

What's New?

As part of the Urgent Changes to Planning Documents for Housing, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) has made region-wide adjustments to regulations in order to create more flexibility for backyard suites.

These fact sheets explain what backyard suites are, answer frequently asked questions, and provide information about the new changes.

*** Note:** A red asterisk indicates that a regulation has been updated through the Urgent Changes to Planning Documents initiative.

Some of the key changes include:

- Increasing the maximum height and floor area of accessory structures;
- Allowing backyard suites to be accessory to a greater range of main dwelling forms; and
- Implementing requirements to improve accessibility and safety.



Photo Credit: Sprout Dwellings

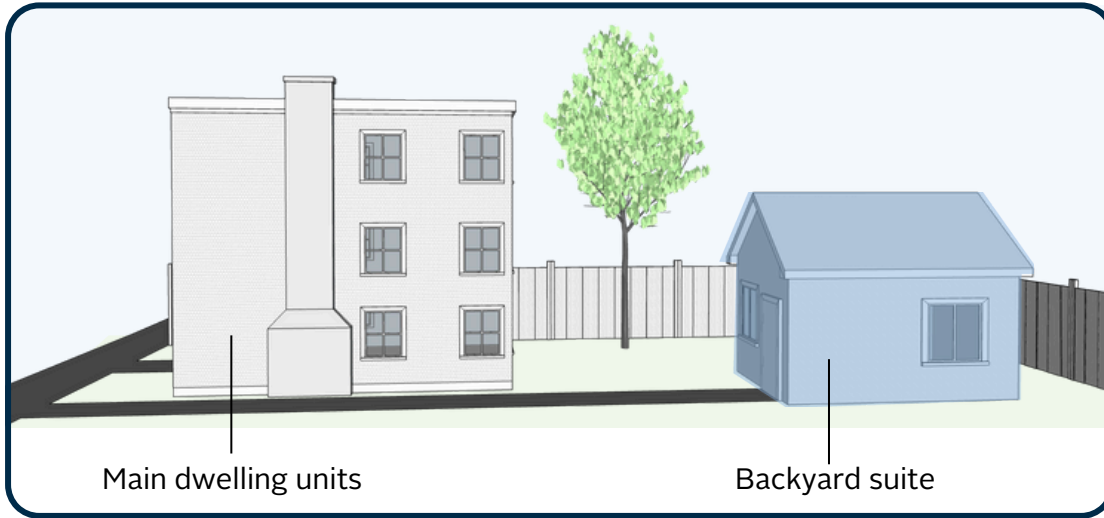
What is a Backyard Suite?

Backyard suites are free-standing buildings that are separate from a main dwelling unit. They are either built overtop an accessory structure like a garage or simply on their own.

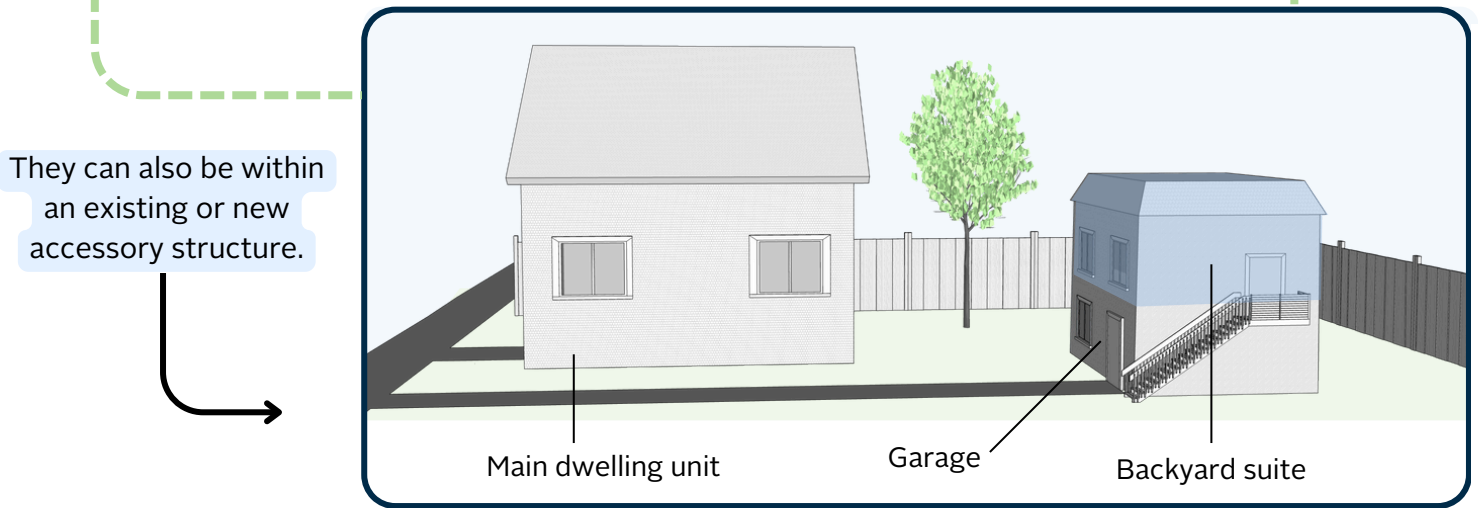
They are often referred to as garden suites, granny suites, laneway houses or carriage flats. Backyard suites can be used for multi-generational living or can be used as general rental units.

Backyard suites are currently allowed as accessory units to main dwellings in most low-rise residential zones in the Regional Centre and Suburban and Rural Areas.

This type of infill development provides opportunities to increase gentle density (additional housing that has minimal impact on a neighbourhood's form) in established residential areas.



Backyard suites can be their own accessory structure.



They can also be within an existing or new accessory structure.

Can I Have a Backyard Suite on my Property?

If you live in a residential zone, it is likely that you are permitted to have a backyard suite on your property. However, there are some exceptions if you have:

- **An existing backyard suite on your lot**

Currently, property owners in residential zones may only have one backyard suite per lot. However, as per the April 23, 2024 Council motion, the municipality will explore the possibility of allowing more than one backyard suite per lot in Suburban and Rural Areas.

- **A Development Agreement on your property**

You may not be eligible for a backyard suite. Please review the terms of the Development Agreement or contact Planning & Development for assistance.

*** More than 4 units on a lot in the Regional Centre or more than 3 units on a lot in the Suburban Area**

Backyard suites are now allowed in conjunction with a broader range of main dwelling types. This change was made to support the amendments that enable at least 4 units as-of-right on serviced residential lots (for more information, please visit the [HAF webpage](#)).

However, backyard suites are not permitted on lots with more than 4 dwelling units in the Regional Centre or more than 3 dwelling units in the Suburban Area.

	1 dwelling unit + backyard suite	2 dwelling units + backyard suite	3 dwelling units + backyard suite	4 dwelling units + backyard suite	5 or more dwelling units + backyard suite
Regional Centre					
Suburban Areas					more than 4 units per lot not permitted as-of-right

Backyard suites can also be accessory to a townhouse dwelling if the unit is on an independent lot and meets the access requirements (see page 7). In the Regional Centre, a backyard suite is permitted in conjunction with townhouses on the same lot (max 1 per lot).

	Townhouse units on individual lots + backyard suite	Townhouse units on the same lot + backyard suite
Regional Centre		
Suburban Areas		

How Big Can a Backyard Suite Be?

If you're looking to find out how big a backyard suite can be on your property, there are a few factors to consider:

Lot Coverage

Backyard suites contribute to your maximum lot coverage. Lot coverage differs depending on your community plan, but maximum lot coverage will typically range between 35% and 60% of your property, including your main dwelling.

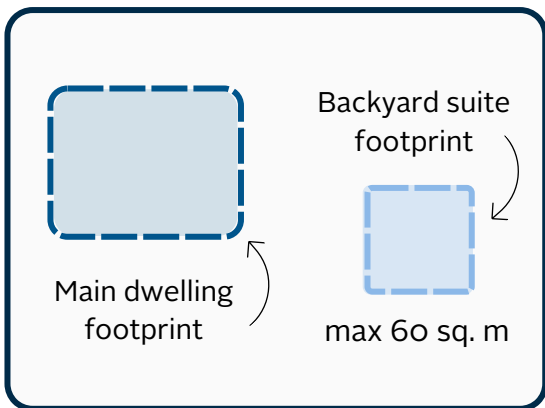
* Lot coverage percentages for the Established Residential (ER) Zones in the Regional Centre have increased.

New maximum lot coverage will depend on lot size and type of residential use. Please see the Regional Centre ER Fact Sheets for more information.



Lot coverage generally means the percentage of a lot that is covered by roofed structures over 0.6 metres in height.

Building Footprint

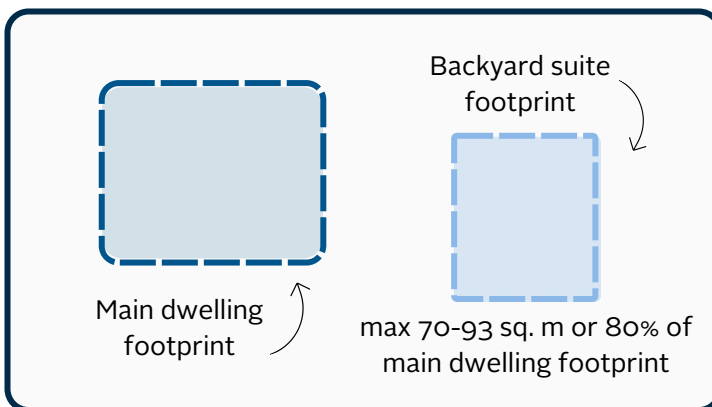


In the Regional Centre:

A backyard suite may take up to 60 square metres (645 square feet) of footprint.



Building footprint generally refers to the area a building occupies on the ground in between the outermost edges of the exterior walls. Please see your local Land Use By-Law for an exact definition.



In the Suburban and Rural Areas:

The maximum footprint for backyard suites varies between Community Plan Areas, however the typical max is between 70 square metres (750 square feet) and 93 square metres (1000 square feet) or 80% of the footprint of a main dwelling.

* Height and Floor Area Maximums

The maximum height for backyard suites has increased from an average of 4.6 metres (15 feet) to a standard height of 7.7 metres (25 feet) across the municipality.

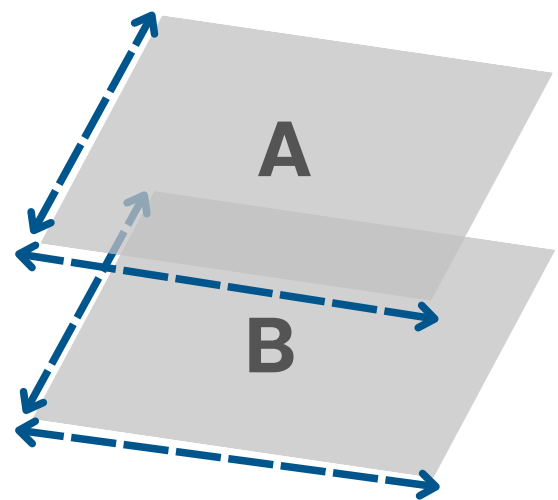
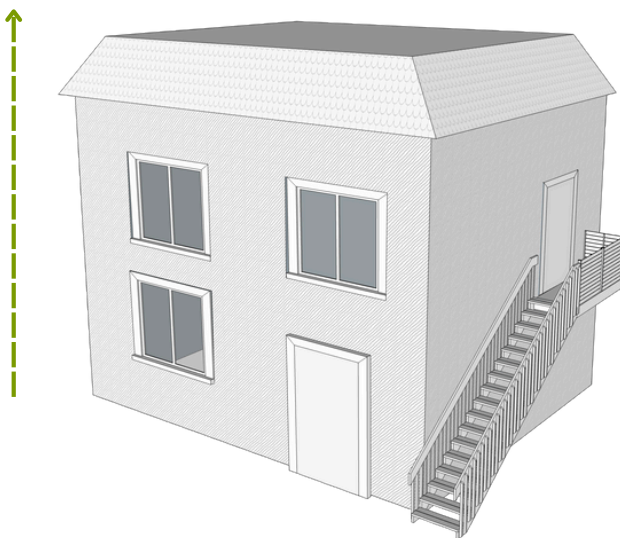
The maximum floor area for backyard suites has increased from an average of 70 square metres (750 square feet) to a standard floor area of 93 square metres (1,000 square feet) for backyard suites across the municipality.



Floor area generally refers to the horizontal area of all floors of a building or a parking structure, measured from the interior faces of any exterior wall or fire wall. Please see your [local Land Use By-Law](#) for an exact definition.

	Maximum Height	Maximum Floor Area
Previous Regulations	4.6 metres (15 feet) (average across municipality)	70 square metres (750 square feet) (average across municipality)
Updated Regulations	7.7 metres (25 feet)	93 square metres (1000 square feet)

Max height:
7.7 metres
(25 feet)



NOTE: all non-habitable internal floor area (e.g. a first floor garage) and external staircases count towards the floor area maximum.

Max floor area:

Floor areas A + B can be up to 93 square metres (1000 square feet) as long as the maximum building footprint is not exceeded.

Setbacks and Watercourse Buffers

Backyard suites must meet the minimum setbacks and buffers (if within proximity to a watercourse) for accessory structures as required by your zone. Please see your local Land Use By-Law for further details.

How Many Dwelling Units and Bedrooms Can I Have?

An accessory structure with a backyard suite can only contain one dwelling unit.

There is no maximum number of bedrooms for a backyard suite, but bedrooms must meet the minimum bedroom size under By-law M-200 as well as other requirements under the National Building Code. In the Rural Area, the maximum number of bedrooms will also depend on the capacity of your on-site septic system.

Can I Convert an Existing Accessory Structure?

An existing accessory structure such as a shed, garage, or farmhouse can be converted into a backyard suite as long as it is under 93 square metres (1,000 square feet) of floor area.

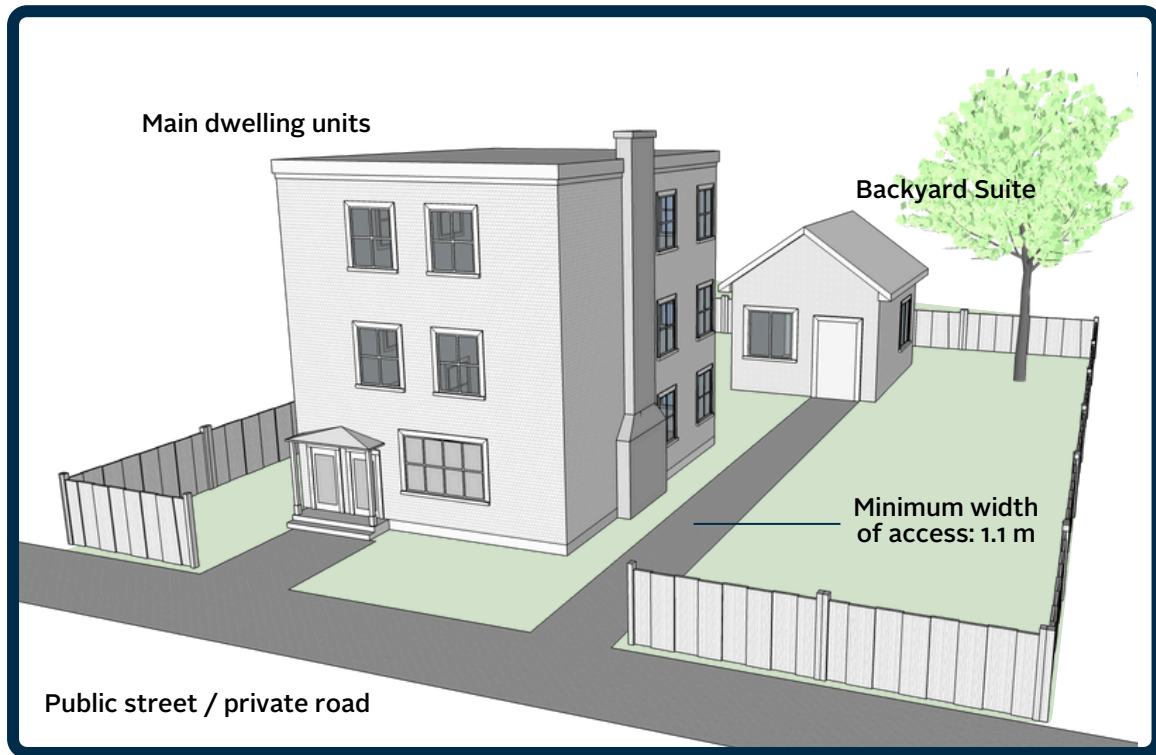
- * The updated regulations also enable the internal conversion of existing non-conforming accessory structures into backyard suites, providing the floor area of the backyard suite does not exceed 93 square metres (1,000 square feet).

My Main Dwelling is Non-Conforming - Can I Have a Backyard Suite?

- * The recent changes allow backyard suites accessory to a non-conforming dwelling, as long as the zone permits residential uses.

What Accessibility and Safety Requirements Have Been Introduced ?

- * The Urgent Changes to Planning Documents for Housing have addressed important accessibility and safety concerns regarding backyard suites.
 - The new requirements would ensure that a backyard suite has unobstructed access that:
 - a. Connects the suite to a street or private road;
 - b. Is located on the same lot; and
 - c. Has a minimum width of 1.1 metres.
 - An enclosed or internal staircase or elevator leading to a dwelling unit in an accessory structure will be exempt from the maximum floor area.



Funding Opportunities

- The Province of Nova Scotia offers funding to incentivize the construction of secondary and backyard suites. The funding provides a forgivable loan if the suites are for your relatives or for affordable rental unit.
- The Government of Canada offers a 15% tax credit up to \$7,500 for secondary and backyard suites. The federal government will also offer a low-interest loan program up to \$40,000 as part of Budget 2024.
- As part of the Housing Accelerator Fund initiative, the Halifax Regional Municipality will seek to develop a municipal incentive program in the next couple of years for secondary and backyard suites that is similar to the Solar City Program.

How Do I Find More Information?

If you have questions related to what you can do on your property, please contact Planning and Development to speak with a Planner.

For more information on the Urgent Changes to Planning Documents for Housing initiative, please visit the website.

See this info sheet to find out what is required to apply for a backyard suite building permit.