



Building Better Homes and Communities

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ACT Solutions

Design Guidelines for Adding a Second Dwelling to Suburban Ranch Houses

City of Charlesbourg, Quebec

The issue

Smaller families, an aging population and a housing stock in need of repair and renovation have sparked municipalities to modernize post-war suburbs to meet the needs of today's society.

One attractive and affordable housing option is transforming a single-family home to accommodate a self-contained secondary suite. Secondary suites are a desirable housing alternative, particularly for seniors, single-parent families or first-time home buyers. The problem is that zoning bylaws in most single-family neighbourhoods do not permit this type of dwelling.

The plan

The former City of Charlesbourg (now part of the City of Quebec) is a conventional single-family suburb north of Quebec City. Since the mid-1990s, the City has been revising its zoning and planning regulations to accommodate higher-density

housing forms like secondary suite additions to one-story bungalows or ranch houses.

In spring 1996, the City was awarded an ACT grant to develop and apply design guidelines for adding secondary suites to ranch homes. A team of professors from Laval University's School of Architecture was retained to undertake the research and development of design guidelines. The plan was to prepare a handbook which would assist property owners and builders in identifying housing needs, making design decisions and understanding regulatory requirements for secondary suites. The City then invited local residents to submit proposals to undertake a secondary suite demonstration project.

The ACT project team undertook the following:

- An inventory of ranch houses and housing needs in Charlesbourg



- Design guidelines
- A handbook for secondary suites
- Changes to the zoning bylaw

The project team

City of Charlesbourg Planning and Recreation Departments
Laval University School of Architecture
Construction SMB de l'Ancienne-Lorette

The results

The City proposed the following key changes to the zoning bylaw:

- If a carport or garage is converted to a secondary unit, allow parking in front.

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- Allow an encroachment into the side, front and/or back yards.
- For an additional unit, increase the minimum building and lot width for semi-detached homes.

By rezoning single-family neighbourhoods to permit the addition of secondary suites in conjunction with updating site development standards, municipalities can encourage secondary suite additions, while ensuring that their construction complements the lifestyle and architectural character of suburban areas.

The secondary suite handbook produced by the City is a useful tool for homeowners and builders alike to construct additions that meet the clients' needs, keep down construction and approval costs, and blend in with the surrounding neighbourhood.

A demonstration home was built in 2002 to showcase the advantages of secondary suite additions. The one-story ranch house with a stone façade was extended into an adjoining lot to accommodate a 78-m² two-bedroom addition for the owners' parents.

The results of this project would be transferable to other communities where it is desirable to adapt ranch-style homes to meet changing community needs.



Related reports

ACT Case Study: *Construction Standards for Accessory Suites* (Energy Pathways Inc., 1997)

ACT Case Study: *Legalization of Secondary Suites in Surrey, B.C.* (R. Kinnis and D. Scherlowski, 1997)

ACT Case Study: *Modifying Municipal Regulations to Accommodate Two-Generational Houses in Quebec City* (Julie Tasker-Brown, 2002)

ACT case studies may be downloaded from ACT's website at www.actprogram.com.

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