



City of Vancouver *Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines*

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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LOCK-OFF UNIT GUIDELINES

Adopted by City Council on September 8, 2009

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

As a condition of Development Permit approval for a Lock-off Unit or Principal Dwelling Unit combined with a Lock-off Unit, the registered owner will execute a covenant which must be registered against the title of the property prior to issuance of the Development Permit. The covenant is to ensure that the number of strata lots created upon registration of a strata plan is consistent with the number of approved principal dwelling units (i.e., the lock-off unit cannot be defined as a separate strata lot).

1 Application and Intent

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with a district schedule of the Zoning and Development By-law, the Downtown District Official Development Plan or a CD-1 By-law, which permit a Lock-off Unit or Principal Dwelling Unit combined with a Lock-off Unit. These guidelines should be consulted in seeking approval for these conditional approval uses.

Lock-off units are self-contained units which are smaller than the principal dwelling unit. Each unit must have direct access to a hallway, corridor or the outside, and a shared internal door which can be locked enabling both units to be independent.

The intent of these guidelines is to encourage functional and liveable lock-off units which are designed in combination with a principal dwelling unit. These Guidelines are only applicable for development permit applications, and applicants should also refer to the Vancouver Building By-law.

2 General Design Considerations

An application for the conditional approval use of a Lock-off Unit or Principal Dwelling Unit combined with a Lock-off Unit will require approval by the Development Permit Board or the Director of Planning. In the consideration to allow this use, liveability will be a primary goal. These guidelines delineate a set of principles for liveability which include light and ventilation, privacy, sound insulation, security and outdoor space.

The minimum unit size for the lock-off unit is 26 m² which may be further reduced to 19 m². Since liveability is directly related to the size of a dwelling unit, units that are smaller than 26 m² should compensate for the reduced size and attain the same standard of liveability through increased enhancements of the other liveability features listed below.

The maximum unit size for a lock-off unit is 29.7 m². Units greater in size are considered secondary suites and must comply with the regulations for secondary suite.

2.1 Light and Ventilation

Natural day light and well ventilated spaces are essential to occupant comfort and well-being. Ensuring good day lighting and proper ventilation is an especially important design consideration for lock-off units, owing to their small size and limited window area. For all lock-off units, the entirety of the main living space should be enabled to be bright and naturally lit during the daytime. Dwelling units with two exterior walls are preferred to enable cross ventilation through the unit.

- (a) For all lock-off units that are 26 m² or smaller, a minimum of one large window in an exterior wall equal in area to 15% of the total floor area of the unit should be provided. This window should provide a direct line of sight to the exterior from at least 50% of the floor area of the lock-off unit.
- (b) A minimum of two operable vents should be placed as far apart as possible, to facilitate good air flow.
- (c) Design elements such as higher ceilings and reflective light shelves that allow light further into the lock-off unit are encouraged, particularly where there are deeper units. When the principal living area, including the kitchen space, is more than 7.6 m deep, a strategy to provide natural light to the rear portion of the area should be demonstrated.

- (d) If an enclosed balcony is being provided as the outdoor amenity space, then the glazing around the exterior perimeter of the balcony should have maximum transparency from floor-to-ceiling to ensure good day lighting into the remainder of the lock-off unit.
- (e) Inboard, habitable spaces not immediately adjacent to an exterior window and which rely on “borrowed day light” are discouraged.

2.2 Noise

Good sound separation between the principal dwelling unit and the lock-off unit is a key aspect of good liveability. While a minimum sound transmission class (STC) rating is specified for partitions between the principal dwelling unit and the lock-off unit, sound transfer is also possible between adjacent units through operable windows or balconies.

- (a) Care should be taken in the placement of balconies, windows and their operable vents to minimize adjacencies.
- (b) Where casement windows are used, the windows should swing in opposite directions to lessen sound transfer between units.

2.3 Privacy

In addition to good sound separation, the physical privacy of the occupant should be considered. Although comfort level and familiarity between co-habitants may vary, the room layout should enable privacy concerns between co-habitants to be respected.

- (a) Common points of entry for the principal dwelling unit and the lock-off unit should be located away from the main living/sleeping areas of each unit so that direct sight lines are minimized.
- (b) Balconies should be separated and well screened.

2.4 Safety and Security

The lock-off unit should be clearly delineated from the principal dwelling unit. Units should be designed to allow a sense of security and well being.

- (a) Entry doors to the principal and lock-off units that are distinct and separate should be provided.
- (b) Internal doors that connect the principal and lock-off units should be equipped to provide security from each unit.
- (c) Access into the lock-off unit from an adjacent balcony of the principal dwelling unit should not be possible.

2.5 Access and Circulation

The introduction of lock-off units has the potential to increase the number of main entry doors facing a common corridor. This has the potential to create a sense of overcrowding within the corridor and create privacy conflicts between dwelling units. Access to unit entries and the circulation in common areas should be designed to minimize these potential conflicts.

- (a) Primary access to the lock-off unit is to be from a common corridor or directly to the outside.
- (b) Where there is direct corridor access, the door should be located as far as possible from the entry to the principal dwelling unit to enhance unit identity and privacy.
- (c) Doors should not align directly with doorways across the common corridor.
- (d) Where doors must be grouped together, the doorways should be recessed approximately 0.6 m from the common corridor.
- (e) Providing generous corridor widths to increase comfort and to distance front entry doors from each other should be considered.

3 Internal Design and Facilities

3.1 Living/Sleeping Space

Due to small unit size, the principal living area in a lock-off unit may also serve as the main sleeping area. As such, this area should be designed to accommodate a multitude of different functions.

- (a) The minimum width of the main living/sleeping space should be 3 m; wide enough to accommodate a fold down bed and circulation space and day lighted by a large window.
- (b) The sleeping area may be located in a wall recess away from the main living area, but the space should remain contiguous with the main living area and not be enclosed.

3.2 Entries

Consideration should be given to the design of the entries with regard to privacy, unit identity, sight lines and the direction of the door swing.

3.3 Bathroom

Complete bathroom facilities are required in each lock-off unit and should offer visual and aural privacy from the remainder of the unit.

- (a) Bathrooms should be equipped with a wash-basin, water closet and a shower or bath.
- (b) Bathrooms should be physically separated from the remainder of the unit by partitions and a door to ensure privacy and to isolate noise and odours.
- (c) The size of the bathroom will depend on the design. In all cases, adequate space around fixtures should be provided to allow unimpeded use.
- (d) Due to limited space, bathroom facilities may be separated and provided for in more than a single room. An example would be a water closet and a separate room for bathing. In these cases, it is expected that rooms containing the water closet and the shower/bathtub are physically separated from the remainder of the lock-off unit.

3.4 Kitchen

Each kitchen should be equipped with a sink, ample counter space for food preparation and areas for a cooking heat source and a modestly-sized refrigerator.

4 Open Space

4.1 Semi-Private Open Space

When lock-off unit sizes are less than 26 m² or when the provision of private open space is not possible for every unit, semi-private open space should be provided as the main outdoor amenity for the lock-off unit. This may be provided in the form of a common roof deck accessible to all residents.

4.2 Private Open Space

Privacy for residents should be considered.

- (a) Usable private open space should be provided for each lock-off unit in the form of balconies, decks or patios.
- (b) The private open space should have a minimum single horizontal dimension of 1.8 m and a minimum area of 4.5 m² and should be designed to capture sun and views where possible, as well as to avoid noise and to take account of visual privacy and security.
- (c) A fully-glazed balcony enclosure to reduce noise may be appropriate.
- (d) Alternatively, a lock-off unit that is designed to provide a strong open relationship with the exterior in the form of large operable windows and/or “Juliet” balconies may also be considered. Such operable doors and windows should allow a large amount of area to be open to the exterior, such as casements, sliders, double or single hung types. The amount of openness to the exterior should be large enough to accommodate two adults standing side-by-side.