

# **Planning Rationale**

## **Permit Amendment to Allow Secondary Suites in Townhouse Development - Cole Harbour, Halifax**

PLANAPP-2024-01200

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### **1. Introduction**

#### **Project Overview**

We are requesting approval to include in-law suites (secondary units) in our current multi-unit townhouse development located in Cole Harbour, Halifax, adjacent to a local school. The development is designed as a family-oriented, residential community that aligns with the municipality's goals for compact growth and diverse housing options.

The proposed inclusion of in-law suites will provide greater flexibility in occupancy, support multigenerational living, and help address both affordability and housing demand in the area. These self-contained units will be integrated within each townhouse and designed to maintain the community's residential character. The purpose of this rationale is:

1. To explain the **planning benefits** of introducing this additional gentle density.
  2. To demonstrate how the proposal is **reasonably consistent with the enabling policies** set out in the **Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS)** and applicable **Land Use By-laws**.
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### **2. Benefits of the Proposed Density Increase**

The proposed inclusion of secondary suites introduces gentle, incremental density within the existing low-rise, ground-oriented residential form. This approach offers multiple benefits that align with HRM's broader planning objectives:

#### **a) Affordability through Rental Income**

The addition of in-law suites allows homeowners to generate **supplemental income** through rental opportunities. This **increased affordability** is especially important in today's challenging housing market and can help first-time buyers, young families, and moderate-income earners enter homeownership.

#### **b) Multigenerational and Flexible Housing**

The design enables **multigenerational living**—a growing demographic need—by offering private, self-contained suites for aging parents, adult children, or extended family. This flexibility allows families to **age in place** and adapt to changing household circumstances without moving or displacing family members.

#### **c) Housing Supply and Diversity**

The proposal introduces **diverse housing choices** into the neighbourhood without changing the **overall scale, character, or built form** of the development. By subtly increasing density within an existing development, it supports the creation of a **more inclusive and resilient housing supply**.

#### **d) Efficient Use of Land and Infrastructure**

By accommodating additional households within the existing townhouse footprint, the development promotes **compact, efficient land use**. It maximizes the benefit of existing **municipal services, transit access, schools, and other community infrastructure**, aligning with principles of **sustainable development**.

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### **3. Consistency with Enabling Policy**

The proposed amendment is **reasonably consistent** with several key **enabling policies** of the **Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS)**, the **Cole Harbour/Westphal Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS)**, and the applicable **Land Use By-law (LUB)**:

#### **a) HRM Regional Plan:**

- The RMPS encourages **complete, compact, and walkable communities** with a diversity of housing options (Policy EC-5, Policy CHR-10).
- The project aligns with HRM's emphasis on **efficient growth management** by increasing density where infrastructure already exists, reducing the pressure for suburban sprawl.
- The **Integrated Mobility Plan (IMP)** further supports developments that are **transit-accessible** and reduce car dependency—both of which are achievable through increased residential density near existing services.

#### **b) MPS for Cole Harbour/Westphal:**

- The Cole Harbour MPS supports a **mix of housing types** and recognizes the need for housing that accommodates **different life stages and income levels**.
- The secondary suites align with the intent of policies aimed at encouraging **housing variety while preserving neighbourhood character**.

**c) Land Use By-law (LUB):**

- Recent changes to HRM's **Land Use By-law** have specifically recognized and permitted **secondary suites** in various residential zones as a way to address housing affordability and diversity.
- The amendment request is in keeping with this direction, seeking to **formally permit the secondary suites** as part of the development's compliance.

**Policy Criteria**

**Applicant  
Response**

**1. Consistency  
with Municipal  
Planning Strategy  
(MPS) and  
Regional Plan**

The proposal is consistent with the **Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy (RMPS)**, particularly policies that promote **complete communities, gentle density, housing affordability, and efficient use of existing infrastructure**. The addition of secondary suites supports **Policy E-10 (Housing Affordability)** and **Policy T-2 (Growth within serviced areas)**. The project aligns with HRM's goals to **maximize housing opportunities within the Urban Service Boundary** without overburdening infrastructure.

**2. Supports a  
Compact,  
Walkable,  
Complete  
Community**

The inclusion of secondary suites gently increases density without altering the existing low-rise, residential character of the neighbourhood. The site is **adjacent to a school**, within walking distance of parks, and close to public transit, making it ideal for **family-oriented, pedestrian-friendly living**. The proposal encourages **aging in place, multigenerational households, and smaller rental units** in line with **complete community objectives**.

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| <b>3. Appropriate Distribution of Density</b>   | The proposed increase in density is modest: up to 16 secondary suites added to 16 primary townhouse units, resulting in a maximum of 32 units on a site that can comfortably support this density. The layout remains low-rise, ground-oriented, and compatible with existing neighbourhood development patterns.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>4. Built Form and Land Use Compatibility</b> | <p>The built form remains unchanged in terms of building envelope, The proposed in-law suites will be internal to the townhomes, maintaining the residential character and built form approved under the current permit. No external changes to massing, height, or setback are required. Parking provisions will meet or exceed Land Use By-law standards, and a detailed site plan has been provided to illustrate this compliance.</p> <p>The suites are intended to serve as either family accommodations or rental units, both of which are consistent with residential use. The increased density (from 16 to potentially 32 units) is modest and aligns with similar townhouse configurations elsewhere in Cole Harbour</p> |
| <b>5. Population Density Management</b>         | The modest increase in population that may result from adding secondary suites will be well-absorbed by existing schools, parks, transit, and municipal infrastructure. The site's proximity to multiple childcare centres, schools, and community amenities enhances its ability to support these additional residents without strain on public services.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>6. Transportation and Mobility</b>           | A Traffic Impact Statement has been prepared demonstrating that the potential increase in vehicle trips (from the secondary suites) will have a negligible impact on local road capacity and traffic operations. The project supports multi-modal transportation through access to transit and nearby walkable destinations. Each unit provides on-site parking, including for the secondary suites.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>7. Environmental Considerations</b>          | The development respects existing topography, drainage patterns, and municipal servicing constraints. No sensitive environmental features are affected. The inclusion of additional units within the existing built form supports efficient land use and avoids urban sprawl, in line with HRM's environmental sustainability goals.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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| <b>8. Phasing and Coordination</b>         | The development will proceed in phases with Block 1 already under construction. The secondary suites can be included in subsequent phases or retrofitted into existing units without requiring major reconfiguration or disruption. The design allows for coordination with existing and future neighbourhood development.                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>9. Public Interest and Housing Need</b> | This proposal responds directly to the <b>pressing housing affordability challenge</b> in HRM by enabling <b>homeowners to qualify for mortgages based on secondary rental income</b> . It increases <b>housing choice</b> without the need for large-scale rezoning or disruptive infrastructure expansion. The project aligns with <b>Provincial Housing Accelerator Fund objectives</b> to create more housing supply quickly within existing serviced areas. |
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#### 4. Conclusion

The inclusion of **secondary suites** in the **townhouse development** is a **responsible, balanced approach to increasing housing density** in an area already served by schools, parks, transit, and municipal services. The proposal provides:

- **Affordable housing opportunities**
- **Support for multigenerational families**
- **Greater housing diversity**
- **Efficient use of land and infrastructure**

The amendment is **reasonably consistent with the enabling policies** of HRM's Regional Plan, the Cole Harbour/Westphal MPS, and the applicable Land Use By-law, and it aligns with the municipality's strategic goals around growth management, affordability, and sustainability.

We respectfully request the municipality's **support and approval** for this permit amendment