



## THE CITY OF VAUGHAN SECONDARY SUITES STUDY



*COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSES – DECEMBER 2013*

### *CONSULTATION SUMMARY*

Prepared By:



## Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Consultation Overview .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background .....	1
1.2	Objectives.....	1
1.3	Approach.....	1
<b>2.0</b>	<b>What We Heard .....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1	Community Awareness .....	2
2.2	Neighbourhood Character .....	4
2.3	Health and Safety.....	5
2.4	Infrastructure .....	6
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Summary of Key Messages .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Next Steps.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix A: Summary of Online Survey Results .....</b>		<b>9</b>
<b>Appendix B: Community Open House Participant Handout .....</b>		<b>11</b>

## 1.0 CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Background

The City of Vaughan is in the process of undertaking a secondary suites study. The study is being developed within the context of existing policy environment as established by the Province of Ontario and Region of York. The main outcome of the work will be a recommended secondary suites policy including Official Plan policies, zoning standards and other related measures or tools required to regulate secondary suites in the City of Vaughan.

One of the objectives of this initiative is to conduct the study with the benefit of a public consultation process. As such, several community engagement activities have been incorporated into the various study phases, including 3 community open house sessions:



This report provides a summary of the Community Open House & Workshops held in December 2013. In addition to the community open houses an online survey was conducted to gather additional input into the development of its secondary suite policy. A summary of findings is provided in Appendix A.

### 1.2 Objectives

There were two main objectives to the consultation process:

- Share information on secondary suites with consultation participants
- Hear from community stakeholders and residents on how best to develop a “made-in Vaughan” approach to secondary suites

### 1.3 Approach

The consultation sessions were held on two evenings in December 2013. The first was held at City Hall and the second was held at the Vellore Community Centre. Both sessions were held from 7-9pm.

The sessions each started with a brief presentation to share the purpose for the study, outline the background and policy context for

the study, provide an overview of secondary suites, and outline the process for completing the secondary suites study.

The fifteen minute presentation was followed by a series of discussions related to four key planning considerations:

1. Community Awareness
2. Neighbourhood Character
3. Health and Safety
4. Infrastructure

A brief overview of each topic was provided to participants followed by a series of questions that were explored in a small-group table format. Each table had a facilitator with 4-6 participants.

A copy of the participant handout including discussion questions is provided as Appendix B.

## 2.0 WHAT WE HEARD

Through the consultations held in December the City heard from approximately 60 residents.

The insight, experience, and knowledge of these individuals has been summarized and reflected in the following synopsis. Responses have been organized by each of the four topics outlined above.

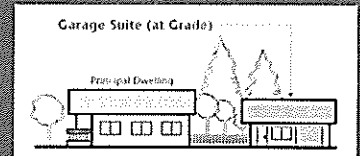
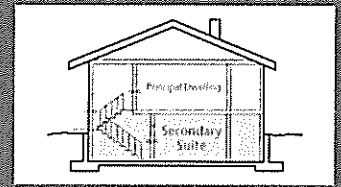
### 2.1 Community Awareness

Increasing everyone's awareness of the benefits of secondary suites as well as the responsibilities associated with having a secondary suite will contribute to the success of the City's secondary suite policy once it is implemented.

Workshop participants were asked to reflect on the potential benefits of secondary suites to tenants, landlords and homeowners, as well as the general community.

Some of the benefits of secondary suites expressed by stakeholders include:

- Additional income for homeowners
- Facilitates aging in place and can provide a space for live-in caregivers



A secondary suite is a self-contained unit within a house OR within an accessory building on the same lot as a house.

A secondary suite has its own kitchen and bathroom.

- Creates an affordable housing option (affordable housing for youth was emphasized as well as low-income wage earners)
- Creates standards to improve safety
- Creates diversity in neighbourhoods
- Provides a more efficient use of land and infrastructure
- Encourages more rental housing
- Provides an affordable homeownership opportunity for first time homebuyers (as they can supplement their income)

Participants were also asked to identify strategies for encouraging landlords to come forward to legalize existing secondary suites. Many stakeholders expressed that additional fees and costs associated with legalizing secondary suites could be a disincentive for existing landlords of secondary suites. Balancing these costs with the need for a licensing program was emphasized.

**“There are too many cars, how do we address this?”**

Some stakeholders also identified that providing incentives to existing homeowners to retrofit their homes would help encourage existing landlords to come forward. Other stakeholders, however, did not agree that the City should provide incentives to landlords as they are earning an income from renting their secondary suite.

Many discussion groups noted the importance of creating and providing educational resources to existing and new landlords outlining ‘what it takes’ to be a landlord including City planning fees and standards, Fire Code and Building Code requirements, as well as responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act.

One discussion group suggested a tenant education campaign, which could include highlighting their rights as tenants, and offering suggestions for obtaining further information.

**“Process should not be too onerous”**

More general information on the overall benefits and challenges of secondary suites was also suggested as a way to create a broader understanding of secondary suites. It was also suggested that Councillors should be involved in the education process.

Having information easily accessible through the City’s website was also identified as a strategy for creating ongoing awareness of secondary suites. One group also suggested encouraging builders to include options for secondary suites at the development stage to help reduce costs to retrofit.

Having more community consultations/seminars was suggested to help increase community awareness and resident engagement. Further education to share data and acknowledge myths around secondary suites was also proposed. Similarly, hearing from other municipalities on the impacts of secondary suites was suggested.

*It was noted that secondary suites already exist within the City of Vaughan and that legalizing suites simply created greater awareness of them.*

## **2.2 Neighbourhood Character**

Preserving the character of the neighbourhood means ensuring that secondary suites are in keeping with the look and feel of the neighbourhood.

Stakeholders identified a number of potential impacts to neighbourhood character.

The most common concern with regard to secondary suites seem to be parking. The need for on-street parking, increased traffic congestions, and widening driveways (paving over existing lawns/gardens) to accommodate increased demand for parking were all identified as concerns. Many stakeholders expressed existing qualms that many home owners have paved over front lawns to create more parking spaces and that this has already had a negative impact on neighbourhood character. This seemed to be a more prevalent issue within newer higher density neighbourhoods. Stakeholders expressed concern that this would become an even greater issue with the legalization of secondary suites. Some stakeholders proposed that higher density neighbourhoods may not be appropriate for secondary suites if parking cannot be accommodated. Some stakeholders suggested that one parking space per secondary suite should be provided. Others noted that improving public transit and creating more 'walkable' communities would help alleviate demand for cars. Additional suggestions regarding parking included creating a parking permit system (on street parking) and limiting the number of secondary suites in higher density areas.

Some discussion groups expressed concern over increased garbage in neighbourhoods. Other groups, however, noted that the City of Vaughan has a 3 bag limit so additional garbage would be at the cost of the homeowner/landlord. Some stakeholders noted that it may be a challenge to regulate this if there are multiple rental dwellings.

Stakeholders were asked to consider several planning considerations including parking, size and location, and property standards such as setbacks, entrances and landscaping.



There was some conflicting opinions regarding limits to the size of secondary suites; some groups expressed the desire to have minimum unit sizes (450 & 500 square feet were suggested) and limits to the number of occupants while other groups felt that these were already covered in existing regulations such as the Ontario Building Code.

Some stakeholders noted the need to ensure privacy of residents and suggested appropriate standards for setbacks be considered. Most stakeholders agreed that entrances to secondary suites should be clearly visible (i.e. not through garages). There were, however, differences in opinions on the best location of entrances. Overall many expressed a preference for the back only while others noted that with appropriate setbacks a side entrance should also be permitted.

One discussion group suggested prohibiting absentee landlords (i.e. only permitting owner-occupied secondary suites). One of the main concerns was ensuring 'pride of place'. It was noted that other communities have proposed this and that legal challenges exist. Generally stakeholders agreed that secondary suites should be limited to one unit per dwelling.

*It was noted that many regulations are already in existence (i.e. landscaping regulations, noise regulations) and that an important component to minimizing the impact to neighbourhoods is ensuring adequate enforcement of these standards.*

### **2.3 Health and Safety**

Secondary suites need to be safe and livable for the individuals and families who live in them. The Province sets standards in the Ontario Building Code and Fire Code to make sure that a home is safe for the people who live there.

One of the key messages from stakeholders was that there is a need for some form of registration and/or licensing process. Stakeholders noted that a registration process would help identify where units are in the City; this would help Fire Services respond appropriately in emergency situations. Two of the discussion groups also suggested a plaque or something visible to indicate the location of a secondary suite. While many stakeholders suggested the need to incorporate a fee for existing and potential landlords it was also noted that there needs to be a balance so that the fee is not too onerous. Several stakeholders expressed that a fee was needed to help cover the additional costs for inspections and regulation. Others noted that

Building code inspectors and fire investigators often find things that can be done to improve safety, like:

- installing fire separation barriers between units
- creating separate exits from each unit
- enlarging/ installing windows in bedrooms
- installing smoke/carbon monoxide detectors

there should not be any fees as part of the registration process as this would act as a deterrent landlords.

Additional suggestions as part of the registration process included conducting inspections, ensuring landlords have insurance, and incorporating a fine for non-compliance. There were varying opinions on the frequency of inspections. Most agreed that an initial inspection was important, while some expressed this should be completed annually others thought less frequently (i.e. every 3-5 years) was more reasonable. Some recommended that an inspection occur every time a unit was turned-over, although it was suggested that this would be very difficult for the City to monitor.

Again, enforcement of these regulations was identified by most as an important component of legalizing secondary suites although it was acknowledged as a challenge as well (i.e. need for more resources, limited authorities for enforcement).

Several stakeholders commented that from a safety standards perspective the Fire Code and Building Code are very comprehensive. More education around these standards and resources was seen as important to ensuring safety. Having a form of checklist was suggested as a means of further education to potential landlords.

Several discussion groups suggested some form of incentive for landlord compliance with safety measures.

## 2.4 Infrastructure

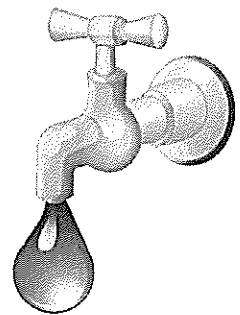
Maintaining the current level of services as the population grows is important to the City and its residents.

Stakeholders were concerned with the impact of secondary suites on local infrastructure; both hard and soft services. In particular:

- Impact on schools and community centres
- Impact on water and sewage
- Impact on traffic and street congestion

*It was acknowledged by several stakeholders that there is a general lack of awareness (and data) on what the potential impact actual is on City Services (in particular with regard to soft services).*

Based on information from the City's Engineering and Public Works department the design requirements for the City's water & wastewater are generally conservative and sufficient to accommodate secondary suites.





As noted previously, some stakeholders expressed concern over increased garbage while others acknowledged the City's 3 bag limit as being sufficient to address this issue.

Parking was again noted as a concern. In particular, one discussion group noted the impact of increased on-street parking in the winter/snowy months.

Monitoring the impacts to the City's infrastructure over time was suggested as a way to increase awareness and mitigate impacts. Another suggestion was that a secondary suite pilot project or a phasing-in approach may be a good opportunity to test and evaluate various strategies and opportunities with regard to secondary suites.

### 3.0 SUMMARY OF KEY MESSAGES

The Community Open House & Workshops held in December 2013 provided an opportunity to discuss with City of Vaughan residents their concerns and recommendations regarding secondary suites. In particular, their viewpoints around the issues of community awareness, neighbourhood character, health and safety and infrastructure. A number of key messages were heard.

#### Community Awareness

- An ongoing dialogue and engagement process is important.
- Developing and sharing resources for landlords and residents should be part of the secondary suite policy implementation process.

#### Neighbourhood Character

- Preserving neighbourhood character is important to residents.
- Strong consideration to parking needs to be incorporated into the secondary suite policy and standards.
- Developing standards/regulations should also consider location of entrances and setbacks.
- Adequate enforcement of existing and potential new regulations is a critical component to legalizing secondary suites.

#### Health and Safety

- Some form of registration/licensing process is needed including requirements for inspections and adherence to the Fire Code and Ontario Building Code.

Stakeholders expressed a desire to have more consultations, and to continue to be informed and engaged in the secondary suite study.

- There needs to be a balance between ensuring safety and responsibility with creating a process that is not too onerous.

#### Infrastructure

- There needs to be more education around the impact of secondary suites to infrastructure and services.
- Ongoing and longer-term monitoring of the impact of secondary suites should be incorporated into the implementation process.

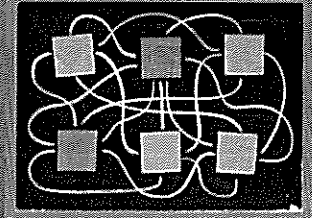
## 4.0 NEXT STEPS

Using the feedback and direction outlined in the above sections, the City of Vaughan will work with the Secondary Suite Task Force to develop a draft secondary suite policy over the coming months.

This draft policy and recommendations will be shared with residents at another community open house scheduled for the spring of 2014.

It is anticipated that the City will present the draft secondary suite policy to Council later in the spring.

*We would like to thank all of the participants of the December Community Open House & Workshops for their time and energy, and for sharing their experiences, insights and viewpoints.*

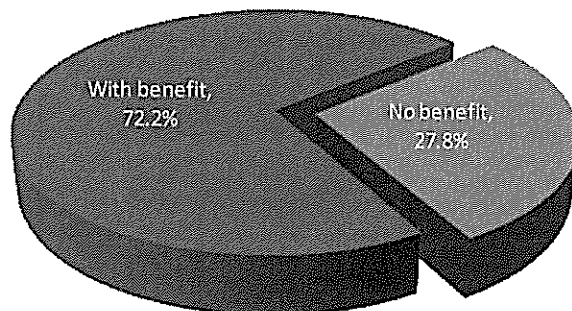


## APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

### Summary of Responses to Vaughan Secondary Suites Online Survey

1. What are the potential benefits in allowing secondary suites? Why do you believe this is a benefit? (79 responses)

- 27.8% or 22 respondents believe there are no benefits in allowing secondary suites
- Benefits:
  - Increases affordable housing in the community, particularly for employees and students
  - Provides homeowners with another source of income to help with housing costs
  - Provides housing options for elderly parents, adult children and nannies or caregivers
  - Legalizing secondary suites would require those who have existing suites to bring them up to building code standards



2. Do you have concerns about secondary suites in Vaughan? If so, please describe. (82 responses)

- Traffic and parking issues (51.2% or 42 respondents)
- Neighbourhood safety (9.8% or 8 respondents)
- Capacity in terms of infrastructure (water, sewage) and overcrowding in neighbourhoods, parks, schools, community centres, libraries, etc. (9.8% or 8 respondents)
- Ability to enforce by-laws such as parking by-laws, property standard by-laws and health and safety codes
- Decreased property values
- Changing neighbourhood character/ exterior of homes

3. What policies or regulatory tools do you think should be considered in developing a “made-in-Vaughan” approach to secondary suites? (75 responses)
- Registering and/or licensing secondary suites (8% or 6 responses)
    - Annual renewal of permits/licenses and payment of fees
  - Ensuring that property taxes reflect the presence of a secondary suite (10.7% or 8 responses)
  - Regular inspections to ensure that secondary suites meet health and safety standards (14.7% or 11 responses)
  - Fire and safety standards, including number of exits and construction material to be used
  - Limiting the number of people living in one house
  - Owner occupancy – having the landlord live in the house where the secondary suite is located

## APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

# CITY OF VAUGHAN SECONDARY SUITES STUDY COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

Secondary Suites are self-contained units within a house or within an accessory building on the same lot as the house. A secondary suite has its own kitchen and bathroom.

Secondary Suites are currently not permitted in the City but the Province now requires that municipalities like the City of Vaughan establish Official Plan policies and zoning standards that will permit secondary suites in residential dwellings. As a result, the City is currently working on a study that will consider new Official Plan policies, zoning standards and other regulatory tools that will guide the manner in which secondary suites will be permitted.

The purpose of tonight's open house is to share information on secondary suites and the Secondary Suites Study. We would also like to hear from you on how best to develop a "made-in-Vaughan" approach to secondary suites.

### Tonight's Agenda:

Time	Activity
7:05 – 7:20	Presentation of City's Secondary Suites Study
7:20 – 8:30	Discussion Groups
8:30 – 8:55	Report Back
8:55 – 9:00	Closing Remarks

We would like your input on the following issues:

**Issue #1: Creating Community Awareness**

1. What are the benefits of legalizing secondary suites?
  - a) Consider: benefits to tenants/residents, benefits to landlords/homeowners, and benefits to broader community.
2. What could the City do to encourage landlords to come forward to legalize existing secondary suites?
3. What (other) strategies can you recommend to create community awareness?

**Issue #2: Impact on Neighbourhood Character**

1. What are the potential impacts of secondary suites on our neighbourhoods?
  - a) Consider: location, number of units, parking, size of secondary suite, other property standards (i.e. setbacks, entrance locations, landscaping/driveway).
2. Are policies/ regulations needed to address these impacts and preserve the look and feel of neighbourhoods? If so, what would they look like?

**Issue #3: Ensuring Safety**

1. What can the City do to ensure the safety of secondary suites?
  - a) Consider: registration of secondary suites (initial and renewal periods), licensing, inspections.
2. How could the City encourage homeowners to improve the safety of their units?

**Issue #4: Impact on Infrastructure**

1. What are the potential impacts of secondary suites to infrastructure?
  - a) Consider: garbage, traffic, parking, community services
2. What can the City do to address any impact on City Services?

**For further information, please visit the project's website:**

[http://www.vaughan.ca/projects/policy\\_planning\\_projects/secondary\\_suites\\_policy\\_study/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.vaughan.ca/projects/policy_planning_projects/secondary_suites_policy_study/Pages/default.aspx)

**You can also provide additional input by completing the survey:**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/vaughansecondarysuite>

**THANK YOU!**