

Amendments to Repair and Clarify Basement and Cellar Regulations for New Houses in RS Zones

Public Hearing

November 5, 2019

Housing Vancouver Strategy & Action Plan

- **Action 3.2C:** Expand availability of legal secondary and lock-off suites and laneway houses
- **Action 3.2D:** Review regulations around secondary suites (and existing lock-offs)



Review of Secondary Suites and Basements in RS Zones

Launched early 2019 to:

- Assess outcomes since zoning changes were made in 2009 to allow full basements
- Identify issues and key topics related to the construction of **new** houses
- Identify performance objectives and potential changes to improve outcomes and address Housing Vancouver and other key City objectives

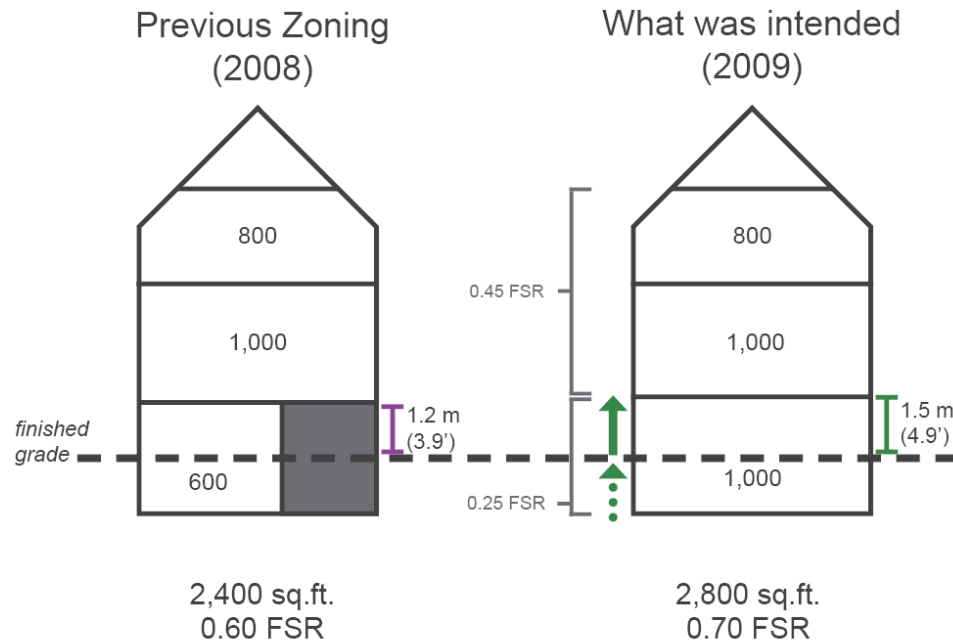
The addition or legalization of secondary suites in existing houses is being explored as part of a separate work program

Current Regulations and Intended Outcomes

2009 Zoning Changes Enabled Full Basements in Houses in RS

- Increased permitted FSR (from 0.6 to 0.7)
- Focused on limiting visible massing – reduced allowable above-grade floor area and house footprint
- Enabled basements to be less deep, but did not limit maximum depth

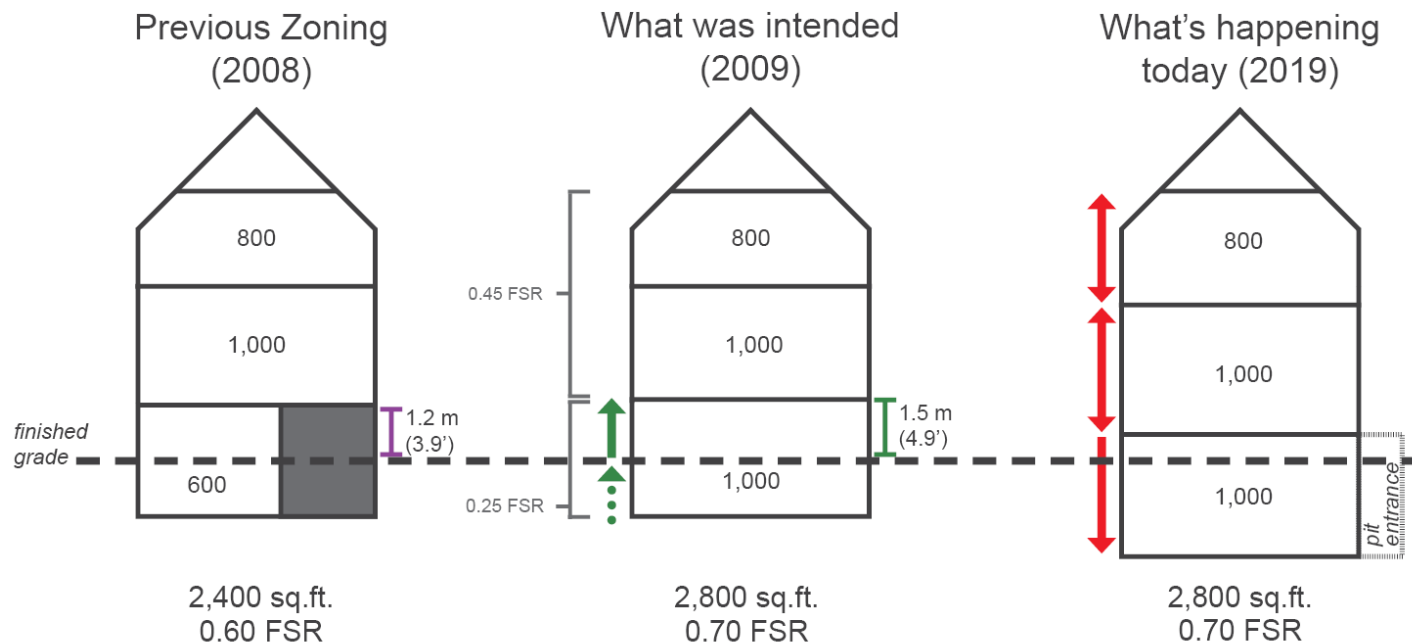
Key Intended Benefit: Enable more functional and livable basements & secondary suites



Current Regulations: Observed Outcomes

Findings and Observations

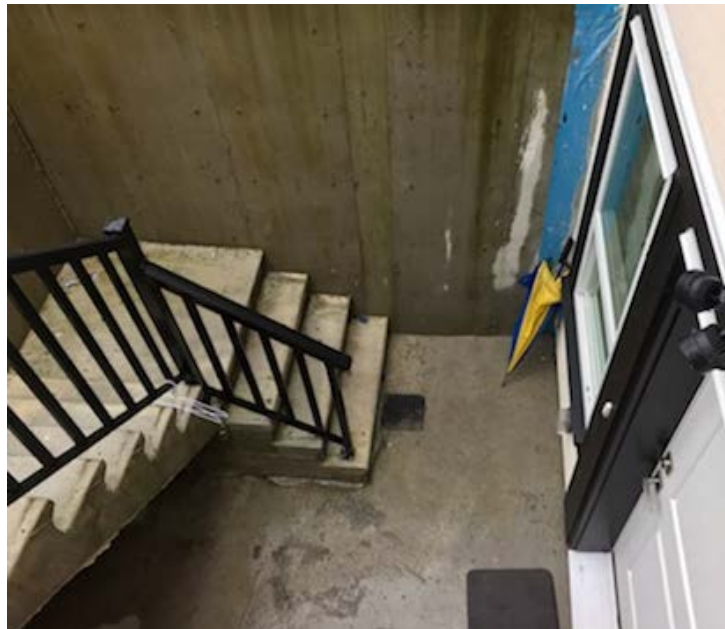
- Almost all houses built with a basement or cellar (to achieve max. FSR)
- Basements are being built deeper – often 1.83 m (6 ft.) or more below grade
- Less functional and livable basements and secondary suites, less flexibility to add a suite in the future
- Broader range of environmental and sustainability impacts



Deeper Basements: Issues & Implications

Compromised Livability, Equity & Design Flexibility

- Small windows compromise access to natural light, ventilation and views to the yard or street
- Deep entrance pits provide less dignified and accessible suite entries
- Deep cellars cannot legally be converted to include a secondary suite in the future



Deeper Basements: Issues & Implications

Sewer & Resiliency Concerns

- Plumbing more likely to require pumping to City sewer system (vs. gravity flow)
- Fixtures lose function during power loss without backup power system

Increased Costs

- Excavation and below-ground construction adds significant expense



Deeper Basements: Issues & Implications

Increased Greenhouse Gas Impacts

- Extensive foundations, pit entrances and window wells require more concrete

Soil & Groundwater Impacts

- Compromises tree retention, necessitates removal of more soils, more likely require pumping of groundwater
- Settlement issues on sites with problematic geotechnical conditions (eg. peat soils)



Engagement & What We Heard

Activities

- Industry Workshop & Survey
- Summer Pop-up Events (13 events City-wide, 400+ people)
- Talk Vancouver Survey (3,382 respondents)
- Public Open House

Residents

- Majority indicated it is important to address identified issues with deep basements
- Concerns for livability, accessibility, safety and equity of basement suites

Small Home Builders & Designers

- Agreed with observed issues and implications of deep basements
- Emphasized need for regulation changes to achieve intended objectives, including livability



Proposed Regulation Changes

Repair, Simplify and Clarify Intent of Existing Regulations

- Initial steps to fix identified shortcomings and improve livability, and begin to address environmental, sustainability and resiliency concerns
- Increase design flexibility and align regulations for secondary suites across RS zones

Changes Would Apply To:

- New house (one-family dwelling) construction with or without a secondary suite in RS zones

Changes Would **NOT** Affect:

- Existing houses
- Character house conversions to Multiple Conversion Dwellings
- Duplexes (secondary suite depth already limited to 1.5 m [4.9 ft.] or less)
- The number of suites permitted in a house

Proposed Regulation Changes

Limit Depth of Secondary Suites in New Houses

1. Limit secondary suites and lock-off units to basements – no more than 1.5 m (4.9 ft.) below ground and no longer permit external entries to cellars
2. Require living spaces to be located in portions of the basement that are no more than 1.5 m (4.9 ft.) below the adjoining ground

Expand Relaxations for Challenged Lots

3. Expand height relaxation in RS-1 to permit height up to 10.7 m (35 ft.) to enable a secondary suite if site conditions create challenges (pitched roof required)
4. Introduce relaxation for sites unsuitable for below-grade construction to enable above-grade floor area up to 0.6 FSR

Improve, Clarify & Align Regulations Across RS Zones

5. Allow houses with a secondary suite to have a second entrance at the basement level that faces the front street
6. Add existing secondary suite window area requirements to RS-3 and RS-3A
7. Clarify regulations for lowering ground for windows or entries in RS district schedules and delete outdated Administration Bulletin

Conclusion

Proposed Regulation Changes

- Limited set of changes to repair identified shortcomings in current RS regulations
- Improve livability and other outcomes for new houses and secondary suites
- Increase design flexibility and align regulations
- Address public and industry concerns



Thank you