



Building Better Homes and Communities

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ACT Solutions

City of Victoria helps homeowners to create secondary suites Victoria, BC

Issue

With a vacancy rate well below three per cent, the City of Victoria was facing a severe rental housing shortage. To address this issue, the city made it easier for homeowners to create secondary suites — rental units located within single-family detached homes. In addition to increasing opportunities for affordable housing options, secondary suites offer homeowners a number of benefits such as helping to pay mortgages, providing a sense of security, increasing the home's value and increasing opportunities for affordable housing options.

Victoria now allows secondary suites throughout the city and has also introduced an incentive program to increase the number of legal secondary suites.

Plan

Victoria used the ACT grant to offer a one-day “Hands-On” open house at City Hall where residents could bring in their plans, walk through the entire regulatory process step-by-step, and get answers to their specific questions. Building inspectors, city planners and other experts were on hand to provide information to make it easier for homeowners wishing to create secondary suites. Hourly seminars were also offered on topics such as finding a contractor, choosing a tenant and working with a designer.

Results

The feedback from residents who attended the open house was very positive. The open house was a key component of the city's comprehensive housing strategy.



Side-yard entrance to a secondary suite in the City of Victoria

Source: City of Victoria

Secondary suites offer homeowners and first-time home-buyers financial assistance and support for aging in place, while increasing the availability of affordable rental housing in a way that contributes to neighbourhood stability and a more efficient use of existing land and services.

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Victoria implemented relaxations to regulations that facilitate the creation of new secondary suites. Adjustments included the application of the policy to all single-family dwellings in the city; permission to modify the building exterior; and elimination of the parking requirement for a secondary suite.

The city also created a secondary suite grant program that offers homeowners financial assistance equal to 25 per cent of construction costs for new suites, up to a maximum of \$5,000. The grant is offered to occupant-owners of single detached homes within the city limits, on condition that the suite is made available for rental use for five years. This obligation accrues to the new owner if the house is sold. Eligible costs include building materials and contracted services, and the program provides design guidelines to assist homeowners in developing a suite that will enhance the unique features of their homes and neighbourhoods.

The Secondary Suite Grant Incentive program is a one-time opportunity that is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Regulatory modifications together with financial and information assistance have been hugely successful. Eighty per cent of all available secondary suites in Victoria have been created since the city expanded its policy.

Related reports

Additional information is available on the City of Victoria's website at: <http://www.victoria.ca/cityhall/departments-sustainability-secondary-suites.shtml#pa>

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