

Pathways for Compliance: Unpermitted Accessory Dwelling Units

Recommendations:

THAT the proposed approach outlined in the staff report titled “Pathways for Compliance: Unpermitted Accessory Dwelling Units”, dated November 18, 2025, to bring unpermitted accessory dwelling units into compliance, be endorsed.

THAT the abeyance of the bylaw enforcement files related to the unlawful or unregistered secondary suites authorized by Council under resolution R/2022-WS-018 be lifted.

Report Purpose and Summary Statement:

To provide Council with an overview of the issue of unpermitted accessory dwelling units and secondary suites, and recommend an approach to address them. The report summarizes the regulatory context, identifies the challenges and opportunities, and outlines options for compliance and next steps for developing a compliance framework for homeowners.

Previous Council Action:

When accepting the Housing Accelerator Fund funding, the City committed to implementing 22 new and ongoing actions across seven key initiatives aimed at improving housing accessibility and affordability in Maple Ridge.

The City has made significant progress through policy innovation and modernization of development and permitting processes, making it easier and faster to build homes. The funding received through the Housing Accelerator Fund will support the delivery of these priorities and support the continued implementation of Council’s housing objectives.

Strategic Alignment:

Liveable Community; Engaged, Healthy Community

Pathways for Compliance: Unpermitted Accessory Dwelling Units

BACKGROUND:

The City has recently taken many progressive steps to expand housing choice, improve affordability, and support the legalization of existing secondary suites and detached garden suites in Maple Ridge. Secondary suites and detached garden suites, collectively known as accessory dwelling units (ADUs), play an important role in the community's rental market, and support homeownership affordability as "mortgage helpers" for homeowners. Council has directed staff to explore policy and regulatory options that reduce barriers to creating safe and affordable ADUs in the community, while maintaining essential life-safety standards. Encouraging these types of units increases the community's rental supply and housing availability within established neighbourhoods.

As of December 12, 2019, the BC Building Code was amended to remove several barriers intended to encourage more affordable housing options, including secondary suites. Key changes included eliminating size restrictions and expanding eligibility for secondary suites beyond single-detached dwellings to include ground-oriented housing types such as duplexes and townhouses.

At the [July 14, 2020](#), Council Workshop, staff presented an approach to expand housing choice and encourage additional rental opportunities, while introducing mechanisms to ensure accountability among property owners. Following this discussion, Council directed staff to prepare an amendment to the Zoning Bylaw to remove the owner-occupancy requirement for secondary suites and detached garden suites in Maple Ridge. This change came into effect in January, 2021.

At the [April 26, 2022](#), Council Workshop, staff presented regulatory options to further expand opportunities for ADUs, supporting both homeowners and renters through a greater diversity of housing choices, within Maple Ridge. Council expressed general support for exploring the potential inclusion of secondary suites in the R-2 and R-3 zones and directed staff to bring forward a report with options. At that time Council also directed that bylaw enforcement related to unregistered or unlawful secondary suites be held in abeyance while the City reviewed opportunities to expand its secondary suite program, except in cases involving obvious nuisance situations requiring enforcement.

Also at that time, both the Province of BC and the Union of BC Municipalities had identified the housing and rental market as being in crisis, with escalating housing costs continuing to challenge affordability for residents. Council expressed support for staff to prepare options to amend the Zoning Bylaw to permit secondary suites in ground-oriented duplexes and townhouses, where appropriate.

On April 23, 2023, the Province announced the Homes for People action plan to deliver more homes for people, faster. Staff were exploring opportunities to expand the range of zones that permit secondary suites and to consider regulatory adjustments that would support various housing types. With the announcement, in-stream work was paused until the Province released more information.

In November 2023, the Province introduced new housing legislation intending to accelerate housing supply across British Columbia (i.e., Bills 44, 46 and 47). The legislation enabled greater as-of-right density and diversity in single-detached neighbourhoods and near frequent transit corridors. Local governments, including Maple Ridge, had until June 30, 2024 to update their Zoning Bylaw to allow ADUs on all single-detached and duplex-zoned lots.

Housing Accelerator Fund:

The Government of Canada has provided funding to municipalities and other bodies through several intakes of the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. A key objective of HAF is to remove barriers and encourage local initiatives to build new and more diverse housing forms faster, and support affordable, diverse and climate-resilient communities.

In late 2024 the City was successful in a HAF funding intake and was approved for up to \$16.6 million for the years 2025-2029. The City has received the first of four annual installments of the funding, with the final instalment being contingent on the City achieving the target for building permits issued. In accepting the HAF grant, the City committed to the implementation of a comprehensive action plan consisting of 22 new and ongoing initiatives, aimed at making housing more accessible and affordable. One of these 22 initiatives is about exploring and implementing compliance options, or pathways, for non-permitted accessory dwelling units within the City, which is the subject of this report.

DISCUSSION:

Secondary suites and detached garden suites are now permitted as-of-right on all single-detached and duplex-zoned lots within the City. This means that they may be located in a single-detached home, ground-oriented duplex, triplex or fourplex unit.

As a result of the initiatives commenced in 2022 and the direction of Council, it is estimated that the bylaw enforcement against approximately 80 to 100 unregistered, and unpermitted ADUs is presently being held in abeyance by City staff. Many of these cases are on properties that, in 2022, would not have permitted an ADU. With the recent regulatory changes, it may now be possible to permit ADUs on these properties.

ADUs play a role in the community by providing an affordable housing option for both tenants and homeowners. Staff have identified several initiatives that will help facilitate the compliance and legalization of existing unpermitted ADUs within the City. The initiatives described below are intended to balance public safety, housing affordability, and administrative efficiency. Each would need to be explored further by staff and recommendations on the specific criteria, program and associated regulatory amendments necessary be prepared and presented at a future meeting for Council consideration and direction.

1. Reinstatement of the Special Inspection Application Process:

For ADU construction work that had been completed without permits, the Planning and Building Department previously offered a “special inspection application” service to help identify evident Building Code issues and provide applicants with a starting point for bringing their suites into Building Code and Zoning Bylaw compliance.

This service had been temporarily suspended due to staffing shortages. Staff can reintroduce this complementary service for applicants seeking to legalize their existing, unpermitted ADU. Reinstating it would help to:

- Provide homeowners with clear guidance on required upgrades;
- Reduce reliance on contractors for preliminary assessments; and
- Promote transparency and trust between residents and the City.

This service could be considered on a year-by-year basis for the duration of the HAF program. For 2026, it is anticipated that this service can be accommodated within existing staffing resources. The special inspection application can also be reinstated for applicants who have applied for a building permit and wish to meet with an inspector to better understand the Building Code requirements to build an ADU.

2. Introduce Time-bound Incentives:

To help meet the City’s commitment of the HAF grant, staff can introduce expedited or streamlined, building permitting for applicants voluntarily disclosing existing, unpermitted ADUs on lots that are now permitted an ADU; streamlining the permit review process is particularly critical when units are already occupied. In such cases, the building review and permitting process serves as the primary mechanism to ensure compliance with the Building Code and the Building Bylaw so that safety requirements, protecting both tenants and property owners, are met. Establishing a dedicated or prioritized permitting pathway for these situations would help bring existing, unpermitted ADUs into compliance more effectively, while maintaining public safety and regulatory integrity. Any incentive program would be considered on a year-by-year basis and evaluated for effectiveness for the duration of the 4-year HAF program.

3. Increase Public Education and Awareness of ADU Regulations:

To encourage the voluntary disclosure of existing, unpermitted ADUs, staff can implement a public information campaign highlighting that those homeowners with non-compliant ADUs can come to the City to begin the legalization process to ensure that they are safe and Building Code compliant.

To support homeowners, new public-facing resources can include:

- Hosting one-on-one Sessions with City Building Officials (similar to the existing program in place for the Short Term Rental “Meet with a Planner” program);
- Hosting public information sessions for designers to inform them of common Building Code and design submission considerations for ADUs;
- Developing and offering inspection readiness checklists for homeowners on the compliance process, safety standards, and benefits of legalization;

- Developing a “Suite Legalization Guidebook”, tailored to Maple Ridge’s zoning and the Building Code requirements, including step-by-step examples and case studies; and
- Offering special inspection service for building permit applicants who have applied for an ADU.

4. Exploring Equivalencies in Safety Standards:

To support broader compliance and encourage the legalization of existing unpermitted ADUs, Council may wish to explore options for flexibility, where consistency with safety measures can be demonstrated. For example, the *Fire Sprinkler Bylaw No. 6184-2003* includes provisions that go beyond the minimum requirements of the Building Code. While the Building Code establishes minimum technical standards for health, safety, and accessibility in new construction and renovations, it does not mandate sprinkler systems in ADUs. These additional safety measures through the Fire Sprinkler Bylaw are intended to improve life safety, but the installation costs associated with introducing a sprinkler system can be a significant financial barrier to creating new or legalizing affordable rental units in the community, especially for homeowners with older properties. In some cases municipalities like Maple Ridge have adopted enhanced standards in recognition of local factors such as a property’s proximity to a fire hall.

5. Introduction of Notices on Title:

A Notice on Title (under Section 57 of the *Community Charter*) is a tool to help municipalities administer and enforce the Building Code and local building bylaws. The process involves registering the notice on the title of a property at the Land Title Office noting that a building or structure has been constructed or altered in contravention of the City’s Building Bylaw and/or the Building Code. Once registered, the notice appears in the “Legal Notations” section of the property title search.

The purpose of the Notice on Title is to inform potential property owners, lenders, or prospective purchasers of any known violations of building bylaws or regulations. It serves as a warning that the property may be in breach but does not specify the details of the contravention. Instead, it indicates that further information can be obtained from the municipality. The notice is intended to encourage voluntary compliance of unpermitted ADUs and reduce risks for the City. It is a protective measure rather than a punitive one, ensuring that future owners are aware of any issues with the property.

6. Lift Abeyance of Bylaw Enforcement Files and Enforce ADU Compliance:

While the primary focus of the proposed pathways to compliance elements described above is to encourage voluntary compliance through education, guidance, and support, the City also has a requirement to maintain clear procedures for cases where property owners choose not to achieve bylaw and Code compliance within a reasonable timeframe.

Staff are recommending that the abeyance of bylaw enforcement related to the unlawful or unregistered secondary suites since April 2022 be lifted. With the new housing legislation introduced by the Province, and the regulations having been incorporated into the City’s Zoning Bylaw in 2024, that the City has met the intent to expand the accessory dwelling unit program,

as envisioned in 2022 when Council directed that bylaw enforcement related to unregistered or unlawful secondary suites be held in abeyance.

Should Council choose to lift the abeyance direction, staff will investigate ADUs for full Zoning Bylaw and/or Building Bylaw compliance where:

- A valid complaint has been received by a current tenant of the suite, or by a neighbour experiencing direct negative impacts from the suite;
- A homeowner identifies potential non-compliance issues and requests a special inspection to determine what is required to comply;
- There is evidence suggesting safety concerns or serious nuisance issues may exist;
- There exists reason to believe the use and density provisions of the Zoning Bylaw are being contravened; and
- There exists other circumstances where the City considers it prudent to exercise its statutory powers to investigate and pursue bylaw compliance.

In general, where any work that, in the opinion of a Building Inspector, is necessary to ensure an adequate degree of safety is not required, but other Building Code infractions exist, an owner can be given a period of time to apply for a Building Permit (e.g., 60 days) and to complete the work to bring the suite into compliance (e.g., 180 days).

NEXT STEPS:

Should Council endorse the proposed pathways to compliance for unpermitted ADUs described in this report, staff will explore each of the initiatives and report back to Council with recommendations on the specific criteria, program and associated regulatory amendments necessary to move one or more of the initiatives forward for consideration. This would include recommended information resources to help support homeowners through the compliance process, and ways to encourage the voluntary disclosure of existing unpermitted ADUs.

The fair and effective implementation of compliance options for unpermitted ADUs involves the continued collaboration of many departments, including but not limited to, the Planning and Building, Bylaw, Licensing and Community Safety, Finance, Communications, and Fire Departments. Through this ongoing collaboration between staff, opportunities to identify operational requirements and resource implications will continue to be leveraged. As with any new program or service, if one or more of the initiatives are implemented, staff will evaluate uptake and report back to Council approximately one year after introduction on progress and provide any recommended adjustments.

Strategic Alignment:

The proposed pathways to compliance for unpermitted ADUs align with the Liveable Community and Healthy Community pillars of the 2023-2026 Council Strategic Plan by advancing the City's commitment to promoting housing diversity, safety, and accessibility.

Financial Impact:

The proposed scope of work aligns with the financial allocations under the 2025 Planning and Building Department, and Bylaw, Licensing, and Community Safety Department's, budgets and workplans.

CONCLUSION:

Staff are committed to implementing a balanced and compassionate approach to unpermitted Accessory Dwelling Units, that supports public safety, collaboration, and housing affordability in Maple Ridge. By introducing a thoughtful supportive program that includes one or more of the initiatives summarized in this report, the City can encourage voluntary compliance while ensuring adherence to the Building Code's safety standards.

"Lisa De Silva"

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Report Approval Details

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Attachments:	
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This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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