FAQ Frequently Asked Questions
Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing

Disclaimer: *This is not a legal document and does not outline all applicable regulations. Any contradiction, dispute, or difference between the contents of this document and applicable provincial law or City bylaws, plans, policies, or guidelines will be resolved by reference to the law, bylaws, or other official documents.*

What are the Province's new housing rules?

A: In the fall of 2023 the Province of British Columbia introduced new housing rules to increase the supply of housing across BC. The new rules require cities like Abbotsford to permit "Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing" on most lots with zoning that is otherwise restricted to single detached dwellings and/or duplexes.

Q: What is Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing?

A: Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH) refers to a range of buildings and dwelling unit configurations that can provide more affordable and attainable housing for middle-income families. Examples of SSMUH include:

- Secondary Suites;
- Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), like Garden Suites or Coach Houses;
- Duplexes; and
- Multiplexes.

Q: How much housing is permitted on each property?

A: The number of housing units that can be added to any particular property depends on its size and whether it is located within the Urban Development Boundary.

Outside of the Urban Development Boundary:

- 1 accessory dwelling unit (e.g. secondary suite) is now permitted on all properties zoned for single detached dwellings.

Within the Urban Development Boundary:

- 3 units on properties that are 280 m^2 (~3,014 ft^2) or smaller.
- 4 units on properties that are bigger than 280 m^2.

Note: The legislation requires allowing up to 6 units on properties bigger than 280 m^2 and within 400 metres of a bus stop with frequent service. However, currently there are no bus stops in Abbotsford that meet the criteria for frequent service.

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604-864-5510
planning-info@abbotsford.ca

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604-864-5525
building-info@abbotsford.ca

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Q: Is my property eligible for additional units?

A: In accordance with the Province's new rules, eligible properties in Abbotsford must:

- be located within the Urban Development Boundary;
- be smaller than 4,050 m^2 (~ 1 acre);
- not have heritage protection; and
- not be within a Transit-Oriented Area (TOA).

Q: Which zones allow up to 4 housing units?

A: Any zone in which the principal residential use is otherwise limited to single detached dwellings and/or duplexes (including Comprehensive Development zones) is permitted up to 4 units, subject to conditions. The impacted zones include, but are not limited to:

- Suburban Residential (SR)
- Urban Estate Residential (RS1)
- Urban Residential (RS3; RS3-A)
- Urban Residential, Infill (RS3-i)
- Urban Residential, Infill Garden Suite (RS3-ig)
- Duplex Residential (RS4)
- Duplex Residential, Infill (RS4-i)
- Residential (RS5; RS5-A)
- Compact Lot Residential (RS6)
- Compact Lot Coach House Residential (RS6-C)
- Infill Residential (RS7)
- Coach House Residential (RCH)
- Urban Residential Hybrid (RSH)
- Residential Corner Store (RCS)
- Comprehensive Development Zones restricted to single detached dwelling and/or duplex

Q: How can I find out if 4 units is allowed on my property?

A: You can use the City's online WebMap to see if up to 4 housing units is allowed on your property, as per the following instructions:

1. Enable the Urban Development Boundary
   In the layer list on the left side of the map, click + next to "Development Layers" and select "Urban Development Boundary." This shows the City's Urban Development Boundary. If your property is inside the Urban Development Boundary, up to 4 housing units may be permitted.

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2. Confirm Your Zoning
   Use the map or address bar at the top right of the map to find your property. Click on your property. Your zoning will be listed next to "Zoning" in the information box that appears. If your property is zoned for single detached dwellings or duplexes, up to 4 housing units may be permitted. You can review your zone using the City's online Zoning Bylaw. Common zones where up to 4 units may be permitted include RS3, RS3-A, RS3-i, RS4, RS5, RS5-A, RS6, RS7, and RSH.

3. Confirm Your Lot Area
   Your lot area is listed in the information box when you select your property. Lot area is listed next to "Area (from GIS)." If your property is less than 4,050 m², up to 4 units may be permitted.

Alternatively, or if you have further questions, you can contact City staff at the following:

32315 South Fraser Way, 2nd Floor
planning-info@abbotsford.ca
604-864-5510

Q: Are single detached houses still allowed?

A: Yes. Single detached housing is still allowed. However, additional housing units are allowed on most single detached properties.

Q: Are multiple secondary suites now permitted in a single detached house?

A: No. The BC Building Code requires secondary suites to be located within a building or portion of a building "that contains only one other dwelling unit". For example, a single detached dwelling can have 1 secondary suite and a Duplex building can have 1 secondary suite per duplex unit.

If a single detached homeowner wishes to have multiple rental units within their home, it would be considered a Duplex with suites or a Multiplex (depending on the size and configuration of units).

Note: Different BC Building Code requirements will apply depending on the configuration of units. For example, a Duplex with suites is subject to Part 9 of the Code, while a Multiplex may be subject to Part 3 of the Code.

For specific Building Code related questions, please contact the Building Department at 604-864-5525.

Q: Can I have more than one residential building on my property?

A: Individual SSMUH units are required to be fully attached within one building except where existing zoning allows for detached accessory units like garden suites and coach houses.

Q: Can I add a detached accessory unit, like a Garden Suite or Coach House to my property?

A: Garden Suites and Coach Houses are permitted in zones that include them as a permitted use, subject to conditions (e.g. lot size). For example, Garden Suites are permitted in the RS3-ig, RS7, and N78 zones, and Coach Houses are permitted in the SR, RS6-C, RCH, and N30 zones.

Q: What are the zoning regulations for SSMUH?

A: As a first step, Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing is subject to the zoning regulations contained within the applicable zone. For example, if your property is zoned RS3 then SSMUH must comply with the regulations (e.g. setbacks, height, lot coverage, density) contained within the RS3 zone.

Q: What are the parking requirements for SSMUH?

A: Parking requirements for SSMUH depend on the type of housing provided, as follows:

- Single Detached Dwelling: 2 parking spaces / unit
- Duplex: 2 parking spaces / unit
- Multiplex: 1.5 parking spaces / unit
- Accessory Units: 1 parking space / unit

Q: Can individual SSMUH units be stratified?

A: As a first step the City is requiring that SSMUH units be non-stratified. This means there will be a single landowner for the property who may chose to rent out individual units.

Q: Are building permits required for SSMUH?

A: Yes. Construction of new housing is subject to the BC Building Code and all applicable bylaws, regulations, and enactments, including the City's Building Bylaw.

Q: What are the Building Code requirements for SSMUH?

A: Different versions of SSMUH will be subject to different Building Code requirements. For example, a Duplex with secondary suites falls under Part 9 of the BC Building Code, whereas a Multiplex may fall under Part 3 of the BC Building Code. For more information on the Building Code, please contact the Building Department at 604-864-5525.

Q: Are upgrades to services required if I want to add units to my property?

A: The Development Bylaw regulates the engineering design and construction standards for offsite and onsite infrastructure improvements associated with building permits. To determine if SSMUH is likely to trigger offsite works and services, please send your enquiry to planning-info@abbotsford.ca or 604-864-5510.

Q: Will Development Cost Charges (DCC's) and/or other Engineering related fees apply?

A: Yes. Please anticipate DCC's and other Engineering related fees. Each application will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and the associated fees will be determined by staff upon review.

Q: What's next for SSMUH?

A: Through the ongoing OCP update process, the City is continuing to explore how SSMUH can best integrate with Abbotsford's unique context and housing needs. City staff anticipate bringing forward further ideas related to SSMUH implementation as part of the OCP's New Directions Report in the fall of 2024.

Q: Where can I ask further questions about SSMUH?

A: If you have further questions about the new housing rules, you can contact City staff at the following:

32315 South Fraser Way, 2nd Floor
planning-info@abbotsford.ca
604-864-5510

Helpful Links:

City of Abbotsford Zoning Bylaw

City of Abbotsford Development Bylaw

Abbotsforward 2050 | Official Community Plan Update

Changes to the BC Building Code for Secondary Suites