can live near them as well as from developers who see it as a marketing tool that will appeal to the changing demographics of the area.

There has also been strong community support for secondary suites. The City found that public consultations were key in the success of its secondary suite policy. Public consultations were undertaken prior to developing the policy which allowed the public to provide their input from the start as well as to have their questions answered. In addition, while waiting for approval of the new draft Zoning By-law, City staff encourage applicants for secondary suites, including developers, to provide suggestions for what should be included in the policy and how it should be implemented. Staff have taken these suggestions and revised the by-law regulations accordingly.

¹ The exception is high density residential zones which permit apartment buildings.



The City also felt that having a consistent message was important so City staff was coached on how to answer questions concerning secondary suites and the rationale for allowing them.

“Make it as easy as possible and be as transparent as possible.”

– City of Welland Staff

Another lesson learned was to make the policy and application process as simple as possible so that these would not deter people from applying to create secondary suites. The City felt that if they made the policy and process too onerous, people would just build illegal suites.

The City also found that having clear direction from the Province with regard to secondary suites policy made it a lot easier to develop their local policy.

Community Impact

The policy has been popular in the City with people lined up to obtain approval to build secondary suites. Some applicants have already received approval under the current regulations while others are waiting for the new Zoning By-law to be approved.

Next Steps

The City completed another round of public consultations in the fall 2016. It hopes to have its new Zoning By-law approved by early 2017.



Further reading:

[Section 4.2.3.13 and Section 5.1.3.2 of the City Official Plan speak to second dwelling units.](#)

[Also refer to permitted uses in low density designation which includes duplex.](#)

[Incentives for Secondary Suites \(City of Welland\)](#)

[Incentives for Secondary Suites \(Niagara Renovates Program\)](#)

[Strong Communities through Affordable Housing Act \(2011\)](#)

[Ontario Secondary Suites Research Study](#)

[Accessible and Adaptable Housing](#)



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