

Housing Choices Program



CASE STUDY | JANUARY 2024



1. Background

The City of Burnaby is steadily growing, with a population increase between 2016 and 2021 of 7%. The City allows for in-law suites and secondary suites in single family dwellings, secondary suites in duplexes, and laneway homes. Demand for secondary suites has been quite strong in Burnaby due to the strong family ties within resident families and other housing factors. This demand resulted in up to 5,000 unauthorized secondary suites being created to 2014. A policy to support authorized secondary suites was adopted in 2014 in order to start keeping track of the units and ensure compliant construction for safety. More recently the City has introduced a program called Housing Choices, to explore and encourage housing options in the city to bridge the gap between single family homes and apartments/condos. Allowing secondary suites in duplexes as well as laneway homes were also part of the program's first phase.

Policy/program

Housing Choices Program

Municipality

City of Burnaby (2021 population: 249,125)

Gentle Density Types Involved

- Secondary suites
- Laneway houses
- Secondary suites and one laneway house
- Duplexes, duplexes with suites

3. Description of policy/program/project

The City has allowed in-law suites (small suites limited to relatives or caregivers) in single-family homes since 1969. In 2014, they were replaced by the introduction of secondary suites. Lock off/flex suites have been allowed in the very specific area of Simon Fraser University since 2002. Housing became a greater priority in 2018 when the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing was launched, in part, to help address recent renter displacement challenges. The Task Force considered various ways to improve housing affordability. This work led to the development of Burnaby's Housing and Homelessness Strategy – a 10-year action plan for housing. One of the priority actions in the Strategy was to develop an infill program to provide more housing variety in low density neighbourhoods. This program was launched in February 2022 and called "Housing Choices".

The first phase of Housing Choices focused on allowing laneway homes on single family lots (in addition to a secondary suite) and secondary suites in duplexes (with lanes). This was adopted in September 2023.

The gentle density types are all identified in the zoning bylaw. Applications may be made using a building permit, rather than a development permit, making the process simpler. Both suites and laneway homes can be built in or around existing dwellings as well as part of new homes. Property owners need to pay the supplementary utility fees: water and sewer charges will be billed with utility notices.

Laneway homes and secondary suites in semi-detached homes may be added in all zones and only require a building permit.

The minimum parking requirements have been reduced for single and two-family properties with suites/laneway homes:

- Require only one parking spot per property. This must be outside or in a carport and meet the City's standard for a van-accessible size. Infrastructure for EV charging is required in the parking area.
- Semi-detached homes with suites need to provide two spaces for four units.
- No parking maximums, but there are restrictions on lot coverages and impervious surfaces.
- Hoping to introduce a pre-approved design program; approach is slow building up of a library.

2. Key Players

Municipality

- The Community Planning Division leads this work and is within the Planning and Development Department. As of 2023 there are three people working directly on the Housing Choices program.
- The Mayor and Council are very strong advocates for the work as this is a priority action from Burnaby's Housing and Homelessness Strategy (adopted in 2021).
- The work impacts and is being supported by staff across multiple City departments, writing regulations, supporting engagement etc.
- Building and Engineering have a role in administering the permits

Stakeholders

- Community engagement for the new Housing Choices program began in spring 2022. A dedicated project webpage was established at that time. As of May 15, 2023, the project webpage had been accessed 27,220 times, by a total of 17,402 users.
- The first phase of the project included three rounds of community engagement and directly involved over 4,000 people. Events included two public surveys, three virtual workshops, one in person workshop and three open houses.

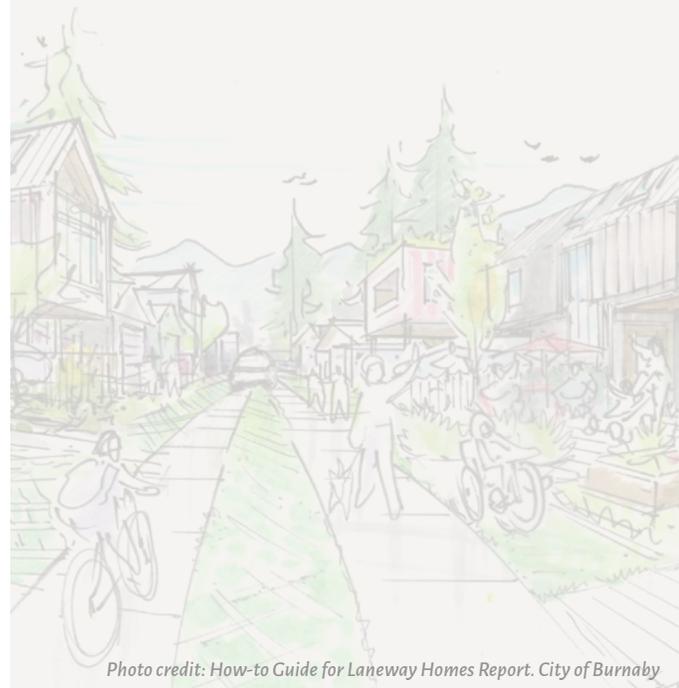


Photo credit: How-to Guide for Laneway Homes Report. City of Burnaby

4. Outcomes

Secondary suites were being built in Burnaby preceding the zoning to allow them. Up to 5,000 unpermitted units existed when the zoning bylaws were introduced in 2016. Now there are close to 1,800 permitted suites and an estimated additional 4,000+ suites unpermitted as tracked by the declaration form.

5. Lessons learned

Facilitators

- Strong support from the Mayor and Council along with recent housing strategy documents facilitated policy development and implementation.
- It was helpful to have neighbouring jurisdictions such as Vancouver also implementing new models of housing and more locally the strong desire for affordable multi-generational housing generated support.
- Phasing the addition of new gentle density and circling back with engagement and technical review each time proved to be a successful strategy.
- The level of support for reducing parking minimums was surprisingly high. Despite this, parking is still, and will probably remain, the most contentious element of the program.
- The high level of resident engagement and support for the Housing Choices program was surprising. It was anticipated that there would be more dissenting voices as the program progressed. The level of support has remained largely consistent throughout the first phase.

Challenges

- Charging extra utility fees for secondary suites created some initial problems. Owners who were not renting out their suites felt it was unfair. Owners now need to provide a supplementary utility fees declaration at the start of each year, to state if they are renting out their units. If they provide a false declaration they may have to pay a fine.
- Parking is likely to remain a challenge. As the City moves to the next phases of the program and permits additional density, creative strategies may be needed to address potential parking issues.



6. Next Steps

The next Housing Choices phase will introduce these new forms on lots without lanes, and look to add in options for 3 and 4-plexes. Phase 2, will explore higher density forms of rowhouses and low-rise apartments as part of an OCP update. The Housing Choices program phases included a recommendation report, extensive public engagement and technical reviews and was about a two year process from the recommendations to a zoning bylaw adoption.

7. Resources

Burnaby Housing Strategy

| HOME-Strategy: <https://www.burnaby.ca/sites/default/files/acquiadam/2022-03/HOME-Strategy.pdf>

Housing Choices Program

| Engagement and program description: <https://yourvoice.burnaby.ca/housing-choices-program>

| Final program report for Phase1A: https://yourvoice.burnaby.ca/download_file/37/501

Secondary suite resources

| Intro: <https://www.burnaby.ca/services-and-payments/development-permits-construction/secondary-suite-program>

Laneway home resources

| Intro: <https://www.burnaby.ca/services-and-payments/development-permits-construction/laneway-homes>

| How to guide: <https://www.burnaby.ca/sites/default/files/acquiadam/2023-09/How-To-Guide-Laneway-Homes.pdf>

| Regulation summary: <https://www.burnaby.ca/sites/default/files/acquiadam/2023-09/Laneway-Homes-Summary-of-Regulations.pdf>