

Secondary Suites

Guidelines for the construction of Accessory Secondary Suites in the City of Abbotsford

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ABBOTSFORD

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SECONDARY SUITES GUIDE

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SECONDARY SUITES - DEFINED

A secondary suite is defined as a portion of a single family home which is established as a separate dwelling unit from the principal part of the house. It is typically a finished basement with kitchen facilities, a separate entrance from the exterior, and has a lockable, fire-rated door between the second set of cooking facilities and the remainder of the principal dwelling.

Secondary suites are required to be registered with the City. Registration confirms that suites comply with the *BC Building Code* and *Abbotsford Zoning Bylaw, 2014*. A number of legal, health, life safety, fire protection, and zoning requirements must be met for the suites to be registered.

ZONING REQUIREMENTS

Secondary suites are permitted in the following zones: **RR, CR, SR, RS1, RS3, RS4, RS5, A1, A2, A3, A5, N11 and RMF zones**.

In the City of Abbotsford, a secondary suite must comply with the following zoning provisions:

1. Be limited to **one** secondary suite per lot, no larger than **90 m²** (968.8 ft^2) **or 40% of the net floor area** of the house, whichever is less;

2. In addition to the two off-street parking spaces required for the house, one additional off-street parking space is required for a secondary suite. Tandem parking (one vehicle behind the other) is acceptable and garage space counts towards the off-street parking requirements; however, the City strongly encourages providing a non-tandem parking space for the tenant;

3. Not permitted where **Residential Care,** accessory **Boarding** or **Coach House** is occurring on the property. The Zoning Bylaw provides definitions for each of these terms/uses.

The secondary suite cannot be subdivided from the house that it is part of. Both the suite and principal dwelling will remain registered under the same title.

The title of the property must be free of any charges that would prohibit a secondary suite or a second set of cooking facilities (i.e. covenants, statutory building schemes, Land Use Contracts).
Note: A copy of your property title can be obtained from the Land Title Office (88 6th Street, New Westminster, 1-877-577-5872 or www.ltsa.ca). Your lawyer or notary can assist you with this. The City of Abbotsford does not hold copies of these Land Title documents and cannot interpret them for you.

ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS

If your property complies with all of the zoning requirements, one secondary suite may be permitted subject to the following regulations:

- **SEPTIC**: Fraser Health Authority (Environmental Health Services) must approve acceptable septic disposal for properties not connected to City sewer services (Agricultural and Rural Residential zones).

- **SEWER PUMP**: Except where the entire house relies on a sewage pump for drainage a secondary suite that does not have gravity drainage for sewer is not permitted.

- **BUILDING CODE**: The suite must meet *BC Building Code* safety and size restrictions (see page 4).

LAND USE CONTRACT AREAS

Houses on properties governed by a Land Use Contract (LUC) that prohibit secondary suites require an amendment process similar to rezoning to allow a suite in a house, as well as a Public Hearing. The fee for a Land Use Contract Amendment for a secondary suite is $950. Contact the Planning Services Division (2nd Floor, City Hall) at 604-864-5510 or planning-info@abbotsford.ca for further information.

COSTS (as per the Consolidated Building Bylaw, 2003, Bylaw No. 1274-2003)

Existing suite registration fee (infrastructure fee also required for current year)	$572.00
New suite registration fee (a finished basement permit may also be required at an additional cost)	$260.00
Infrastructure fee (paid on an annual basis through property taxes)	$260.00
Suite removal permit	$75.00

SECOND KITCHENS

A second set of cooking facilities is allowed in homes in all zones, provided the cooking facilities are open to the rest of the house (i.e. not separated by a fire-rated lockable door).

COACH HOUSES

Coach houses are permitted in the RR, CR, SR and RS6-C zones as accessory uses to a single detached dwelling, and must be on the second storey of an accessory building. The coach house must comply with the conditions of use set out by the specific zone they are situated in.

ILLEGAL SUITES

Please note that all necessary permits must be in place for a secondary suite. In addition, permits are required for all building and plumbing alterations and improvements and must meet *BC Building Code* compliance standards.

If the City becomes aware of an illegal secondary suite, either through a Bylaw complaint or other means, a thorough investigation will be conducted by City Bylaw Officers to determine whether a suite removal permit is required. Typically, when there is a separate area downstairs that has locking doors separating it from the remainder of the principal dwelling and it has a kitchen with a cooking device, it is considered a separate dwelling unit.

Property owners with unauthorized suites may be subject to a $250 fine per day under the *Bylaw Notice Enforcement Bylaw* for every day that a suite is not registered. To avoid being fined, property owners must register their secondary suites with the Building Permits and Licences Division.

SUITE REMOVAL

If an owner chooses to remove a secondary suite independent of a Bylaw complaint or Services file, the following conditions apply:

- locking devices, which separate the suite from the remainder of the principal dwelling unit, must be removed;
- ensure the door between the second set of cooking facilities and the remainder of the principal dwelling is a non-fire rated door; and
- suite removal fee of $62.50 is to be paid (this fee is increase to $260 where there are two (2) or more non-conforming suites being removed).

An inspection is done by a City official to confirm the suite has been removed. Once the City has confirmed that the suite is removed, the property tax base is changed. Any suites not removed by May 1 will have the $260 infrastructure fee included in the property tax notice for that current year.

BC BUILDING CODE

Requirements for life safety, fire protection and health of the occupants of the suite are taken from Part 9 of the *BC Building Code*. Section 9.36 of the Code applies specifically to secondary suites.

These requirements apply to alterations to an existing single family dwelling to incorporate an accessory suite. Where a suite is being constructed in conjunction with a building permit for the principal dwelling, all requirements of Part 9 of the current *BC Building Code* shall apply.

A secondary suite may be constructed in an existing building that does not comply with current Building Code requirements at the discretion of the Manager of Building Permits and Licences, provided it meets the intended safety levels of the Code.

The City may require an upgrade to existing features in a house to meet the most current Code standards when permitting the construction of a new secondary suite in the existing house.

A. FIRE SAFETY (see page 11)

To protect the occupants in both the main part of the house and the secondary suite against the spread of fire, and to ensure their safe exit from the building in an emergency situation, the Building Code requires that the following regulations be met:

- **Fire Separation** – defined as "a construction assembly that acts as a barrier against the spread of fire." A fire separation is required between the secondary suite and the remainder of the house.

  The fire separation must be constructed to withstand the spread of fire for:
  - New Construction: 45 minutes; or
  - Existing: 30 minutes in conjunction with interconnected photo-electric smoke alarms.

  No fire separation is required if the home is sprinklered throughout.

  The fire separation between the suite and the house must be constructed using gypsum board products to achieve the desired fire resistance rating.

New Construction

- 45 minutes - 5/8" type 'X' or 'C' on ceilings
  - 1/2" type 'C' on walls

Existing Construction

- 30 minutes - 1/2" type 'C' on ceilings
  - 1/2" regular on walls

Openings greater than 25 in^2, in the fire separation, such as doors, windows, pot lights or access hatches that could allow fire to spread from one side of the separation to the other must be protected appropriately. Doors must be labelled or stamped for a 20-minute fire-resistance rating and be self-closing and weatherstripped (see page 10).

- **Smoke Alarms (see page 11)** – must be hard-wired in accordance with the Canadian Electrical Code and the *BC Building Code*. Their purpose is to provide early warning to all building occupants in the event of fire.

  - Smoke alarms must be connected to a lighting circuit, not a dedicated circuit or one that is provided only for receptacles;
  - In addition to "ionized" smoke alarms, an interconnected photo electric smoke alarm is required in the suite and the principal dwelling where the fire separation is less than 45 minutes;
  - Smoke alarms shall be installed in all bedrooms;
  - Ionized smoke alarms must be wired so that if one smoke alarm is activated it will cause all the alarms to sound; and
  - In the case of the house and the suite sharing a forced air heating system, the smoke alarms in the principal dwelling must be tied to a relay switch which will turn off the furnace fan when the smoke alarms are activated.

- **Carbon Monoxide Alarms** – are required for every building that contains a residential occupancy that also contains a fuel-burning appliance, or a garage.

  Where required, carbon monoxide alarms shall:

  a) conform to CSA 6.19, "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices";
  b) be equipped with an integral alarm which satisfies the audibility requirements of CSA 6.19, "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices";
  c) be hard wired and have no disconnect switch between the overcurrent device and the carbon monoxide alarm; and
  d) be mechanically fixed at a height recommended by the manufacturer.

  Where a fuel-burning appliance is installed in a suite, each suite shall have carbon monoxide alarms installed either inside each bedroom, or if outside, within 5 m of each bedroom door, measured following corridors and doorways.

Where a fuel-burning appliance is installed in a service room that is not in a suite of residential occupancy a carbon monoxide alarm shall be installed:

- Either inside each bedroom, or if outside, within 5 m of each bedroom door, measured following corridors and doorways, of each bedroom door in every suite of residential occupancy that shares a wall or floor/ceiling assembly with the service room.

- **Access Openings** – if access is required through a fire-rated wall or ceiling, it must be protected with an approved metal hatch or other approved closure.

- **Exits** – a separate exit/entrance door is required for the secondary suite:

  - This door must not open into a garage or any common area, such as a foyer or laundry room;
  - This door must be equipped with an approved dead bolt lock;
  - A door viewer is required unless there is transparent glazing in the door or in a sidelight; and
  - Exterior stairs to the suite entrance shall have a landing and where there are more than three risers, a guard and handrail is required.

- **Fire Protection of Exits** – If an unenclosed exterior exit stair or ramp may be exposed to fire from openings in the exterior walls of the principal dwelling, the openings shall (if permitted) be protected with glass block, wired glass on a fixed steel frame, or have the window replaced with a rated self-closing door.

- **Bedroom Windows** – All bedroom windows must meet the requirements of the *BC Building Code*. In the event of a fire, bedroom windows must provide a second means of escape in case it is impossible to reach the exit door. At least one window per bedroom must:

  - provide an unobstructed opening of not less 15” in height and width, with an aggregate area of not less than 3.77 ft^2;
  - be openable without the use of keys, tools, or special knowledge (security bars or other such obstructions are not permitted);
  - for windows opening into a window well, provide a clearance of not less than 30” in front of the window in the fully open position; and
  - have guards for any window wells more than 24” deep, and a permanently mounted ladder out of the well if at a bedroom.

- **Flame Spread Limited** – Certain types of wood, plastic or fabric products can be very dangerous in the event of a fire and are not approved for wall or ceiling finish. The exposed surface of every interior wall and ceiling shall have a maximum surface flame-spread rating of 150. Manufacturer's specifications to verify flame spread may be required if any product other than gypsum board is used.

- **Combustible Plumbing** – (see page 8) Plastic piping is widely used in residential plumbing.

  Combustible water distribution piping may penetrate a fire separation up to a diameter of 1 3/16”.

  Combustible drain, waste, and vent piping must not penetrate the gypsum board ceiling and must be totally enclosed in gypsum board. It is permitted to penetrate a wall providing the hole is tight fitting to the pipe.

B. HEATING SYSTEM (see page 9)

Suites in homes with common forced air heating system must have approved fire dampers installed at the outlet registers. A cold air return is required in the suite. A fire damper is not required if the cold air return is located within 24” of the floor.

A fire damper is a device which is normally in the open position, but closes in the event of a fire to protect the opening in which it is located. The fire damper in registers must be a minimum 4”X10” – the outlet-boot shall be resized as necessary. In addition to the fire dampers, the smoke alarms must be installed to turn off the furnace fan in the event the smoke alarms are activated. This will prevent smoke entering and being distributed by the heating system.

It is preferable for the secondary suite to have its own heating system independent of the rest of the house.

C. VENTILATION

Ventilation requirements vary depending on the year of construction of the house. Mechanical ventilation must be provided for all secondary suites. At least one 85 C.F.M. (cubic feet per minute) exhaust fan vented to the exterior of the building must be provided in the secondary suite. Automatic controls for this fan must be provided by a centrally located dehumidistat or timer.

New suites being constructed shall have a continuously running fan, sized in accordance with *BC Building Code* section 9.32.3.4.

Air for combustion or combustion-air shall be provided by a 5” diameter duct, drawing air from the exterior to the furnace room and shall be insulated for at least 8 ft from the exterior.

Interior doors must have a ½” gap at the bottom to provide air movement within the suite, unless return air ducts are installed in the room. The maximum gap under a rated door is a ¼”.

D. WOOD STOVES/FIRE PLACE INSERTS

Where existing wood stoves/fireplace inserts have not been installed and approved under a building permit, they must be W.E.T.T. Inc. (Wood Energy Technology Transfer Inc.) certified or removed.

E. HEIGHTS OF ROOMS OR SPACES

The minimum height of rooms or spaces in a secondary suite shall be no less than 2 m. It should be possible to move within the suite without a reduction in the room height.

F. PLUMBING

A separate plumbing inspection may be required if it appears that modifications have been made to facilitate a secondary suite. Note: All plumbing must conform to the current *BC Building Code*.

G. ELECTRICAL AND GAS

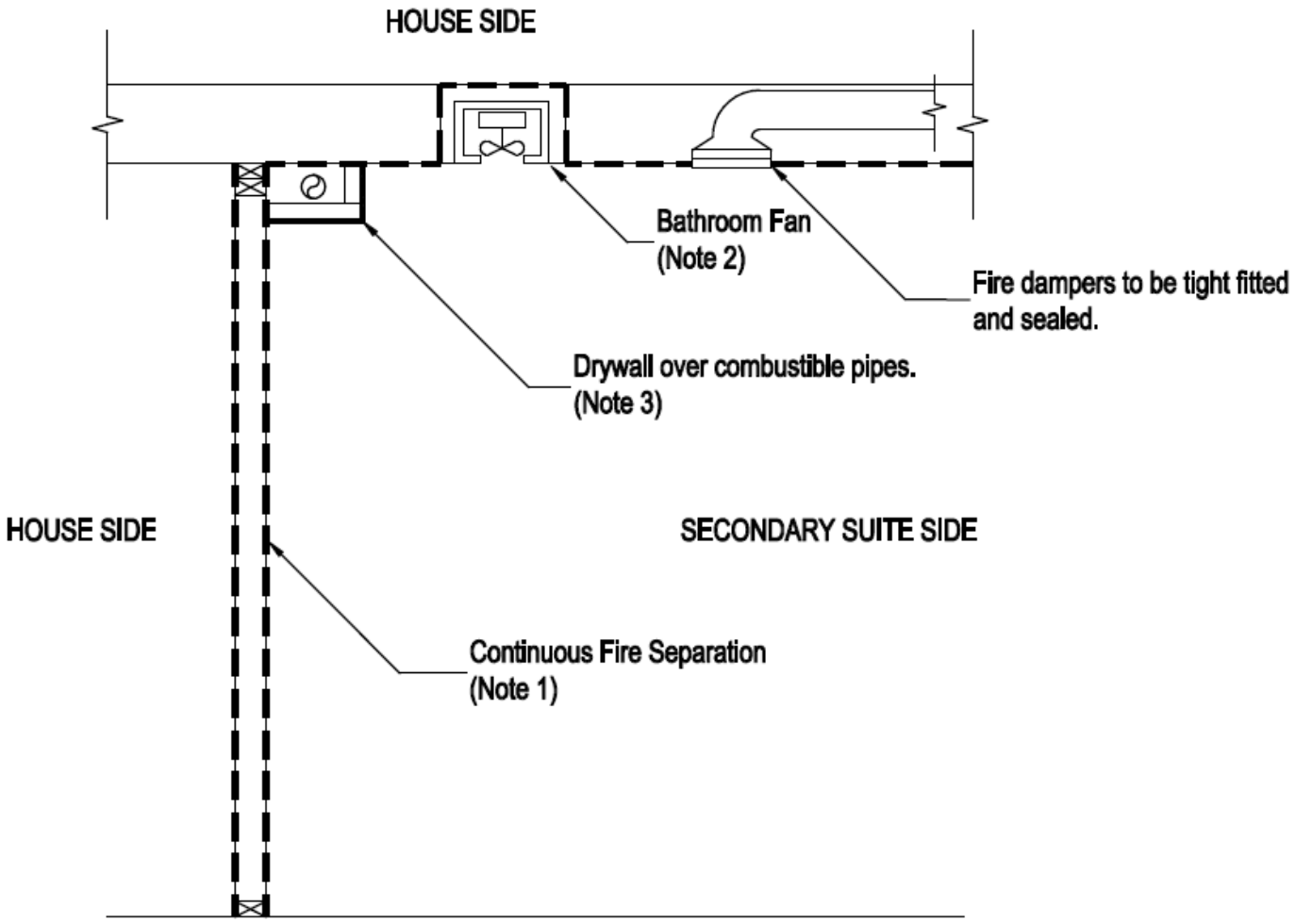
A survey (E1 form) performed by a certified electrician is required. This survey must be submitted to the Building Inspector before the suite can be approved.

Note: The City of Abbotsford does not provide electrical or gas permits. **Electrical and gas permits and inspections must be obtained through the BC Safety Authority.**

The registered owner must provide one of the following at the time of inspection:

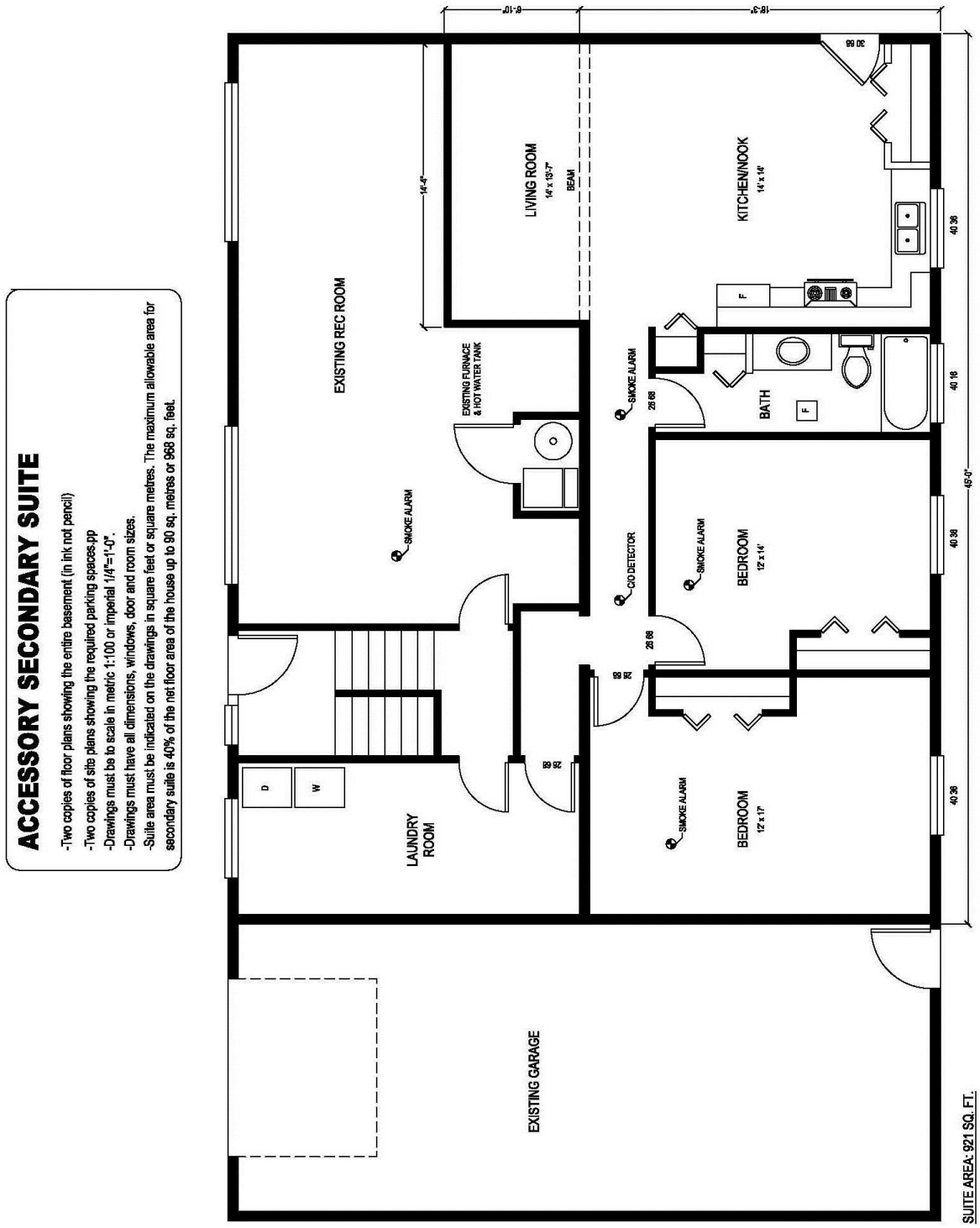
a) the electrical green authorization form signed by the Electrical Contractor;
b) a copy of the electrical permit specifying the area of work signed by the home owner; or
c) a survey done by a certified electrical contractor where the electrical installations are existing.

FIRE SEPARATION AND DAMPER DETAILS

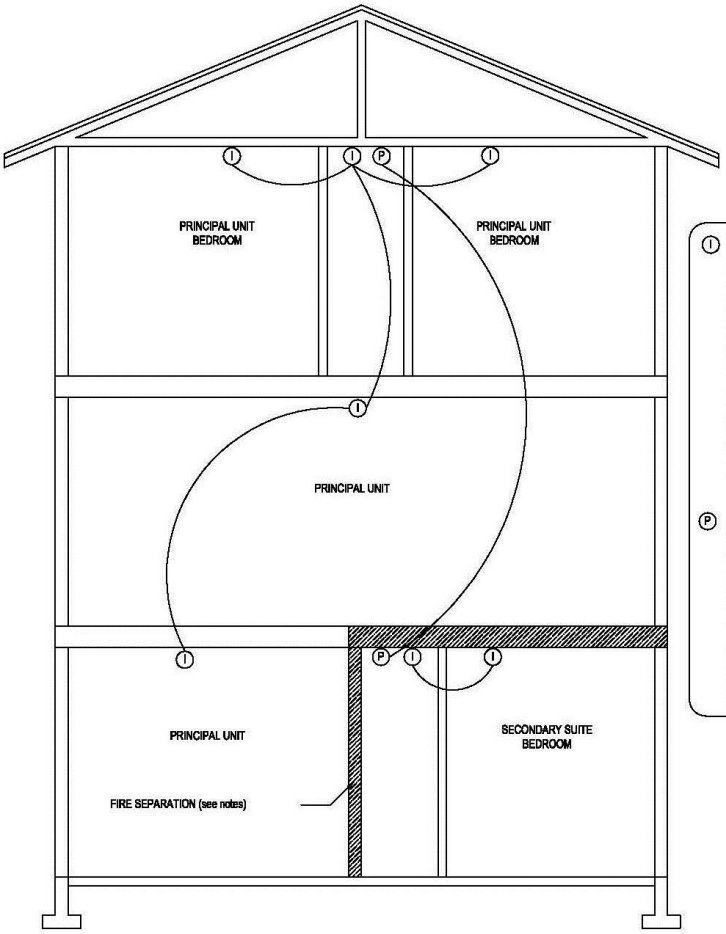


-(Note 1) Rated gypsum board is required on both sides of walls and underside of joists separating the house from the secondary suite.
-(Note 2) Openings for bathroom fans, pot lights larger than 5" or any other opening greater than 25 square inches in a fire separation shall be lined with rated gypsum board to maintain the fire separation. Joints in the gypsum board shall be taped and filled and fasteners shall be filled.
-(Note 3) Combustible plumbing pipes shall be covered by gypsum board.

SAMPLE FLOOR PLAN



INSTALLATION OF SMOKE ALARMS IN HOUSES WITH SECONDARY SUITES



(I) **INTERCONNECTED IONIZATION** type smoke alarms are required within the suite and on any storey containing sleeping rooms, in each sleeping room and in a location between the sleeping rooms and the remainder of the storey, and if the sleeping rooms are served by a hallway, the smoke alarm shall be located in the hallway. Ionization smoke alarms **shall not** be interconnected between the principal unit and the suite.

(P) **AN ADDITIONAL PHOTOELECTRIC** smoke alarm is required to be interconnected between the dwelling unit and the suite when the rating of the fire separation is less than 45 minutes. The smoke alarm shall be located nearest the sleeping areas. Note that is permitted only in existing suites. All new suites require a 45 minute fire separation.