

Garden Suite Study
Terms of Reference

ADOPTED BY COUNCIL

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1. OVERVIEW

Having a garden suite to help offset a mortgage, house a family member, or provide an accessible living situation is becoming increasingly appealing to homeowners. Garden suites can add to the housing supply at a time when shortages exist. They are a potential housing option and used by many communities as a way to infill established residential neighbourhoods while retaining form and character.

Currently, garden suites are not permitted within the District of Saanich. However, there is direction in the District of Saanich's Official Community Plan (OCP) Policy 5.1.2.10 to consider "a wide range of alternative housing types" in support of affordable housing. The Official Community Plan also supports increasing density within urban centres and villages to build walkable and sustainable communities, and specifies support for detached "carriage/coach houses" up to two storeys.

Relevant policy also exists in the Official Community Plan to support housing choice, appropriate infill, and housing affordability. The Official Community Plan envisions a broad range of housing types that can accommodate people of different ages, incomes, family structures, and physical and social needs. It supports housing options to allow residents to age in place, accommodate new residents, and provide lifestyle choices.

In addition to choice, housing affordability is an issue of municipal and regional importance. The District of Saanich's housing policy resides in the Official Community Plan and aligns with the Regional Housing Affordability Strategy. Key regional goals include regulatory actions to implement best practices to permit greater densification and inclusionary zoning. Examples of this include allowing secondary suites, planning for increased density in "Centres" and "Villages", and encouraging infill.

2. BACKGROUND

On August 22, 2016, Council passed a motion directing staff to explore strategies to regulate garden suites in Saanich for Council's consideration.

Secondary suites have been legal within urban Saanich since 2014 by building permit. The application process includes requirements regarding location, size, owner occupancy, parking, as well as meeting BC Building Code, zoning and plumbing bylaws, and other applicable requirements. The zoning requirements specify that the suite must be contained within the single family dwelling, and allows for only one secondary suite per lot.

Public interest in garden suites exists, although historically support has been lower than for secondary suites. During the public engagement process for secondary suites, residents were surveyed regarding their level of support for garden suites located in an accessory building such as a converted garage or purpose-built cottage. Survey results indicated that in 2009, there was 47% in favour of garden suites, 20% neutral, and 33% against. In 2014, support for garden suites increased to 52%, 22% neutral, with 26% against. The large number of neutral responses suggests that the public needs more details to determine their support for this issue.

There is considerable experience in other BC communities with garden suites from which Saanich can benefit. Within the region, Colwood, Victoria, Sidney, and Metchosin have adopted regulations that regulate their use. Nanaimo has had regulations in place since 2008. In the Lower Mainland, communities including

Vancouver, West Vancouver, Coquitlam, City of North Vancouver, and the District of North Vancouver support detached accessory residential. Kelowna has allowed them since 1998.

There are a variety of approaches and approval processes for regulating garden suites within these communities depending on local context. These examples provide the District of Saanich with ample experience from which to draw to develop its own approach.

3. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of undertaking a study to examine legalizing garden suites is to:

- Increase the long-term supply of rental housing;
- Expand the diversity of housing choice in Saanich;
- Provide a legal and safe route for a form of housing which is now occurring illegally; and,
- Support forms of infill that are sensitive to established neighbourhoods within urban parts of Saanich.

4. DEFINITION

The terminology for garden suites varies almost as much as the number of communities which have adopted them. Some other terms in use include: backyard cottages, laneway houses, carriage houses, coach houses, accessory dwelling units, and detached accessory dwelling units.

Garden suites are defined as small detached homes (see Figure 1) that are sited in the rear yard of single family lots where an accessory building might go (see Figure 2), and are accessory to the primary dwelling.



Figure 1: Garden suite

Garden suites are for rental purposes. Subdivision and strata titling are not permitted.

The BC Building Code considers garden suites to be small homes. They must meet the same standard of construction and servicing requirements as principal residential buildings. They tend to cost the same or slightly more per square foot to build than standard homes.

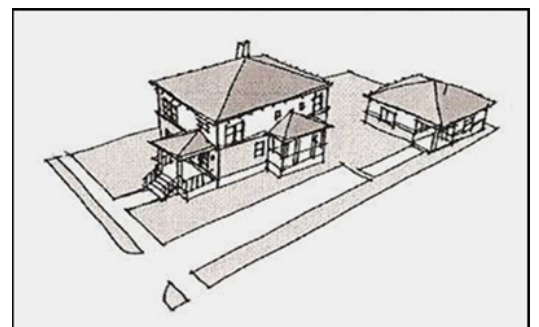


Figure 2: Siting of garden suite

5. STUDY OBJECTIVES

- a) Investigate garden suites as a form of permanent rental housing.
- b) Develop a sound information base to assess potential regulatory changes and associated impacts.
- c) Develop an understanding of key challenges and opportunities.
- d) Assess community and stakeholder support for garden suites.
- e) Identify locations within the Sewer Servicing Area where it would be most appropriate to permit garden suites.
- f) Provide direction on an appropriate potential regulatory framework for garden suites.

6. SCOPE OF WORK

The scope of work is to develop proposed standards for detached garden suites as an alternative to secondary suites (one or the other, but not both) on single family lots. The study will produce a technical analysis of design and land use requirements, a community engagement process to determine concerns, interests, and level of support, and a regulatory regime and approvals process.

The focus of the study is to provide the opportunity for permanent long-term rental housing stock, built to BC Building Code standards. Temporary structures that do not meet the BC Building Code standards and seasonal recreational vehicles are outside the scope of this work. Smaller sized homes are within the scope of the study, as long as they meet the BC Building Code.

The geographic scope of the study includes the area within the Sewer Service Area only.

Informed by the experience of other communities, the scope of work includes the following elements:

- A brief analysis of housing supply and gaps, social and demographic changes/needs, and potential impact of garden suites on Saanich's housing inventory;
- A review of regulatory frameworks in other jurisdictions;
- A review of the District of Saanich's existing accessory building regulations;
- A determination of appropriate building dimensions, lot/siting requirements, parking standards, etc. for garden suites in Saanich;
- An identification of appropriate zones, locations, and/or lots for garden suites;
- An estimated cost of construction;
- A public engagement process to determine community concerns, interests, and support;
- Proposed regulatory options, a regulatory framework, and approvals process;
- An analysis of anticipated housing impacts if regulations are implemented;
- Identification of potential impacts to property assessment and property taxes;
- An assessment of current bylaws, policies, and processes to ensure consistency and alignment; and
- A proposed timeline for implementation.

Other issues requiring consideration will be:

- Servicing requirements and capacity;
- Enforcement considerations;
- Legal standing of existing garden suites;
- Minimizing neighbourhood impacts through:
 - Off-street parking;
 - Density limits;
 - Owner occupation;
 - Orientation and privacy; and,
 - Location of entry; and
- Registration or licensing; and
- Feasibility of implementation.

7. PLANNING PROCESS

There are three activities that make up the planning process to examine the potential for regulating garden suites (see Table 1). A background technical report will provide sound information and analysis that can

serve as a basis for detailed discussions. The public engagement exercises will provide an opportunity to share research findings, explore issues, and gauge public support for regulatory changes. These activities will provide the basis for drafting regulations within the Saanich context.

Table 1: Planning Process

PHASE	ACTIVITIES	KEY DELIVERABLES	DURATION
Technical report	Overview of housing profile SCAN and key stakeholder interviews Technical analysis of development standards and zoning of existing accessory buildings and proposed garden suites Building cost estimates Analysis of regulations and approvals processes in other jurisdictions Identification of key issues	Housing gap brief Technical report of development standards, zoning, property eligibility, potential regulatory approaches Info package for public Display boards for public engagement	3 months
Public Engagement	Community survey Consult stakeholders and the public on support and concern for garden suites Test approaches to regulating garden suites with stakeholders and the public Loop-back to stakeholder groups to get feedback on draft development standards	Summary of public engagement process and outcomes Options for garden suite regulatory approach	6 months
COUNCIL CHECK IN			
Draft regulations	Develop a recommended regulatory regime including, if applicable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recommended approvals process ▪ Draft bylaw amendments ▪ Draft design guidelines 	Recommended regulatory regime Proposed Zoning Bylaw amendment Proposed DPA guidelines Communications materials	3 months

8. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A series of open houses, workshops, focus groups and stakeholder meetings are planned to fully explore the issue with key stakeholders.

Key stakeholders include:

- General public and residents;
- Homeowners and neighbours of single family lots;
- Builders and designers;
- Professional associations such as Landlord BC, Urban Development Institute, and Canadian Home Builders Association;
- BC Assessment;
- CRD and other municipalities;
- Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria;
- Saanich Community Associations and Network (SCAN);
- District of Saanich staff; and,
- Committees of Council.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) illustrates a spectrum of public participation in planning processes. Table 2 identifies examples of the level of public engagement that is proposed for the review of a regulatory approach to garden suites.

Table 2: Proposed Engagement Activities - IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decision	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution
Anticipated Use of Technique	Saanich website and social media Advertising Background information	Open Houses Primary research including interviews and community survey	Workshops Stakeholder meetings Focus Groups	

9. BUDGET AND TIMING

The project will be led by the District of Saanich staff, with support from consultants as needed throughout the process. The planning process will require planning and technical staff, with some support from other departments.

The budget for the Garden Suite Study is \$45,000. Included in the budget are project costs for a detailed technical analysis and community survey. The District of Saanich will retain an external research firm to undertake a random survey of Saanich residents of adequate sample size to be statistically significant. The budget also includes expenses for print production, advertising, facility rentals, open house refreshments, supplies, and graphic design and illustration work.

The project is expected to be completed within twelve months.

10. DELIVERABLES

The final deliverables of this project will be a report to Council with attachments that are anticipated to include the following:

- Technical report on garden suites;
- Summary of public engagement process and outcomes;
- Recommended actions with regards to regulating garden suites;
- Draft Zoning Bylaw Amendments;
- Design guidelines; and
- Proposed garden suite approval process.