



# Basement Suite Regulations

## Legalizing Your Existing Basement Suite

[www.stalbert.ca](http://www.stalbert.ca)

### Basement Suites in St. Albert

Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing approved amendments to the Alberta Building and Fire Code regulations on December 31, 2006, to ensure safe construction and modifications for new and existing basement suites, also referred to as “secondary suites”. Subsequently, St. Albert City Council amended the Land Use Bylaw making Basement Suites a permitted use in single detached dwellings, subject to certain requirements and regulations. A process has been developed to simplify legalization, clarify the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition requirements, and help to reduce costs for homeowners.

Conformance with the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition will help to ensure safety and quality of life for the occupants of legal basement suites.

### For further information contact

#### City of St. Albert

Planning & Development

Phone: 780-459-1642

Building Inspection Services

Phone: 780-418-6601

Located at:  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

5 St. Anne Street  
St. Albert, Alberta  
T8N 3Z9

### Do You Qualify?

If you have an existing basement suite with no previous development permit and building permit approval, you must submit an application to the City with the intent to meet the requirement of the current National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition, including the recent amendments for secondary suites. These standards will also be required in new home construction where basement suites are proposed.

If you are building a new home and intend to develop a basement suite, the City’s Land Use Bylaw and the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition contain the necessary requirements.

### Permit Fees

Existing Basement Suite, or renovation / occupancy of existing suite:

- Development Permit \$204.00
  - Building Permit \$273.00
  - Safety Codes Fee \$ 10.92
- \$487.92

Basement suite included in application for new home construction:  
(fees are additional to current fees for new home construction)

- Development Permit \$204.00
- Building Permit \$ 96.00
- Plus Safety Code Fee of 4% of total Building Permit Value

**Additional costs may include plumbing, gas, heating and electrical permit fees, depending on the work being undertaken.**



## Existing Suites – Permits & Inspections

Existing in-law suites are also considered basement suites. The regulations contained in this brochure will apply, unless the in-law suite is properly decommissioned.

If you decide not to legalize your existing suite, you must contact a Development Officer at 780-459-1642, for assistance with this process.

Inspection of the basement must be requested at the following stages:

- Prior to installation of drywall/interior finishes.
- When construction of the basement suite has been completed, prior to occupancy.

## For further Information Please Contact:

### Development Permit:

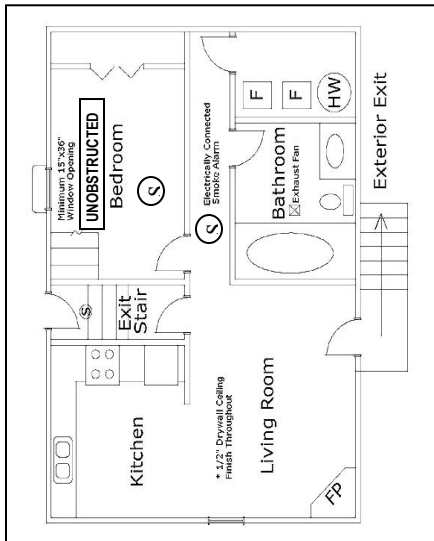
Development Officer  
780-459-1642

### Building Permit and Inspections:

Building Inspection  
Services  
780-418-6601

## What you need to apply

- Call Planning & Development at 780-459-1642 or apply in person
- Development Permit Application form website location:  
<https://stalbert.ca/dev/planning/applications/development-processes/>
- Letter of Authorization if you are not the owner of the property website location:  
<https://stalbert.ca/dev/planning/applications/development-processes/>
- Building Permit Application form website location:  
<https://stalbert.ca/home/property/building-inspections/>
- Two copies of a floor plan
- Two copies of a site plan or current survey
- Two copies of building elevations or current photos showing the entrance to the suite and the driveway location
- Submission of permit applications and fees



## Permits

A development permit must be obtained prior to new suite construction or approval of an existing suite. A building permit allowing commencement of the work will follow the development approval.

In addition, **plumbing, gas, heating and electrical permits** must be applied for when significant changes or additions to these components are necessary. The owner of the property is responsible for ensuring these permits are obtained and inspections are requested. **Qualified tradespersons with a City business license will be required to submit the permit applications and complete the work.**

A decommission confirmation will also be needed if you wish to discontinue use of the basement suite. Contact a Development Officer at 780-459-1642, for assistance with this process.



## Plan Requirements

To apply for a development permit and building permit the following minimum criteria are required:

### Floor Plans

Two (2) copies of the Floor Plan of the suite with the following information:

- The floor area of the basement suite with rooms identified
- The types and sizes of the bedroom windows
- Locations of electrically connected smoke alarms
- The exit door(s) and required bedroom egress window(s)
- Wall and ceiling construction materials and details
- Type of separate heating system
- Additional information may be requested upon review

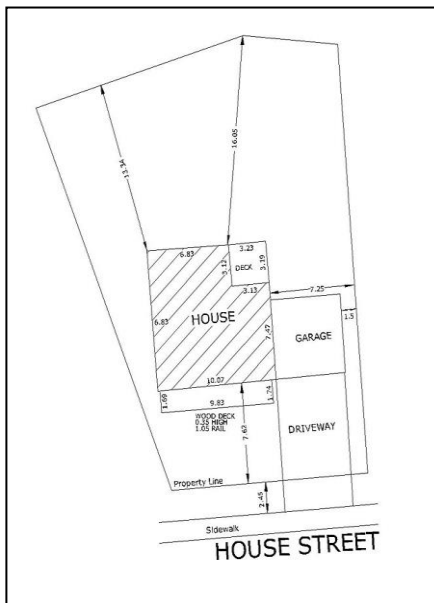
### Building Elevations

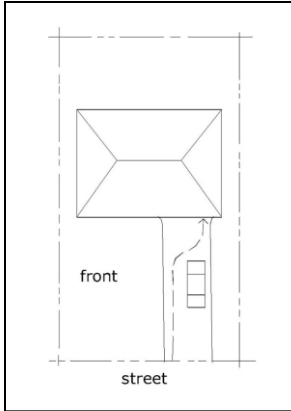
Two (2) copies of the building elevation (or existing photograph) of the house, clearly indicating where the entrance to the basement suite will be located (Note: if the required separate entrance to the basement suite is to be from the exterior of the house, it must be from the side or rear of the house and not the front).

### Site Plans

You will also need two (2) copies of a Site Plan showing the following information:

- The entire lot
- Property lines with dimensions
- Location of the house on the lot
- Identification and dimensions of setbacks from the property line
- Location of all parking spaces on the lot (specify location of basement suite parking space or spaces)





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### **Parking**

In addition to the required parking (2 stalls) for the principal dwelling unit, a basement suite shall comply with the following parking requirements of the Land Use Bylaw:

- a. One stall for a bachelor suite, one bedroom or two bedroom units;
- b. Two parking stalls for a three-bedroom unit.

The extra parking space(s) for the suite must be contained on the private property and be situated on an asphalt or concrete surface. The stall must be at least 5.8m in depth and have a width of no less than 2.6m.

When planning for a basement suite, consideration must be given to the on-site parking arrangement. Ideally, a separate parking pad that does not interfere with the activities of either tenant should be considered. Tandem parking is discouraged.

Please contact a Development Officer at 780-459-1642 for more details.



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C o d e s  
&  
B y l a w s**

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### **Suite Size and Location**

The suite must be located within the basement of the existing house. The minimum area of a basement suite shall not be less than 30 square metres or 323 square feet.

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### **Limits on Uses**

Suites may be allowed in single detached houses on lands zoned as R1 or R2 under the City Land Use Bylaw and you can only have one suite per home. Basement Suites are NOT permitted within duplexes, townhouses, row houses, and other multi-family housing types. The building must also be a single real estate entity. In other words, basement suites cannot be strata units.

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### **Height of Rooms and Spaces**

The ceiling height for basement suites in an existing house must be 1.95m (6'-5") and conform to Article 9.5.3.1 of the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition and be a minimum of 1.85m (6'-1") to the underside of beams and ductwork. The minimum ceiling height must be maintained throughout the suite with some exceptions. Portions of the ceiling may be lower on the condition that provision is made for the minimum required floor area in each room.

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### **Minimum Window Areas**

Opening windows are required in bedrooms to provide natural ventilation and a suitable means of exiting in an emergency. They must be openable from the inside without the use of tools or special knowledge. The bedroom window(s) must have a minimum unobstructed opening area not less than 540 sq.in. (0.35m<sup>2</sup>) and no dimension less than 15" (380mm).



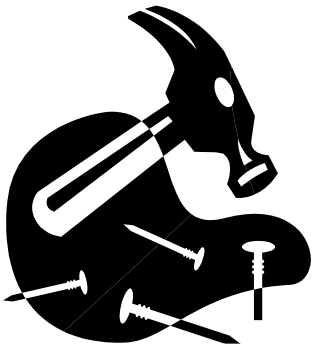
**For further  
information  
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780-459-1655**

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## Suite Area and Exits

Basement suites must have a separate entry from the principal dwelling unit, either from a common indoor landing or directly to the exterior. Separate exterior entries are restricted to the side or rear of the house. If the access is from the side, the stairwell must not be located within 1.0 m of the side property line. A suitable foundation design must be submitted when you are planning to construct a new exterior basement entry.

## Constructing Your Suite



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## Safe Exiting Requirements

The basic principle of the exit requirements is that people have two ways of getting out of the building in case of fire or similar emergency. Some existing homes may need significant modifications to meet the exiting requirements in the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition.

### Doors

Minimum door sizes required:

Entry to basement.....	32" x 78" (810mm x 1980mm)
Bedroom(s).....	24" x 78" (760mm x 1980mm)
Bathroom.....	24" x 78" (610mm x 1980mm)

### Exit Corridors and Stairs

An exit stairway connected to the main floor must have a solid core door at the top of the stairs to restrict access and help prevent smoke from passing to the main floor suite. The exit stairway must be separated from the remainder of the dwelling by minimum ½" standard drywall or equivalent material on each side of the walls. A solid core door is also required at an entrance to a basement suite and the furnace room.

Handrails and guards shall conform to the requirements of the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition.

If the existing bedroom window does not meet the minimum area required, you can:

- Replace the window to meet the minimum required size, or
- Provide an exterior door with direct access to the outside.

A Building Safety Codes Officer can help resolve your specific situation.

### Windows near an exit route

An unenclosed exterior exit stair from the basement suite must not be located adjacent to or pass in front of windows in the main floor dwelling unit.

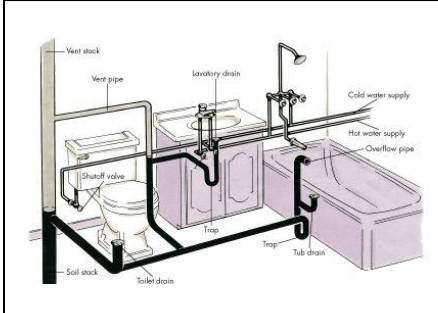


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## Dwelling Unit Separations

The basement suite, furnace room and the main floor of the dwelling must be separated from each other by not less than one layer of 1/2" standard drywall or equivalent material on the ceiling and sides of adjacent walls. Furnace rooms must have drywall on both sides of the walls adjacent to the basement suite.



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## Pipes and Ducts Penetrating Dwelling Separations

Metal pipes, sheet metal air ducts and plumbing are allowed to pass through ceilings and walls between the suite and the main house but they must be tightly fitted and sealed.

Plastic water pipes can pass through ceilings and walls if they are tightly fitted and if they are not more than 30mm (1 inch) in diameter.

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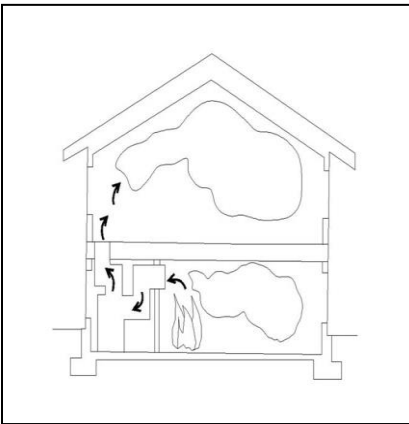
## Heating Systems

Heating and ventilation systems must meet the requirements in Sections 9.32 and 9.33 of the National Building Code – 2019 Alberta Edition, B149.1-15 Gas Code and the Canadian Electrical Code where applicable.

The heating system for a basement suite must be capable of maintaining an indoor air temperature of 22 degrees Celsius in all living spaces throughout the heating season.

In most existing dwellings, the upper floors and the basement share a common forced air ventilation system. For basement suites, a separate heating system is required to help prevent the danger of smoke or other harmful contaminants moving quickly from one dwelling unit to another. Contact Building Inspection Services to obtain further information on the most current options.

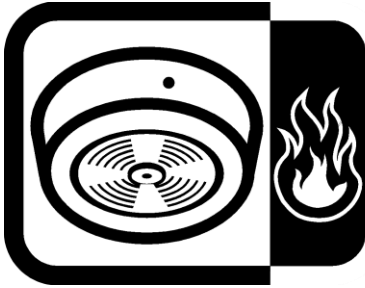
Heating systems, which do not change the air between suites, such as radiant hot water, electric baseboard, etc. are permitted, but another form of mechanical ventilation will also be required within the suite.



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## Exhaust Fan

The basement suite must have at least one exhaust fan in the suite, usually placed in the bathroom or kitchen, with an insulated vent pipe extending to the exterior.



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## Smoke Alarms/Carbon Monoxide Alarms

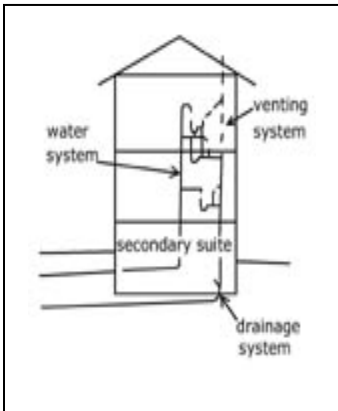
Electrically connected smoke alarms conforming to CAN/ULC-S531 are required in both the basement suite and main dwelling unit and must be interconnected so that activation of one smoke alarm will cause all alarms within both units to sound.

Where bedrooms are developed, a smoke alarm must be located inside the bedroom and outside the bedroom within the hallway to the main living area.

Smoke alarms shall be installed with permanent connections to an electrical circuit and shall have no disconnect switch between the panel breaker and the smoke alarm.

Smoke alarms shall be installed in areas common to both dwelling units such as access to an exit, furnace rooms and other shared spaces.

Carbon monoxide alarms shall be installed in new basement suites. They must conform to CSA – 6.19, be located inside each bedroom or outside the bedroom within 5 metres of the bedroom door(s) and be mechanically fastened at a height recommended by the manufacturer.



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## Plumbing

Additional plumbing fixtures installed to accommodate a basement suite may affect the operation and performance of existing fixtures in other areas of the dwelling. Drainage, venting and water systems must meet the current National Plumbing Code requirements to ensure that an acceptable level of performance is maintained throughout the dwelling. Non-compliance may result in poor plumbing system performance, trap seal failures and the entry of sewer gas into the building.

Note: Provisions for a shared laundry or storage room facility are acceptable but wall and ceiling finish materials must meet the previously mentioned criteria for dwelling unit separation.



For further  
information  
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780-459-1655

## Occupancy

When construction of the basement suite has been completed, you must call the City of St. Albert, Building Inspection Services for a final occupancy inspection. When the suite has passed inspection, written approval will be given allowing occupancy of the basement suite.

## Additional Information

For further clarification pertaining to the development or approval of a basement suite, please contact the City of St. Albert, Planning and Development branch at 780-459-1642.

***This guide has been prepared to provide convenient information only. If a contradiction exists between the guide and the relevant Bylaw or applicable Code, the Bylaws and Codes shall take precedence.***