

VANCOUVER HOME ADDITIONS

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# Permits & Regulations

BC Building Code requirements, municipal building permits, engineering approvals, and inspection processes for home additions in Metro Vancouver

26 Expert Answers from Additions IQ

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## Vancouver Permit Fees and Development Cost Charges Guide

**Permit fees and development cost charges (DCCs) for a home addition in the City of Vancouver typically add \$8,000 to \$25,000 to your project cost, with the exact amount depending on the size of the addition, whether you're adding a new dwelling unit, and the declared construction value.** This is significantly higher than most other Metro Vancouver municipalities and catches many homeowners off guard when budgeting.

The City of Vancouver's fee structure for residential additions involves several separate charges that stack up. **The building permit fee** is calculated based on the declared construction value of the project. Vancouver uses a sliding scale — as of recent fee schedules, the rate is approximately \$10 to \$12 per \$1,000 of construction value for the first portion, stepping down slightly for higher values. For a typical addition valued at \$200,000 to \$300,000 in construction costs, the building permit fee alone runs **\$3,500 to \$5,500**. The City reviews your submitted construction value and may adjust it upward if they consider your declared value unrealistically low, so don't try to understate costs to save on permit fees.

**Plan review fees** are included within the building permit fee in Vancouver, but be aware that if your project requires revisions and resubmission — which is common for additions, especially in neighbourhoods with character home guidelines — there may be additional review charges for subsequent submissions. The initial review process for an addition typically takes 8 to 16 weeks, and each round of revisions adds 4 to 8 weeks.

**Development Cost Levies (DCLs)** are where the numbers can jump significantly. DCLs are Vancouver's version of development cost charges, and they apply when you're creating new dwelling space. For a standard addition that expands an existing single-family home without creating a new dwelling unit, DCLs are typically **not triggered** — this is a common misconception that causes unnecessary anxiety. DCLs apply primarily when you're creating a **new dwelling unit**, such as adding a secondary suite or laneway house. However, if your addition does create a new unit, DCLs in the City of Vancouver are area-specific and can range from **\$15 to \$90+ per square foot** depending on the DCL district, which can add \$10,000 to \$40,000 or more for a new dwelling unit.

**Separate trade permits** add to the total. An electrical permit typically costs \$200 to \$500 depending on the scope of work. A plumbing permit runs \$200 to \$600. A gas permit, if you're extending gas service to the addition, is another \$150 to \$300. These are relatively minor individually but add up to \$500 to \$1,400 collectively.

**Other City-required fees and charges** that often apply to addition projects include a **demolition permit** if you're removing part of the existing structure (\$300 to \$600), a **tree removal permit** if any protected trees are affected (\$500 to \$1,500 per tree, plus potential replacement tree requirements), and **damage deposits** for work that affects the boulevard or sidewalk (\$500 to \$2,000, refundable if no damage occurs).

Beyond the City's direct fees, there are **professional costs that the permit process necessitates** but that aren't technically City charges. These include the architectural drawings required for permit submission (\$10,000 to \$18,000), structural engineering (\$3,000 to \$8,000), an energy advisor for BC Energy Step Code compliance (\$2,000 to \$4,000), and potentially a geotechnical report or arborist report if site conditions require them. While these aren't "permit fees" in the strict sense, they're costs you wouldn't incur if the permit process didn't require them.

For comparison, here's how Vancouver's fees stack against nearby municipalities. **Burnaby** charges building permit fees at a similar rate but generally has lower DCCs. **Surrey** has lower permit fees overall and faster processing times for straightforward additions. **North Vancouver District** fees are moderate but the process can be slower for complex projects. The City of Vancouver consistently ranks as the most expensive municipality in Metro Vancouver for permit-related costs, and the timeline from application to permit issuance is among the longest.

For budgeting purposes, a safe approach is to allocate **\$10,000 to \$15,000 for all permit-related fees for a standard home addition** that doesn't create a new dwelling unit, and **\$20,000 to \$35,000 if your project creates a new unit** and triggers DCLs. These figures include the direct City fees plus the trade permits but exclude professional design fees, which should be budgeted separately.

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Q2

## Planning Additions Around Vancouver's Protected Trees

**Vancouver's Protection of Trees Bylaw requires a permit to remove or significantly alter any tree with a trunk diameter of 20 centimetres or more (measured at 1.4 metres above ground), and working within the critical root zone of a protected tree without proper planning can result in fines up to \$100,000 per tree.**

Planning your addition around protected trees requires early arborist involvement, strategic design decisions, and close coordination with the City of Vancouver's Urban Forestry department.

The **first step** is hiring an ISA-certified arborist to conduct a tree inventory and assessment on your property. The arborist will identify every protected tree, assess its health, species, and structural condition, and establish the **tree protection zone (TPZ)** for each — this is the area around the trunk where no excavation, grading, soil compaction, or material storage is permitted during construction. The TPZ is typically calculated as a radius of **6 to 18 times the trunk diameter**, depending on species and conditions. A mature Western Red Cedar with a 60-centimetre trunk might have a TPZ extending 3.6 to 10.8 metres from the trunk. An arborist report for a home addition project typically costs **\$1,500 to \$4,000**, and the City of Vancouver requires this report as part of your building permit

application when protected trees exist on the property.

**Design your addition's footprint to avoid the TPZ entirely** if at all possible. This is the cleanest path to permit approval and gives you the best chance of keeping the tree healthy through and after construction. Your designer should overlay the arborist's TPZ maps onto the site plan early in the design process — before you fall in love with a layout that conflicts with a major tree. In many cases, shifting the addition's footprint by just one or two metres can move it entirely outside the TPZ while still achieving your functional goals.

When complete avoidance isn't feasible, you'll need an **arborist's tree management plan** that specifies exactly how the tree will be protected during construction. This plan may allow limited encroachment into the TPZ (typically no more than 25% to 30%) with specific mitigation measures: **hand excavation only** within the TPZ (no machine digging), root pruning by the arborist at approved locations, installation of protective fencing at the TPZ boundary before any construction activity begins, mulching exposed root zones, and supplemental watering during and after construction. The City requires this fencing to be in place before your building permit inspection will pass.

**Foundation design** near protected trees requires careful engineering. Traditional strip footings with deep excavation trenches are problematic near root zones. Alternative foundation systems that minimize soil disturbance include **helical piles** (steel screw-in supports that thread between major roots), **concrete piers** with minimal excavation, or **grade beam foundations** that span over the root zone. Helical pile foundations cost **\$15,000 to \$30,000** more than conventional footings for a typical addition but can make the difference between keeping and losing a significant tree. Your structural engineer and arborist should collaborate directly on the foundation design.

If a protected tree **must be removed** to accommodate your addition, you'll need a tree removal permit from the City of Vancouver. The bylaw requires replacement planting — typically two replacement trees for every one removed — and a **cash-in-lieu contribution** if your lot cannot accommodate the replacements. Removal permit fees and replacement costs together run **\$500 to \$3,000** per tree, but the real cost is often the loss of mature canopy that took decades to grow and that contributes meaningfully to your property's value and neighbourhood character.

**Species matters** for planning purposes. Some trees common in Vancouver — like Douglas Fir, Western Red Cedar, and mature ornamental cherries — have extensive, shallow root systems that are easily damaged by construction activity. Others, like certain maples and oaks, have deeper root structures that tolerate nearby construction somewhat better. Your arborist's species-specific guidance is essential for realistic planning.

During construction, the general contractor must enforce tree protection rigorously. **No parking equipment or storing materials within the TPZ**, no dumping concrete washout or chemicals near trees, and no attaching anything to tree trunks. The arborist should visit the site at key milestones — before excavation, during foundation work, and after backfilling — to verify the tree's health and protection measures. Budget **\$1,000 to \$2,500** for these monitoring visits. A tree that was healthy before construction but dies within two years afterward due to root damage can trigger enforcement action and replacement requirements, so protection isn't just good practice — it's

a legal obligation.

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Q3

## Land Survey Costs for Richmond Home Additions

**Yes, get a land survey before designing your addition — in Richmond specifically, a survey is not just advisable but practically essential because of the city's flood plain construction requirements, tight lot setbacks, and the prevalence of properties where existing structures may already be close to or encroaching on setback limits.** A current survey prevents costly design revisions, permit delays, and the nightmare scenario of building an addition that violates setback requirements and must be modified after construction.

A **BC Land Surveyor (BCLS)** is the only professional legally authorized to establish property boundaries and prepare survey documents in British Columbia. For a home addition project in Richmond, you'll typically need one or both of two survey products. A **topographic and legal survey** of your property, showing boundaries, existing structures, elevations, and setback dimensions, costs **\$2,000 to \$4,000** depending on lot size, complexity, and whether the surveyor needs to re-establish boundary markers. A **building location certificate** (also called a plot plan or survey certificate), which verifies that a structure as-built complies with zoning setbacks, costs **\$1,500 to \$2,500** and is often required by Richmond at specific stages of the building permit process.

Richmond presents **unique survey considerations** that don't apply in most other Metro Vancouver municipalities. The entire city sits on the Fraser River delta floodplain, with average ground elevations barely above sea level. Richmond's Flood Construction Level (FCL) regulations require habitable floors to be built above a specified elevation — currently **3.5 metres geodetic** in most areas, though this varies by neighbourhood and is under review for potential increases. Your surveyor establishes the existing ground elevation and your designer uses this to determine how high the addition's floor must be, which directly affects foundation design, stair connections to the existing home, and exterior grade transitions. Getting this elevation data wrong can result in a permit rejection or, worse, a finished addition that doesn't meet flood requirements.

**Setback verification** is particularly important in Richmond because many properties in established neighbourhoods like Steveston, Broadmoor, and the central city have homes built decades ago when setback requirements were different or enforcement was less rigorous. It's not uncommon to discover that an existing home already sits closer to a property line than current zoning allows. If your home is already non-conforming, adding to it in that direction may be prohibited without a development variance permit, which costs **\$2,400 to \$3,500** in application fees and requires a public notification process. A survey reveals this before you invest in design work

that may prove unbuildable.

The survey also identifies **easements, rights-of-way, and covenants** registered on your property's title. Richmond has numerous drainage easements, utility corridors, and restrictive covenants that can prevent construction in specific areas of a lot. A title search (which your surveyor or your lawyer can obtain) paired with the survey plan shows these encumbrances spatially so your designer can work around them.

Timing matters — **commission the survey before your designer starts detailed drawings**. The survey serves as the base document that your designer, structural engineer, and HVAC contractor all reference. Accurate property dimensions, setback distances, elevation data, and utility locations prevent expensive mid-design changes. Some homeowners try to save money by having their designer work from an old survey (perhaps one from when they purchased the home), but conditions change — fences move, neighbours build, trees grow, and grades shift. A current survey by a BCLS costs a fraction of what a design revision costs and provides the legal certainty that your permit application requires.

Richmond's building permit application requires a **site plan** drawn to scale showing the proposed addition in relation to property lines, existing structures, setbacks, and the street. While your designer prepares this site plan, it must be based on surveyed data to be accepted by the city. After construction, Richmond may require a **final survey certificate** confirming the addition was built where the permit specified — this is a separate survey visit costing **\$1,000 to \$1,800** and should be budgeted from the start.

For a typical Richmond addition project, budget **\$3,000 to \$5,500** total for survey services: the initial topographic/legal survey plus the post-construction certificate. This represents roughly **1% to 2%** of a mid-range addition's cost and eliminates some of the most expensive risks in the entire project.

## How Far Ahead to Plan a Vancouver Addition for Permit Delays

You should begin the planning process at least 9 to 14 months before you want construction to actually start, because the City of Vancouver's building permit process currently takes 12 to 20 weeks for a typical home addition — and that's after your design and drawings are complete. Many homeowners are shocked by this timeline, but understanding it upfront lets you plan strategically rather than being caught off guard by delays.

The overall timeline breaks down into three major phases: **design** (8 to 14 weeks), **permit review** (12 to 20+ weeks), and **pre-construction preparation** (2 to 4 weeks). Each phase has its own variables that can compress or extend the timeline.

**Design phase (8 to 14 weeks)** covers everything from your initial consultation with an architect or designer through to completed construction documents ready for permit submission. This includes the initial site assessment, schematic design options, design development with your input and revisions, structural engineering, and final construction drawings. If your project requires a geotechnical investigation (common in many Vancouver neighbourhoods, especially near slopes or in areas with variable soil conditions), add 3 to 4 weeks for the investigation and report. If you're in a heritage area or your home is on the Vancouver Heritage Register, additional documentation and review by the heritage planner extends the design phase by another 4 to 6 weeks.

**Permit review (12 to 20+ weeks)** is where most homeowners experience frustration. The City of Vancouver's Development, Buildings & Licensing department processes residential building permit applications through several review streams. A straightforward addition that complies with all zoning requirements (setbacks, height, lot coverage, FSR) goes through a simpler process than one requiring a Development Permit or a relaxation. If your addition triggers a **Development Permit** — which it will if you're in a neighbourhood with design guidelines, if you need a zoning relaxation, or if the project exceeds certain thresholds — add another 8 to 16 weeks on top of the building permit timeline. Development Permits often require notification to neighbours, which adds mandatory waiting periods.

The City of Vancouver has been working to streamline permit processing, but staffing constraints and application volumes continue to create backlogs. **During peak filing periods** (January through March, when homeowners plan spring construction starts), wait times stretch toward the longer end of the range. Applications filed in summer or early fall sometimes move faster simply due to lower volume.

**Resubmissions** are common and add weeks to the timeline. If the plans examiner identifies code deficiencies, zoning non-compliance, or missing information, your application goes back to your architect for corrections and then re-enters the review queue. Each resubmission can add 4 to 8 weeks. The best way to minimize resubmissions is to hire an architect or designer experienced with City of Vancouver permits who knows exactly

what the plans examiners expect and submits thorough, complete packages the first time.

For homeowners in other **Metro Vancouver municipalities**, timelines vary. The City of Burnaby typically processes residential building permits in 8 to 12 weeks. The City of Surrey has improved its timelines significantly and often processes within 6 to 10 weeks. North Vancouver District and West Vancouver tend to be in the 10 to 16 week range, and projects in West Vancouver's hillside areas with complex geotechnical and environmental review can take considerably longer. New Westminster and Coquitlam fall in the 8 to 14 week range for straightforward additions.

**Pre-construction preparation (2 to 4 weeks)** covers the gap between permit issuance and the actual start of construction. Your contractor needs time to finalize subcontractor scheduling, order materials (some specialty items have 4 to 8 week lead times), arrange for temporary utilities and site protection, and coordinate the demolition or preparation phase. If you're planning a spring start, your contractor ideally has the permit in hand by February to begin mobilization.

**Strategic planning tips:** If you want to start construction in the spring of next year, begin interviewing architects and designers no later than the previous May or June. Start design work by July, submit for permits by October, and you'll have a reasonable chance of receiving your permit by February or March. If your project is complex — second storey, heritage home, zoning relaxation needed — add an additional three to six months to this schedule and start even earlier.

Another consideration is **contractor availability**. Vancouver's construction industry operates at near capacity, and the best residential addition contractors are often booked 3 to 6 months in advance. Engaging your preferred contractor during the design phase — even before permits are submitted — gives you a realistic cost estimate to inform design decisions and secures your place in their schedule. Waiting until you have the permit in hand to start looking for a contractor can add another 2 to 4 months of delay.

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Q5

## Do You Need a Permit for a 100 Sq Ft Bump-Out in Burnaby?

**Yes, you need a building permit for a 100 square foot bump-out in Burnaby — there is no minimum size threshold that exempts structural additions from permitting.** The City of Burnaby, like every municipality in Metro Vancouver, requires a building permit for any construction that changes the structural footprint of your home, regardless of how small the addition may be. Even a modest 10-by-10-foot kitchen extension triggers the full permit process.

This catches many homeowners off guard because they assume small projects fly under the radar. The BC Building Code and Burnaby's bylaws are clear: any work that involves cutting into exterior walls, extending the foundation, modifying the building envelope, or adding habitable floor area requires a permit. A 100 square foot bump-out checks every one of those boxes. You are extending the foundation (even if it is a simple slab or crawlspace), cutting through the exterior wall to connect the new space, adding new roof structure, and creating additional living area that must meet insulation, ventilation, and egress requirements.

Burnaby does have a short list of projects that are permit-exempt, but these are limited to things like small detached sheds under 10 square metres (about 107 square feet) that are **not** attached to the house, certain fences, retaining walls under a specific height, and minor interior cosmetic renovations that do not affect structure, plumbing, or electrical. The key distinction is "detached accessory structure" versus "addition to the dwelling." Your bump-out is physically attached to and integrated with the existing house, so the detached-shed exemption does not apply even though the square footage is similar.

The permit application for a bump-out in Burnaby typically requires architectural drawings showing the proposed addition in plan view and section, a site plan demonstrating compliance with setback requirements, structural engineering details for the new foundation and roof tie-in, and confirmation that lot coverage limits are not exceeded. Burnaby's planning department will check that the bump-out respects the required side-yard and rear-yard setbacks under the applicable zoning district. For most RS-zoned single-family lots, you need a minimum 1.5 metre side setback and 6 metre rear setback, though this varies by zone.

From a cost perspective, the permit fee for a 100 square foot bump-out in Burnaby is relatively modest — typically **\$300 to \$600** depending on the declared construction value. The bigger expense is the professional drawings and engineering you will need to submit. Expect to pay **\$2,000 to \$4,000** for architectural plans and **\$1,500 to \$3,000** for structural engineering on a small bump-out. These professional fees often surprise homeowners who assumed a "small" project would be simple paperwork.

The permit timeline in Burnaby for a straightforward bump-out runs approximately **6 to 10 weeks** from submission to approval, assuming there are no zoning variances needed and your drawings are complete. If the bump-out encroaches into a required setback or pushes your lot coverage over the limit, you will need a development variance permit on top of the building permit, which adds significant time — potentially three to six months for the public notification and council approval process.

Building without a permit is never worth the risk. If Burnaby's building inspection department discovers unpermitted work, you face stop-work orders, fines of up to **\$1,000 per day** of violation, and the possibility of being ordered to demolish the addition. Even if the work is never caught during construction, unpermitted additions create serious problems when you sell the home, refinance, or file an insurance claim. Title searches and home inspections routinely flag additions that do not match the original building plans on file with the city, and your insurance

company can deny a claim on an unpermitted structure.

The bottom line is straightforward: budget for the permit, hire professionals to prepare proper drawings, and build it right. A 100 square foot bump-out is a meaningful structural modification to your home, and the permit process exists to ensure it is safe, properly engineered for Metro Vancouver's seismic zone, and compliant with the BC Building Code's requirements for energy efficiency, fire safety, and structural integrity.

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Q6

## How Long Does Vancouver's Building Permit Process Take?

**Six to twelve months is unfortunately a realistic timeline for a building permit for a home addition in the City of Vancouver, and many projects take even longer.** Vancouver has one of the slowest municipal permitting processes in Canada, and homeowners planning an addition need to build this extended timeline into their project schedule from day one.

The City of Vancouver's permitting process for a home addition typically unfolds in several stages. First, you or your designer submits a development permit application if the project triggers any zoning considerations — which most additions do, since they change the building footprint, lot coverage, or floor space ratio (FSR). The development permit review alone can take **3 to 6 months** depending on complexity and current application volumes. Simple projects that comply fully with the zoning district's regulations move faster, while anything requiring relaxations, variances, or neighbourhood notification takes considerably longer.

Once the development permit is in hand (or if your project is exempt from development permitting), you submit the building permit application. This requires complete architectural drawings, structural engineering stamped by a BC-registered professional engineer, energy efficiency documentation demonstrating compliance with the BC Energy Step Code, and various supplementary reports depending on your site — geotechnical reports, arborist assessments, or survey certificates. The building permit review itself typically takes **8 to 16 weeks** for a residential addition, though the city's own published service targets have fluctuated significantly over the past several years.

What stretches the timeline beyond these base estimates is the back-and-forth of corrections and resubmissions. Vancouver's plan review team frequently issues correction letters requesting changes or additional information. Each correction cycle can add **3 to 6 weeks** to the process as your designer addresses the comments and the revised drawings re-enter the review queue. It is not unusual for a project to go through two or three correction cycles, and each one resets the clock. This is the single biggest source of delays and frustration for homeowners.

Several factors specific to Vancouver compound the problem. The city's aggressive FSR and lot coverage limits mean that many additions push up against maximum allowable density, triggering more detailed scrutiny. Vancouver's heritage conservation rules can add another layer of review if your home is on the heritage register or located in a character home area — the city may require you to preserve certain architectural features or demonstrate that the addition is sympathetic to the existing structure's character. The city's tree protection bylaw is another common source of delay; if there are significant trees on or near your property, you may need an arborist report and potentially a tree management plan before the permit can advance.

To navigate this timeline as efficiently as possible, invest in thorough upfront preparation. Hire a designer or architect who has extensive experience with City of Vancouver permits specifically — someone who knows the common correction items and addresses them proactively in the initial submission. A complete, code-compliant first submission is the single most effective way to shorten the process. Budget **\$5,000 to \$15,000** for professional design and engineering fees depending on the scope of the addition, and consider this money well spent if it avoids multiple correction cycles.

Some homeowners explore the city's "pre-application review" process, where planning staff provide preliminary feedback on a proposed project before the formal application is submitted. This can help identify potential zoning issues early, but it adds its own timeline — typically **4 to 8 weeks** for the pre-application review — so the net time savings depend on whether it prevents a correction cycle later.

From a practical planning standpoint, if you are hoping to start construction in the spring building season, you should be submitting your permit application no later than the previous summer, and ideally earlier. Many homeowners underestimate this lead time and find themselves sitting idle with a contractor lined up but no permit in hand. Experienced addition contractors in Vancouver build the permitting timeline into their project schedules and will not commit to a firm start date until the permit is issued.

The cost of the building permit itself for a typical home addition in Vancouver ranges from **\$2,000 to \$8,000** depending on the declared construction value, plus development permit fees that can add another **\$1,500 to \$4,000**. There are also plan processing surcharges and various levies that the city applies.

While the timeline is frustrating, the worst approach is to start construction without a permit or to cut corners on the application to speed things up. Incomplete applications get rejected outright, wasting even more time, and unpermitted construction triggers enforcement action that can delay your project by a year or more.

## Required Inspections for Home Additions in Surrey BC

The City of Surrey requires a series of mandatory inspections at key stages of your home addition build, and you cannot proceed to the next construction phase until each inspection is passed. The typical inspection sequence for a residential addition includes footing and foundation, framing, insulation and vapour barrier, and final occupancy — but there are several additional inspection points that catch homeowners off guard.

The process begins before any concrete is poured. The **footing inspection** requires you to have your footing trenches excavated to the depth specified in your engineered drawings, with rebar and formwork in place but no concrete yet poured. The inspector verifies that the footing dimensions match the approved plans, that the bearing soil is adequate (or that engineered fill has been placed and compacted as specified in your geotechnical report), and that the rebar size, spacing, and placement meet the structural engineer's specifications. In Surrey's lower-lying areas — particularly near the floodplain zones in places like Cloverdale or the lowlands near Mud Bay — the inspector will pay particular attention to the foundation elevation relative to the flood construction level.

After footings are poured, the **foundation wall inspection** happens before backfilling. The inspector checks that foundation walls are the correct height and thickness, that anchor bolts are properly placed for the sill plate connection, that any dampproofing or waterproofing membrane is correctly applied, and that the foundation drain system is installed to code. For additions in Surrey where you are tying a new foundation into an existing one, the inspector will examine the connection detail — the dowels, the expansion joint treatment, and the structural continuity between old and new.

The **framing inspection** is one of the most comprehensive checkpoints. This happens after the walls, floor system, and roof structure are complete but before any insulation or drywall goes in. The inspector verifies stud size and spacing, header sizes over windows and doors, joist hangers and structural connectors, shear wall nailing patterns, hold-down anchors, and the tie-in between the new addition framing and the existing house structure. Given Metro Vancouver's seismic requirements, the inspector will specifically look for proper lateral bracing, hold-down hardware at shear wall ends, and continuous load paths from the roof down to the foundation. This is where many projects get correction notices — undersized headers, missing hurricane ties, or inadequate shear wall nailing are common fail points.

Between framing and insulation, you will likely need a **rough-in inspection** for plumbing, electrical, and mechanical work. If your addition includes a bathroom, kitchen, or any plumbing fixtures, Surrey requires the plumbing rough-in to be inspected before walls are closed up. Similarly, the electrical rough-in — wiring, boxes, panel connections — must be inspected by a qualified electrical inspector. If you are adding heating, ventilation, or gas lines, those systems also need rough-in inspection. These are sometimes handled by separate inspectors (electrical inspectors

are typically from Technical Safety BC rather than the municipal building department), so you may need to coordinate multiple inspection appointments.

The **insulation and vapour barrier inspection** happens after all rough-in trades are complete and approved. The inspector confirms that insulation type and R-values match the energy efficiency specifications in your approved plans. For additions in Surrey, the BC Building Code requires minimum **R-22 for walls and R-40 for ceilings** in the climate zone, though the BC Energy Step Code requirements your project was designed to may mandate higher values. The vapour barrier must be properly sealed at all penetrations, seams, and transitions between the new addition and the existing house. This inspection is critical because once drywall goes up, there is no way to verify insulation quality without destructive investigation.

The **final inspection** is the last step before you receive occupancy approval. The inspector checks that all work matches the approved plans, that all previous correction items have been addressed, that smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are installed, that egress windows meet minimum size requirements, that all finishes and fixtures are complete, and that the addition is safe for occupancy. You will also need to provide letters of assurance from your coordinating registered professional (architect or designer) and structural engineer confirming that construction was carried out in conformance with their designs.

Surrey charges inspection fees as part of the building permit fee, so there is no additional per-inspection cost. However, **failed inspections** that require a re-inspection do carry a fee — typically **\$150 to \$250** per re-inspection. More importantly, a failed inspection stops work on that phase until corrections are made and the re-inspection is passed, which creates costly schedule delays.

Your contractor should be managing the inspection schedule, but as the homeowner you should verify that each inspection is booked, passed, and documented. Request copies of all inspection reports for your records — they are valuable documentation for insurance purposes and future resale.

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Q8

## Development Permit vs Building Permit for Additions in Coquitlam

**In many cases, yes — the City of Coquitlam requires a development permit in addition to a building permit for home additions, but it depends on the specific zoning district, the scope of your project, and whether any variances are needed.** Understanding the distinction between these two permits is essential for planning your timeline and budget realistically.

A **building permit** confirms that your proposed construction meets the technical requirements of the BC Building Code — structural safety, fire protection, energy efficiency, plumbing, electrical, and mechanical systems. Every home addition in Coquitlam requires a building permit, no exceptions. A **development permit** is a separate, zoning-level approval that confirms your project complies with the city's land use regulations — lot coverage, floor area ratio, building height, setbacks, site grading, landscaping, and the overall form and character of development in the neighbourhood. These are two different regulatory systems administered by different departments within the city, and you may need to satisfy both before construction can begin.

Coquitlam requires a development permit for residential additions in several situations. If your addition changes the exterior appearance of your home in a way that is subject to the city's **form and character development permit area guidelines**, you will need one. Much of Coquitlam's residential land falls within development permit areas established in the Official Community Plan, particularly in neighbourhoods where the city wants to manage the visual character of new construction and renovations. If your property is within one of these designated areas, any addition that is visible from the street or that significantly alters the building's massing typically triggers a development permit.

You will also need a development permit if your addition requires any **variances** to the zoning bylaw. For example, if the addition would push your lot coverage above the maximum permitted percentage, reduce a setback below the minimum required distance, or increase the floor area ratio beyond the allowable limit, you cannot simply apply for a building permit — you must first obtain a development variance permit. This involves a formal application, staff review, and in many cases notification to neighbouring property owners and a public hearing before council. This variance process adds significant time — typically **3 to 6 months** on top of the building permit timeline.

For additions in Coquitlam's standard RS-1 (single-family residential) zones, the typical development constraints to watch are a **maximum lot coverage of 40%**, **maximum FSR of 0.50 to 0.60** depending on the lot size, and **minimum setbacks** of approximately 6 metres front, 1.5 metres on one side, 1.2 metres on the other, and 6 metres rear (though exact numbers vary by zone and lot configuration). If your proposed addition fits within all of these parameters and your property is not in a development permit area, you may be able to proceed directly to the building permit stage without a separate development permit.

The practical first step is to book a **preliminary plan review** with Coquitlam's planning department. This is an informal meeting where planning staff review your concept drawings against the zoning requirements and tell you exactly which permits and approvals you need. This service is typically free or very low cost, and it can save you months of wasted effort if there is a zoning issue you were not aware of. Bring a current survey certificate of your property, a rough site plan showing where the addition would go, and approximate dimensions.

From a cost standpoint, a development permit application in Coquitlam typically costs **\$500 to \$1,500** in municipal fees, while a development variance permit costs **\$1,500 to \$3,000** due to the additional processing and notification

requirements. These are on top of the building permit fees, which for a typical home addition run **\$1,500 to \$5,000** depending on declared construction value.

The timeline difference is significant. If you only need a building permit, you can expect **6 to 12 weeks** from application to approval for a straightforward addition. If you also need a development permit, add another **4 to 8 weeks** for that review. If you need a development variance permit with council approval, the process can stretch to **4 to 8 months** total before you have all the approvals in hand to begin construction.

One important nuance in Coquitlam: some properties are also subject to **environmental development permit** requirements if they are near watercourses, steep slopes, or environmentally sensitive areas. The city's mapping tools can help you determine if your property falls within one of these areas. If it does, the environmental review adds another layer of assessment — potentially including a biologist's report — before your addition can be approved.

Work with a designer or architect familiar with Coquitlam's specific bylaws. The investment in professional guidance upfront avoids costly surprises mid-process and ensures your application is complete and compliant from the start.

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Q9

## Fines for Building an Addition Without a Permit in Metro Van

**Starting construction before your building permit is approved is illegal in every Metro Vancouver municipality, and the consequences are severe — including substantial fines, stop-work orders, mandatory demolition, and long-term impacts on your property's value and insurability.** This is one of the most costly mistakes a homeowner can make, and unfortunately it happens more often than you might expect.

The immediate consequence is a **stop-work order**. As soon as a municipal building inspector becomes aware of unpermitted construction — whether through a routine patrol, a neighbour complaint, or a utility locate request that flags the work — they will issue an order requiring all construction to cease immediately. Your contractor must down tools on the spot. Every day the work site sits idle while you sort out the permitting situation costs you money in contractor delays, weather exposure to the partially completed structure, and carrying costs on any construction financing.

The financial penalties vary by municipality across Metro Vancouver, but they are consistently punitive. The **City of Vancouver** can levy fines of up to **\$10,000 per offence** under the Vancouver Building By-law, with each day of continued violation potentially constituting a separate offence. The **City of Surrey** imposes fines starting at **\$1,000** and escalating with continued non-compliance. **Burnaby** can issue tickets of **\$500 to \$1,000 per infraction** and

pursue bylaw prosecution for repeat or egregious violations. In the **City of Coquitlam** and other municipalities, similar fine structures exist, typically starting at **\$500 to \$1,000** and escalating. These are fines against the property owner — you, not your contractor — so even if your contractor is the one who jumped the gun, you bear the financial and legal responsibility.

Beyond the fines, the municipality may require you to **expose completed work for inspection**. This means if your contractor poured the foundation, framed the walls, and insulated before the permit was issued, the inspector may require you to remove the drywall, remove the insulation, and potentially even remove structural elements so they can verify that the work meets code. In the worst cases, if the unpermitted work does not comply with the BC Building Code or the approved plans (assuming you eventually get a permit), you may be ordered to **demolish the non-compliant portions and rebuild them correctly**. The cost of demolition and rebuilding typically far exceeds what you would have saved by skipping the permit in the first place.

There are also significant **insurance implications**. Your homeowner's insurance policy almost certainly excludes coverage for unpermitted construction. If a fire, water leak, or structural failure occurs in or because of the unpermitted addition, your insurer can deny the claim entirely. This is not a theoretical risk — insurance companies routinely investigate claims involving additions, and the first thing they check is whether permits were obtained and inspections passed. If the addition was built without permits, you could be personally liable for all damages with no insurance backstop.

When you eventually sell the property, unpermitted additions create serious **title and disclosure issues**. In British Columbia, sellers have a legal obligation to disclose known defects, and an unpermitted addition is a material defect. Buyers' lawyers and home inspectors will check municipal records, and if the addition does not appear in the city's permit history, it raises a red flag that can kill a sale or reduce the purchase price by far more than the cost of the addition. Some buyers will walk away entirely rather than assume the risk of inheriting an unpermitted structure.

Your contractor's professional reputation and licensing are also at stake. Reputable contractors in Metro Vancouver will not start work without a permit because they know the risks to their business licence, their liability insurance, and their standing with the city. **If a contractor pressures you to start before the permit is issued, treat that as a serious red flag**. It suggests either incompetence, dishonesty, or a willingness to cut corners that will likely show up in the quality of the work as well.

The only legitimate exception is very limited **site preparation work** that does not constitute construction — for example, clearing vegetation or demolishing a non-structural deck that is not part of the permitted scope. Even these activities may require separate permits (such as a tree removal permit), so check with your municipality before proceeding.

The right approach is patience. Yes, Metro Vancouver's permit timelines are frustratingly long. But the cost of building without a permit — fines, demolition, insurance gaps, resale problems — dwarfs the cost of waiting. Use the permitting period to finalize material selections, lock in contractor scheduling, and arrange financing so you are ready to move the moment that permit is in hand.

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## Does a Richmond Addition Trigger Whole-Home Code Upgrades?

Adding square footage to your house in Richmond does not typically require you to upgrade the entire existing home to current BC Building Code standards, but the new addition itself must fully comply with the current code, and there are specific situations where upgrades to the existing house are triggered. This distinction between "new work" and "existing conditions" is one of the most important concepts for Richmond homeowners planning an addition to understand.

The general principle under the BC Building Code is that new construction — including additions — must meet the code in effect at the time of the building permit application. The existing portions of your home are generally permitted to remain at the code standard they were originally built to, as long as they were compliant at the time of original construction. This is sometimes called the "grandfathering" principle, and it prevents the prohibitively expensive requirement of bringing an entire 1970s or 1980s house up to 2024 energy, seismic, and accessibility standards every time a homeowner adds a bedroom or extends a kitchen.

However, there are several important exceptions where an addition does trigger upgrades to the existing home. The most common trigger is **fire safety**. If your addition changes the spatial separation between your home and the property line, or between your home and a neighbouring building, the city may require upgraded fire-rated cladding, fire-rated glazing, or sprinkler systems on the existing exterior walls that now face the reduced setback. Similarly, if the addition creates a new connection between floors — for example, a two-storey addition with a new stairway — smoke alarm requirements for the entire house may need to be brought up to current standards, including interconnected alarms in all bedrooms and on every floor.

The **structural connection** between the new addition and the existing house is another area where upgrades are commonly required. The point where new framing meets old must be engineered to transfer loads safely, and the structural engineer may identify deficiencies in the existing structure at the connection point that need to be addressed. For example, if you are adding a second storey over an existing single-storey section, the existing walls and foundation must be capable of carrying the new loads. If they are not, reinforcement of the existing structure is required — not because the whole house needs upgrading, but because the addition imposes new demands on those specific existing elements.

Richmond presents a unique challenge because much of the city sits on **soft, liquefiable soils** in the Fraser River delta. Seismic requirements for new construction in Richmond are stringent precisely because of this soil condition. Your new addition must be designed for the current seismic loads, and the connection to the existing house must account for the possibility that old and new foundations may behave differently during an earthquake. A geotechnical engineer's report is almost always required for additions in Richmond, and the recommendations may

include soil densification, deeper pilings, or other ground improvement measures that add **\$15,000 to \$50,000** or more to the project cost depending on the scope.

**Energy efficiency** is another area where partial upgrades may be triggered. While you do not need to re-insulate the entire existing house, the BC Energy Step Code requires that the new addition meet current energy performance targets. This includes the thermal envelope (walls, roof, windows, and foundation), mechanical ventilation, and in many cases, the heating system. If your existing furnace or heat pump cannot be demonstrated to adequately serve the increased floor area, you may need to upgrade or supplement the HVAC system — which benefits the entire house, not just the addition.

The City of Richmond also has specific **flood construction level (FCL)** requirements that can complicate additions. Richmond's FCL is relatively high due to the city's low elevation and proximity to the river and ocean. If your addition involves any work at the foundation level, the city may require the new floor elevation to meet current FCL standards, which can be higher than your existing main floor. This can create awkward level changes between old and new sections that require careful architectural design to resolve.

From a practical budgeting standpoint, plan for the addition itself to cost **\$300 to \$500 per square foot** for construction, plus an additional **10 to 20 percent contingency** for code-triggered upgrades to the existing house. The most common "surprise" upgrades are smoke and CO alarm systems (relatively inexpensive at **\$500 to \$1,500**), electrical panel upgrades to handle increased capacity (**\$2,000 to \$5,000**), and structural reinforcement at the connection point (**\$5,000 to \$20,000** depending on complexity).

The best way to understand exactly what upgrades your specific project will trigger is to have your designer prepare a preliminary scope and review it with a Richmond building official before finalizing your budget. Every house and every addition is different, and the code requirements depend on the age of the existing home, the type of construction, the location on the lot, and the scope of the proposed work.

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Q11

## Arborist Report Requirements for Additions Near Trees in North Van

**Yes, the District of North Vancouver and the City of North Vancouver both require arborist reports when a proposed home addition is near protected trees, and failing to obtain one before applying for your permit will delay or derail your application.** Tree protection is taken very seriously on the North Shore, and the requirements are more stringent than in many other Metro Vancouver municipalities due to the area's heavily treed character.

Both North Vancouver municipalities have **tree protection bylaws** that regulate the removal, damage, and disturbance of trees above a certain size on private property. In the **District of North Vancouver**, trees with a trunk diameter of 30 centimetres or more (measured at 1.4 metres above ground) are protected. In the **City of North Vancouver**, the threshold is generally 20 centimetres diameter. Any construction activity within the **critical root zone** of a protected tree — which extends well beyond the visible canopy — triggers the requirement for a certified arborist's assessment.

The critical root zone (sometimes called the tree protection zone) is typically calculated as a radius extending outward from the trunk at a rate of **6 to 18 times the trunk diameter**, depending on the tree species, age, and health. For a mature Douglas fir with a 50-centimetre trunk — common throughout North Vancouver — the critical root zone can extend **3 to 9 metres** in every direction from the trunk. This means a tree that appears to be "nowhere near" your proposed addition may actually have roots that extend directly under your planned foundation.

The arborist report required for your permit application must be prepared by an **ISA-certified arborist** (International Society of Arboriculture) and typically includes several components. The arborist will conduct a **tree inventory** identifying every protected tree on your property and on neighbouring properties whose root zones extend onto your land. Each tree is assessed for species, size, health, structural condition, and estimated remaining lifespan. The report then evaluates the **impact of your proposed construction** on each tree, including excavation for foundations, changes to grading and drainage, compaction from equipment and material storage, and loss of canopy or root mass.

Based on this assessment, the arborist provides **recommendations** that become conditions of your permit. These may include adjusting the addition's footprint to avoid critical root zones, using specialized foundation systems (such as helical piles instead of conventional strip footings) that minimize root disturbance, installing root barriers to protect roots during construction, establishing tree protection fencing at specified distances from trunks, requiring on-site arborist supervision during excavation near trees, and specifying post-construction monitoring and care plans.

The cost of an arborist report for a home addition project in North Vancouver typically ranges from **\$800 to \$2,500** depending on the number of trees, the complexity of the site, and whether the arborist needs to provide a detailed tree management plan versus a simple impact assessment. If the arborist needs to conduct root exploration (using an air spade to expose roots without damaging them), the cost can increase to **\$3,000 to \$5,000**.

If the arborist determines that a protected tree must be removed to accommodate your addition, you will need a separate **tree removal permit** from the municipality. Tree removal permits in North Vancouver come with **replacement planting requirements** — you may need to plant two or three replacement trees for each one removed, or pay a cash-in-lieu contribution to the municipality's tree replacement fund. The cash-in-lieu amounts can be significant, ranging from **\$500 to \$3,000 per tree** depending on the size and species of the removed tree.

There are situations where the tree assessment fundamentally changes the design of the addition. If a large, healthy tree is located directly behind your house where you planned to build, the arborist may conclude that the tree cannot be preserved if the addition proceeds as designed. At that point, you face a choice: redesign the addition to avoid the tree, apply for a removal permit (which may or may not be granted), or accept the replacement planting costs and proceed. Having the arborist report early in the design process — ideally before your architect finalizes the plans — avoids expensive redesigns later.

The timeline for obtaining an arborist report is typically **1 to 3 weeks** from the time you engage the arborist to the delivery of the written report. During peak construction season (spring and summer), arborists on the North Shore are in high demand, so booking early is advisable. Some homeowners make the mistake of completing their architectural drawings first and engaging the arborist as an afterthought, only to discover that a major tree conflict requires significant plan revisions.

Both North Vancouver municipalities also require **tree protection measures to be in place before any site work begins** — including demolition, grading, or equipment staging. The arborist's recommended protection fencing must be installed and inspected by the municipality before your building permit inspection process can commence. Violations of tree protection conditions can result in fines of **\$500 to \$10,000** and, in severe cases, a requirement to provide compensatory plantings or habitat restoration.

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Q12

## Development Permit Fees: Vancouver vs Burnaby vs Surrey

**Development permit fees for a home addition vary significantly between Metro Vancouver municipalities, with the City of Vancouver being the most expensive, followed by Burnaby and Surrey offering comparatively lower fee structures.** Understanding these differences is important because permit fees are just one layer of the total soft costs that can catch homeowners off guard when budgeting for an addition.

In the **City of Vancouver**, development permit fees for a residential addition are calculated based on a combination of flat fees and the declared construction value. As of the 2026 fee schedule (which saw a 4.5% increase over the prior year), a standard development permit for a one- or two-family dwelling addition runs approximately **\$1,560 to \$4,200** depending on the scope of the project. If your addition triggers a rezoning or a development variance, the fees climb substantially — a development variance permit alone costs approximately **\$2,500 to \$3,800** on top of the base development permit fee. The City of Vancouver also charges Development Cost Levies (DCLs) when you add significant new floor area, and these can range from **\$15 to \$40 per square foot** of new space depending on the neighbourhood and the type of development. For a typical 400-square-foot addition, DCLs alone could add **\$6,000**

to **\$16,000** to your permit costs. Vancouver also applies Community Amenity Contributions on certain project types, though these primarily affect larger developments rather than single-family additions.

On top of the development permit, you still need a **building permit**, which Vancouver calculates as a percentage of declared construction value — roughly **\$12 to \$15 per \$1,000 of construction value**. For a \$200,000 addition, that translates to approximately **\$2,400 to \$3,000** in building permit fees. Add in plan processing surcharges, and the total permit cost for a mid-sized addition in Vancouver can easily reach **\$8,000 to \$25,000** before you pour a single footing.

In **Burnaby**, the fee structure is more modest. Burnaby charges a building permit fee based on construction value, typically around **\$10 to \$12 per \$1,000 of declared value**, plus flat fees for plan examination. A development permit for a single-family addition in Burnaby generally runs **\$800 to \$2,500** depending on whether the project falls within a development permit area under the Official Community Plan. If you need a development variance permit — say your addition pushes lot coverage beyond the standard 40% maximum or encroaches into a setback — the variance application fee is approximately **\$1,500 to \$3,000**. Burnaby does not currently apply development cost charges (DCCs) on most small-scale residential additions in the same aggressive way that Vancouver does, which is one of the biggest cost differences between the two cities. Total permit costs for a typical addition in Burnaby run **\$3,000 to \$8,000** — roughly half of what you would pay in Vancouver for the same project.

**Surrey** tends to be the most affordable of the three for permit fees. Building permit fees in Surrey are calculated at approximately **\$8 to \$11 per \$1,000 of construction value**, and the development permit process for standard residential additions is streamlined compared to Vancouver. A straightforward addition that complies with the zoning bylaw may not require a separate development permit at all — the building permit application covers the zoning review in many cases. When a development permit is required, fees range from **\$500 to \$2,000**.

Development cost charges in Surrey apply to new dwelling units rather than additions to existing homes, so a home addition typically avoids the substantial DCC hit you face in Vancouver. Total permit costs for a typical addition in Surrey run **\$1,500 to \$5,000**.

Beyond the municipal permit fees themselves, you need to budget for the **professional costs** required to obtain those permits. Architectural drawings compliant with each municipality's submission requirements run **\$5,000 to \$15,000** for an addition, and structural engineering adds another **\$2,000 to \$5,000**. Energy modelling for BC Step Code compliance adds **\$1,500 to \$3,000**. A geotechnical report, if required by site conditions, costs **\$2,500 to \$5,000**. An arborist report for tree protection adds **\$500 to \$1,500**. These professional fees are largely the same regardless of which municipality you are building in.

One practical tip: each of these municipalities offers a **preliminary plan review** or pre-application consultation, either free or for a nominal fee. Taking advantage of this service before you invest in full design drawings can save thousands of dollars by identifying zoning issues, setback conflicts, or lot coverage problems early — before your

architect has produced a complete drawing set that needs to be revised. In Vancouver especially, where the development permit timeline can stretch to six months or more, a pre-application meeting is well worth the effort.

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## BC Step Code Energy Standards for Home Additions Explained

Your home addition in Metro Vancouver must meet the BC Energy Step Code requirements that were current on the date your building permit application was submitted, and as of March 2025 the baseline standard for residential additions is **Step 3 of the Energy Step Code under the 2024 BC Building Code**.

Some Metro Vancouver municipalities have adopted even higher steps, so the exact requirement depends on where you are building.

The BC Energy Step Code is a performance-based system that sets progressively higher energy efficiency targets across five steps, with Step 1 being the old baseline and Step 5 representing near net-zero energy performance. When the 2024 BC Building Code came into effect on March 10, 2025, it established **Step 3 as the provincial minimum** for all new Part 9 residential construction — which includes home additions that add habitable space. This replaced the previous requirement of Step 3 that many municipalities had already adopted voluntarily, and standardized it province-wide so there is no longer a patchwork of different step levels across BC.

What Step 3 means in practical terms for your addition is demanding but manageable. Your walls need to achieve approximately **R-22 to R-24 effective** insulation value (accounting for thermal bridging through studs), your ceiling or roof assembly needs **R-40 to R-60** depending on the configuration, and your windows must meet a minimum **U-value of approximately 1.4 W/m<sup>2</sup>K** (which typically means double-glazed, low-E, argon-filled units at minimum). Air tightness is where the Step Code really bites: your addition must achieve a maximum air leakage rate of roughly **3.0 air changes per hour at 50 pascals** when blower-door tested. This is significantly tighter than what older construction methods produce, and it requires careful attention to air barrier continuity, sealed penetrations, and proper window and door installation.

The challenge specific to home additions is the **transition between old and new construction**. Your existing house was built to whatever code was in effect at the time — possibly decades ago — and likely has nowhere near the air tightness or insulation levels required by the current Step Code. The Step Code requirements apply to the new addition, not to the existing house, but the connection point between old and new is a critical detail. Air barrier continuity at the junction between your existing exterior wall and the new addition framing is one of the most common failure points in blower-door testing. Your builder needs to carefully plan how the new air barrier wraps around the connection and seals to the existing structure.

**Energy modelling** is now a mandatory part of the permitting process for Step Code compliance. You will need to hire a certified energy adviser to model your addition using approved software (typically HOT2000 for Part 9 residential buildings) and produce a compliance report that is submitted with your building permit application. This energy model specifies the insulation values, window performance, mechanical ventilation requirements, and air

tightness target that your addition must achieve. After construction, the energy adviser returns to conduct a **blower-door test** to verify that the as-built air tightness meets the modelled target. If it does not pass, you will need to find and seal the air leaks before you can receive your final inspection approval.

The cost impact of Step Code compliance on a home addition in Metro Vancouver runs approximately **\$5 to \$15 per square foot** above what the same addition would have cost under pre-Step Code standards. For a 400-square-foot addition, that is roughly **\$2,000 to \$6,000** in additional construction costs, primarily from higher-performance windows, thicker or continuous insulation systems, improved air sealing details, and the energy modelling and testing fees themselves (which run **\$2,000 to \$4,000** for the modelling and blower-door test combined). The payoff is meaningfully lower heating costs — Metro Vancouver's mild but damp marine climate means that a well-insulated, airtight addition with proper mechanical ventilation will be comfortable year-round without excessive energy consumption.

The 2024 BC Building Code also introduced **Emissions Level 1 (EL-1)** as a new requirement: the operational greenhouse gas emissions of your addition must be measured and disclosed. This does not yet mandate a specific emissions reduction, but it establishes the measurement framework for future requirements. The province's roadmap targets net-zero-energy-ready construction by 2032, which would correspond to approximately Step 5. The implication for homeowners building an addition today is that slightly over-investing in energy performance now — going beyond the minimum Step 3 to Step 4, for example — can future-proof your addition against the increasingly stringent requirements that will apply to resale compliance and home energy labelling in the years ahead.

Some Metro Vancouver municipalities have adopted requirements above the provincial baseline. The **City of Vancouver** has historically been the most aggressive, requiring higher performance levels for new construction. Check with your specific municipality's building department to confirm which step level applies to your permit application, as the requirements may have been updated since your initial planning.

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Q14

## Separate Plumbing and Electrical Permits for Surrey Additions

**Yes, the City of Surrey requires separate plumbing and electrical permits in addition to your building permit for a home addition, and these trade-specific permits can only be applied for after your building permit has been issued.** This sequential requirement is one of the details that trips up homeowners who assume a single permit covers everything.

The **building permit** covers the structural and architectural elements of your addition — the foundation, framing, insulation, building envelope, and overall code compliance. It does not authorize plumbing or electrical work. Once your building permit is approved and issued, you can then apply for the separate trade permits. This sequencing exists because the plumbing and electrical plans need to be consistent with the approved building plans, and Surrey wants to confirm that the overall structure is approved before trade-specific work begins.

The **plumbing permit** is required for any new water supply lines, drain-waste-vent piping, fixture installations, or gas piping associated with your addition. If your addition includes a bathroom, kitchen, laundry room, or even just a utility sink or hose bib, you need a plumbing permit. The permit is typically pulled by your licensed plumbing contractor, not by you as the homeowner, though you are ultimately responsible for ensuring it is obtained. Plumbing permit fees in Surrey are based on the number and type of fixtures being installed, and for a typical addition with a bathroom they run approximately **\$200 to \$600**. The plumbing work will be inspected at the rough-in stage (before walls are closed up) and again at the final stage (after fixtures are connected and operational).

The **electrical permit** in Surrey is administered slightly differently from the building and plumbing permits. Electrical permits and inspections in BC are handled through a system where the electrical contractor applies for the permit, and inspections are conducted by authorized inspectors. Your licensed electrical contractor is responsible for obtaining the electrical permit, and the permit must be in place before any electrical work begins on the addition. The electrical permit covers all new wiring, panel upgrades, receptacle and switch installations, lighting circuits, and any specialized circuits for appliances, HVAC equipment, or electric vehicle charging. For a home addition, the electrical permit fees typically run **\$150 to \$500** depending on the scope of the electrical work.

Beyond plumbing and electrical, there are other trade-specific permits you may need depending on what your addition involves. If you are installing or modifying a **gas line** — for a gas fireplace, furnace, stove, or hot water heater in the addition — you need a gas permit, which in BC falls under Technical Safety BC's jurisdiction. Your licensed gas fitter handles this permit. If you are installing a **fire sprinkler system** (required in some circumstances depending on the size and configuration of the addition), a separate fire sprinkler permit is needed through the City of Vancouver's fire department or the equivalent authority in Surrey. If you are connecting to or modifying the **municipal sewer or water main**, you may also need a separate servicing permit from Surrey's engineering department.

The practical impact of these multiple permits on your construction schedule is significant. Your general contractor needs to coordinate the timing of each trade permit with the corresponding phase of construction. The typical sequence looks like this: building permit is issued and foundation and framing work proceeds. Once framing is complete and the structure is weathered in, the plumbing and electrical contractors begin their rough-in work — but only after their respective permits have been obtained. The rough-in inspections for plumbing and electrical must be passed before insulation can be installed and walls closed up. If there is a delay in obtaining a trade permit, it can

hold up the entire project.

One common mistake is assuming your general contractor will automatically handle all of these permits. While a good general contractor in Metro Vancouver will coordinate the permitting process and ensure that all required permits are in place before each phase of work, the permit applications for plumbing and electrical are technically the responsibility of the individual trade contractors. Make sure your general contractor's scope of work explicitly includes permit coordination, and verify that each trade contractor is properly licensed and carries the required insurance. In Surrey, you can check contractor licensing and WorkSafeBC registration status online.

Budget approximately **\$500 to \$1,500 in total** for the combined plumbing, electrical, and any other trade-specific permit fees on a typical home addition. This is on top of the building permit fees, which for a standard addition in Surrey run **\$1,500 to \$5,000** depending on declared construction value. The trade permit fees are modest relative to the overall project cost, but the inspection requirements they trigger are critical checkpoints that protect you as the homeowner — each passed inspection confirms that the work meets code and is safe for your family.

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Q15

## WorkSafeBC Requirements for Home Addition Projects in BC

**Your general contractor is responsible for most WorkSafeBC obligations on a home addition project, but as the homeowner you are not completely off the hook — and in some situations you can become personally liable for worker safety and insurance premiums if the proper coverage is not in place.** Understanding where the responsibility lines fall protects both your workers and your personal finances.

The core requirement is straightforward: every worker on your home addition project must be covered by WorkSafeBC insurance. This coverage provides wage-loss benefits, medical treatment, and rehabilitation if a worker is injured on the job, and it protects employers (and in some cases homeowners) from personal injury lawsuits. In BC, the workers' compensation system is mandatory — there is no option to opt out or substitute private insurance.

When you hire a **licensed general contractor** to manage your home addition, that contractor is required to be registered with WorkSafeBC and to carry current coverage for their employees. The general contractor is also typically the **prime contractor** on the project, which means they have legal responsibility for coordinating health and safety across the entire job site, including the work of all subcontractors. The prime contractor designation carries specific duties under the Workers Compensation Act: they must ensure that the activities of all employers and workers on the site are coordinated for safety, that a written health and safety program is in place (for sites with 20 or more workers), and that all workers have received appropriate safety orientation.

Each **subcontractor** — your electrician, plumber, framer, roofer, drywaller, and every other trade — must also be independently registered with WorkSafeBC and carry their own coverage. The general contractor should verify this before allowing any subcontractor on site. You can (and should) also verify it yourself by requesting a **WorkSafeBC clearance letter** for both your general contractor and each subcontractor. A clearance letter confirms that the business is registered, that their account is in good standing, and that premiums are being paid. You can request clearance letters directly through WorkSafeBC's online system at no cost.

**Here is where homeowner liability enters the picture.** If you hire a contractor or worker who is not registered with WorkSafeBC and that person is injured on your property, you as the homeowner can be deemed an employer and held responsible for WorkSafeBC premiums, penalties, and the full cost of the worker's claim. This is not a theoretical risk — WorkSafeBC actively investigates unregistered work arrangements, and homeowners have been assessed tens of thousands of dollars in premiums and claim costs for injuries to unregistered workers.

The risk is highest when homeowners hire **individual workers directly** rather than going through a registered business. If you hire a handyman, a labourer, or a friend's relative to help with your addition and they do not have their own WorkSafeBC registration, you are their employer in the eyes of the law. Even hiring someone for a few hours of casual labour can trigger employer obligations if the total work exceeds the casual-employment threshold. WorkSafeBC's general guideline is that if you hire workers directly and the total labour exceeds **approximately 8 hours** of cumulative work at your home, you should register as an employer.

For a typical home addition project managed by a reputable general contractor, your practical obligations as the homeowner are limited but important. **Before work begins**, request and verify WorkSafeBC clearance letters from the general contractor and all major subcontractors. Confirm that the general contractor has accepted the role of prime contractor in writing — this is often addressed in the construction contract. During construction, you should not direct workers on how to perform their tasks (doing so can create an employer-employee relationship), and you should not interfere with safety procedures or pressure workers to skip safety measures to save time.

If you are acting as an **owner-builder** — managing the project yourself without a general contractor — the obligations shift significantly onto you. As the person contracting directly with each trade, you may be considered the prime contractor, which makes you responsible for site safety coordination. If you hire any workers directly (rather than contracting with independent businesses), you must register with WorkSafeBC as an employer, pay premiums, and comply with all workplace safety regulations. The BC Homeowner Protection Office requires owner-builders to obtain an owner-builder authorization before building, and the associated exam covers some of these responsibilities.

WorkSafeBC also sets specific **safety standards for residential construction sites** that your contractor must follow. These include fall protection requirements for workers at heights above 3 metres (roughly 10 feet), scaffolding and ladder safety standards, excavation shoring requirements for foundation work deeper than 1.2

metres, and personal protective equipment requirements. On a home addition project, the most common WorkSafeBC violations involve inadequate fall protection during framing and roofing — an area where inspectors have increased enforcement across Metro Vancouver.

The bottom line: hire properly licensed and WorkSafeBC-registered contractors, verify their coverage with clearance letters, and let the general contractor manage site safety as the prime contractor. This approach keeps the liability where it belongs — with the professionals — and protects you from personal exposure to worker injury claims that could cost far more than the addition itself.

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## Heritage Conservation Rules for Additions in New Westminster

If your character home is in New Westminster's Queen's Park Heritage Conservation Area, you will need to navigate additional design review requirements for any addition that is visible from the street, but rear additions that are not visible from the front are generally exempt from the heritage guidelines. This distinction — visible versus not visible — is the single most important factor in determining how much the heritage rules will affect your project.

New Westminster currently has one Heritage Conservation Area (HCA): the **Queen's Park neighbourhood**, which was designated to protect the area's distinctive collection of pre-war character homes. The HCA establishes two categories of properties: **protected** properties (those identified as having heritage character and placed on the Heritage Register) and **non-protected** properties (newer homes or those without significant heritage character). The rules that apply to your addition depend entirely on which category your home falls into.

For **protected properties** in the Queen's Park HCA, design guidelines apply whenever the proposed work would make changes visible from the street. This includes additions to the front or sides of the house, changes to the roofline that are visible from the street, and modifications to street-facing windows, doors, or architectural details. If your addition falls into any of these categories, you must apply for a **Heritage Alteration Permit (HAP)** in addition to your building permit. The HAP application is reviewed against the HCA's design guidelines, which generally require that additions be **compatible with but distinguishable from** the original character of the home. The guidelines do not demand that your addition replicate the exact historical style of the original house, but they do require that it respect the massing, proportions, materials, and architectural vocabulary of the existing structure.

The good news for many homeowners is that **rear additions** to protected properties — those that are not visible from the street — are not subject to the HCA design guidelines and do not require a Heritage Alteration Permit. You will still need a standard building permit, and the addition must comply with the zoning bylaw's setback, lot coverage, and floor area requirements, but the heritage layer of review does not apply. This makes a rear addition the path of least resistance for homeowners who want to expand their living space without navigating the heritage approval process. Similarly, interior renovations are completely exempt from the HCA rules regardless of the property's protection status.

One significant benefit of owning a protected property in the Queen's Park HCA is **additional floor space allowance**. Protected properties are permitted a maximum floor space ratio (FSR) of up to **0.70** — meaning your home's total floor area can be up to 70% of your lot area. This is more generous than what was previously available under standard zoning, and it was specifically designed to incentivize heritage conservation by giving protected property owners more flexibility to add space. For a typical 6,000-square-foot lot in Queen's Park, this translates to

a maximum floor area of approximately **4,200 square feet**, which provides meaningful room for a substantial addition.

If your addition does require a Heritage Alteration Permit, the review process typically takes **4 to 8 weeks** and involves staff review against the design guidelines. More complex proposals, or those that involve significant changes to the street-facing character of the home, may be referred to the **Community Heritage Commission** for advisory input. The HAP application fees are relatively modest — typically **\$200 to \$500** — but the design requirements can increase your architectural costs because your designer needs to develop an addition that satisfies both the heritage guidelines and the BC Building Code.

Practical design strategies for heritage-compatible additions in New Westminster include setting the addition **slightly back from the plane of the original front or side wall**, so the original form of the house remains clearly readable. Using **complementary but not identical materials** — for example, matching the cladding profile but using a slightly different colour or finish — helps distinguish new from old while maintaining visual harmony. Roof forms on the addition should relate to the pitch and style of the original roof without mimicking it exactly. Window proportions and placement should echo the rhythm of the existing fenestration.

For **non-protected properties** within the Queen's Park HCA, the heritage rules are less restrictive. Additions and renovations generally do not require a Heritage Alteration Permit, though the standard zoning and building permit requirements still apply. However, demolition of a non-protected building in the HCA still requires council approval, and there are notification requirements to the neighbourhood.

If your character home is **outside the Queen's Park HCA** but is individually listed on the city's Heritage Register, a different set of rules applies. Individual heritage designation or registration triggers Heritage Alteration Permit requirements for exterior changes regardless of the property's location. Contact the city's heritage planning staff to determine your property's exact status before proceeding with design.

The most effective approach is to start with a meeting at New Westminster's planning department. Bring photos of your home, a rough idea of where you want the addition, and ask specifically about your property's heritage status and the applicable guidelines. This consultation is typically free and will give you a clear picture of the approval pathway before you invest in detailed architectural drawings.

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Q17

## Do You Need a Demolition Permit for Partial Teardown in Vancouver?

**In most cases, yes — the City of Vancouver requires a demolition permit when you are tearing down a substantial portion of your existing house as part of building a larger addition, particularly when the scope of removal goes beyond minor alterations to the existing structure.** The threshold between "renovation" and "partial demolition" is where many homeowners get confused, and getting it wrong can create permitting delays and unexpected costs.

The City of Vancouver distinguishes between removing interior walls or small sections of exterior wall to accommodate an addition (which is covered under your building permit) and demolishing a significant portion of the existing building (which triggers a separate demolition permit). The general rule is that if you are removing **more than approximately 50% of the existing exterior walls** or substantially dismantling the roof structure and upper floor, the city considers this partial demolition rather than renovation. There is not a bright-line percentage codified in the bylaw for every scenario — the determination is made by the plans examiner based on the specifics of your project.

When partial demolition is proposed alongside new construction, the City of Vancouver requires a **structural engineering report** signed and sealed by a Professional Engineer registered in British Columbia. This report must assess the existing structure that will remain, confirm it is structurally sound to support the transition during construction, and specify how the new addition will be connected to the retained portion. This engineering assessment is required regardless of whether a separate demolition permit is triggered, but the demolition permit layer adds additional processing requirements.

The demolition permit brings several additional obligations. For houses **built before 1950**, Vancouver's recycling and deconstruction requirements apply. You must achieve minimum reuse and recycling rates for the demolished materials, and a **deconstruction deposit of approximately \$15,310** is required at the time of permit application. This deposit is refundable upon demonstrating compliance with the recycling requirements, but it ties up a significant amount of capital during the project. For houses **built in 1950 or later**, the recycling rate requirements are relaxed, but you still need the demolition permit and must comply with waste management regulations.

If your home is on the **Vancouver Heritage Register** or is located in an area subject to character home protections, partial demolition triggers additional scrutiny. The city may require a Heritage Alteration Permit and will assess whether the retained portions of the original structure preserve sufficient heritage character. In some cases, the city has denied demolition permits for heritage properties where the proposed scope of removal would effectively destroy the building's heritage value.

There are also **environmental requirements** that come with a demolition permit. Houses built before **1990** are likely to contain asbestos-containing materials in various components — insulation, vinyl flooring, drywall compound, exterior stucco, roofing materials, and pipe insulation. Before any demolition work begins, you need a **hazardous materials survey** conducted by a qualified professional. If asbestos or other hazardous materials are

found in the portions to be demolished, they must be abated by a certified abatement contractor before demolition can proceed. The survey costs **\$500 to \$1,500** and abatement costs vary widely — from **\$2,000 to \$15,000** or more depending on the type, quantity, and location of hazardous materials. Lead paint is another common hazardous material in pre-1970 homes.

From a practical standpoint, the demolition permit adds both **time and cost** to your project. The permit application itself costs approximately **\$500 to \$1,500** depending on the scope. Processing time is typically **2 to 6 weeks** on top of your building permit timeline. If recycling requirements apply, you need to arrange for a deconstruction contractor or ensure your general contractor has the capacity and the disposition plan for salvageable materials.

Many homeowners and their designers strategically plan additions to **minimize the extent of demolition** and stay within the scope of a building permit alone. For example, rather than tearing down the entire back wall of the house and rebuilding it further back, a designer might retain the existing back wall and frame the addition as a connected but distinct structure joined by a wide opening. This approach can achieve essentially the same living space while technically constituting an addition rather than a partial demolition. Experienced architects and designers in Vancouver understand these distinctions and can design projects that achieve your goals while navigating the permitting requirements efficiently.

The safest approach is to discuss your project concept with the City of Vancouver's Development and Building Centre at 515 West 10th Avenue before finalizing your design. Staff can review your preliminary plans and advise whether a demolition permit will be required based on the extent of proposed removal. This early consultation is free and can save significant time and money by clarifying the permit pathway before your architect develops detailed drawings.

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Q18

## Fire Sprinkler Requirements for Large Home Additions in BC

**Fire sprinkler requirements for home additions in Metro Vancouver vary by municipality, but the most significant threshold is in the City of Vancouver, where any building or addition resulting in a total aggregate floor area exceeding 12,000 square feet requires automatic fire sprinkler systems throughout the entire building.** For most single-family home additions this threshold will not apply, but several municipalities have additional requirements that can trigger sprinkler installation at much smaller sizes.

Under the **BC Building Code**, Part 9 residential buildings (houses, duplexes, and townhouses of three storeys or less) are generally **not required** to have fire sprinkler systems. This is the baseline provincial standard, and most home additions in Metro Vancouver fall under this exemption. However, the BC Building Code explicitly allows

municipalities to adopt stricter local requirements, and several Metro Vancouver municipalities have done exactly that.

The **City of Vancouver** has the most notable sprinkler requirements. The Vancouver Building By-law specifies that automatic fire extinguishing systems must be installed throughout any building, including proposed additions, that results in an **aggregate floor area larger than 12,000 square feet** (approximately 1,115 square metres). While this threshold is well above the size of a typical single-family home, it can come into play for large estate homes in neighbourhoods like Shaughnessy, Point Grey, or the West Side where homes of 8,000 to 10,000 square feet are not uncommon. Adding a 2,500-square-foot addition to a 10,000-square-foot home would push the total past the 12,000-square-foot threshold and trigger sprinkler installation — not just in the addition, but throughout the **entire existing house** as well. The cost of retrofitting sprinklers into an existing large home is substantial: typically **\$15,000 to \$40,000** or more depending on the complexity of the piping runs and the number of zones required.

The **District of West Vancouver** requires fire sprinkler systems in **all new residential construction**, making it the most stringent municipality in Metro Vancouver for sprinkler requirements. For home additions in West Vancouver, the requirement typically applies when the addition is substantial enough to trigger the "new construction" provisions — the specifics depend on the scope of work and are determined by the building department on a project-by-project basis. If sprinklers are required, they must be installed in the addition and, depending on the extent of renovation to the existing home, potentially in the existing structure as well.

In **Burnaby, Surrey, Coquitlam, Richmond**, and most other Metro Vancouver municipalities, fire sprinklers are generally **not required** for single-family home additions that comply with the BC Building Code's Part 9 provisions. The standard fire safety requirements for these additions include hardwired and interconnected **smoke alarms** on every floor and in every sleeping area, **carbon monoxide detectors** near sleeping areas if the home has fuel-burning appliances or an attached garage, fire-rated separations between the addition and any attached garage (minimum 45-minute fire resistance rating with self-closing door), and proper egress windows in every bedroom.

There are additional scenarios where sprinklers may be required regardless of municipality. If your addition creates a **secondary suite** or additional dwelling unit, some municipalities require sprinklers as a condition of the secondary suite permit. This is because secondary suites introduce life safety considerations — sleeping occupants in a separate dwelling unit need enhanced fire protection. The cost of a sprinkler system for a secondary suite portion of an addition typically runs **\$5,000 to \$12,000**.

Another trigger is **water supply limitations**. In areas where the municipal water system cannot provide adequate fire flow (the volume and pressure of water available for firefighting from street hydrants), the fire department may require residential sprinklers as a compensating measure. This is more common in rural or semi-rural parts of Metro Vancouver's outer municipalities — areas of **Langley Township, Maple Ridge, or Pitt Meadows** where water infrastructure is older or less robust. The fire department reviews this as part of the building permit process.

If fire sprinklers are required for your addition, the system design must be prepared by a qualified sprinkler designer and installed by a licensed fire protection contractor. A separate **fire sprinkler permit** is required in addition to your building permit. In Vancouver, some straightforward sprinkler permits qualify for fast-track processing within 24 hours. The sprinkler system must be inspected and tested before walls are closed up, and it must be maintained in operable condition for the life of the building — this includes periodic testing and inspection by a certified technician.

The practical takeaway for most homeowners planning a standard home addition in Metro Vancouver is that fire sprinklers are unlikely to be required unless you are in West Vancouver, building a very large home in Vancouver proper, or creating a secondary suite. However, confirming the requirements with your specific municipality early in the design process is essential, because discovering a sprinkler requirement after construction has begun is enormously disruptive and expensive.

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## Do You Need a Permit for a 50 Sq Ft Bay Window Bump-Out in Richmond?

**Yes, you need a building permit for a 50 square foot bay window bump-out in Richmond — there is no minimum size that exempts structural additions from the permit requirement.** The City of Richmond, like all municipalities in Metro Vancouver, requires a building permit for any construction that modifies the structural envelope of your home, regardless of how small the project is. A bay window bump-out involves cutting into the exterior wall, extending the floor structure (either cantilevered or on a foundation), adding new window openings, and modifying the roof or adding a small roof over the bay — every one of those activities triggers the permit requirement.

Richmond does maintain a list of permit-exempt work, but it is limited to non-structural projects like minor interior renovations that do not affect load-bearing walls, plumbing, or electrical; replacement of existing windows in the same size opening; re-roofing with the same materials; and small detached structures like garden sheds under 10 square metres that meet specific height and setback requirements. The key word is **detached** — a bay window bump-out is attached to and integrated with your house, which places it firmly in the permit-required category.

The permit process for a 50 square foot bay window bump-out in Richmond is relatively straightforward compared to a larger addition, but it still requires proper documentation. You will need to submit a site plan showing the bump-out's location relative to property lines and confirming setback compliance, architectural drawings showing the bump-out in plan and section views, and structural details — either prescriptive framing that follows BC Building Code span tables or engineered drawings stamped by a structural engineer. If the bay window is cantilevered (the most common approach for small bay windows), the structural design is particularly important because the cantilever must be properly sized for the loads.

Richmond's permit fees for a project of this scale are modest — typically **\$200 to \$500** based on the declared construction value. The larger expense is the professional drawings and engineering required. For a 50 square foot bay window, you can expect to pay **\$1,500 to \$3,000** for architectural plans and **\$1,000 to \$2,500** for structural engineering if a cantilever design is used. Some designers offer combined packages for small projects.

There is an important distinction between a **true bay window** (a window unit that projects from the wall but does not create usable floor area — it hangs off the wall with support brackets or cables from above) and a **bay window bump-out** that creates actual floor space you can stand in or place furniture on. A true hanging bay window that does not extend the floor and is supported entirely by the wall framing and roof cables above may be treated differently by some building departments — but in Richmond's practice, even a projecting bay window that modifies the exterior wall structure typically requires a permit because you are cutting structural sheathing, altering the building envelope, and creating a new weather-exposed junction.

**Richmond's specific site conditions add another reason to go through the permit process properly.** Much of Richmond sits on alluvial soil with a high water table, and the city is in a seismic zone with liquefaction potential in some areas. Even a small bump-out that adds foundation elements needs to account for these soil conditions. If your bay window bump-out uses a cantilevered floor rather than a foundation, the structural engineer still needs to design the cantilever connections to withstand seismic forces — the BC Building Code's seismic provisions apply to all structural modifications, not just large additions.

Building without a permit in Richmond carries meaningful consequences. If the city discovers unpermitted work — through a neighbour complaint, a future renovation permit application, or a real estate transaction — you can face fines, a requirement to obtain a retroactive permit (which costs more and may require opening up finished walls for inspection), or in the worst case, an order to remove the non-compliant work. When you sell your home, the buyer's home inspector or their mortgage lender's appraiser may flag the bump-out if it does not appear on the city's building records, creating delays or price renegotiation at closing.

The bottom line is that for a 50 square foot bay window bump-out in Richmond, the permit and professional fees will total approximately **\$3,000 to \$6,000** — a small fraction of the overall project cost, which typically runs **\$25,000 to \$45,000** for a well-executed bay window bump-out with quality windows and finishing. Treat the permit as a necessary line item, not an optional one.

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Q20

## Laneway House Permit and Build Timeline in Vancouver

**Yes, 12 to 18 months from initial design to move-in is a realistic timeline for a laneway house in Vancouver, and many projects actually take closer to 18 to 24 months when you account for the full process from first meeting with a designer to final occupancy.** The timeline breaks down into three distinct phases — design and pre-application, permitting, and construction — each with its own variables and potential delays.

**Phase 1: Design and Pre-Application (2 to 4 months).** Before you can submit a permit application, you need a complete set of drawings and supporting documents. This begins with hiring an architect or designer experienced with Vancouver's laneway housing program, which itself can take a few weeks given that the best firms often have waiting lists. The design process involves an initial site assessment, schematic design options, client review and revisions, and the preparation of permit-ready drawings. You also need a geotechnical report assessing soil conditions and seismic considerations (allow 3 to 4 weeks for the report), a survey of the existing property if one is not current, and potentially an arborist report if there are significant trees near the proposed building footprint. Energy modelling for BC Energy Step Code compliance adds another layer of documentation. Most homeowners

should budget **8 to 16 weeks** from the first design meeting to having a complete permit application ready for submission.

A critical sequencing note: the City of Vancouver requires you to apply for **sewer and water connection permits before submitting the development or building permit application**. These utility permits involve their own review process with the City's engineering department, and failing to initiate them early can add weeks of unnecessary delay.

**Phase 2: Permit Review (3 to 6 months)**. This is the phase where timelines are least predictable. The City of Vancouver has stated a target of **4 to 6 weeks** for laneway house permit review on straightforward applications, but actual experience as of recent reporting shows an average of approximately **13 to 14 weeks** — and complex applications that require engineering review, Director of Development approval, or have heritage or tree-related conditions can take significantly longer. If your application triggers a development permit review (as opposed to just a building permit), add additional time for that process.

Common causes of delay during permit review include incomplete submissions that require resubmission of revised drawings, questions from plan checkers about structural details or energy compliance, and backlog in the review queue during busy periods. Working with a designer who has a strong track record of clean submissions through Vancouver's permitting system can meaningfully reduce the risk of delays at this stage. The City has also introduced the **Project Requirement Exploration Tool (PRET)** and a new online permit application system to streamline the process.

**Phase 3: Construction (5 to 8 months)**. Once the permit is issued and your contractor is ready to mobilize, construction of a typical laneway house takes **5 to 8 months** depending on size, complexity, weather, and the contractor's schedule. The construction sequence includes demolition of the existing garage (if applicable), excavation and foundation work (2 to 4 weeks), framing and roofing (3 to 5 weeks), mechanical, electrical, and plumbing rough-in (2 to 3 weeks), insulation and vapour barrier (1 to 2 weeks), drywall and interior finishing (4 to 6 weeks), exterior cladding and finishing (concurrent with interior work), and final utility connections and landscaping (2 to 3 weeks).

Vancouver's **marine climate** introduces weather-related construction variables. The rainy season from October through March can slow exterior work, particularly foundation excavation, roofing, and exterior cladding installation. Experienced local builders plan their schedules to do foundation and framing work during the drier months (May through September) and save interior finishing for the wet season. Starting the permit process in fall or winter so that the permit is issued by spring allows for the most efficient construction timeline.

**Inspection requirements** throughout construction add scheduling dependencies. The City of Vancouver requires inspections at multiple stages — foundation, framing, insulation, plumbing and electrical rough-in, and final — and

each inspection must be passed before the next phase of work can proceed. Inspection wait times vary but are typically **3 to 7 business days** from the request.

The realistic total timeline from decision to completion looks like this: design and pre-application (3 to 4 months), permit review (3 to 5 months), and construction (5 to 8 months), for a total of **11 to 17 months** under favourable conditions and **14 to 24 months** when accounting for common delays, weather, and scheduling gaps between phases.

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Q21

## Separate Entrance Requirements for In-Law Suites in BC

**The BC Building Code requires every secondary suite to have its own independent exit to the exterior that does not pass through the principal dwelling unit.** This is a life-safety requirement under Section 9.37 and Section 9.9 (egress), and it is one of the most non-negotiable aspects of any in-law suite — whether built as a new addition or carved from existing space. No municipality in Metro Vancouver will issue an occupancy permit without it.

The separate entrance must lead **directly to the outdoors** at grade level or via an exterior stairway. "Directly" means the occupant of the suite can exit to fresh air without entering any portion of the main dwelling — not through a shared hallway, not through a common vestibule, not through the main house's garage. The exit path must be completely independent. If the suite is above or below grade, an exterior stairway serving only the suite satisfies this requirement, provided it meets dimensional and structural standards.

**Door specifications** for the suite entrance follow standard egress requirements: minimum clear opening width of 810 millimetres (32 inches), minimum height of 1,980 millimetres (6 feet 6 inches), and the door must swing outward or be a sliding door that doesn't reduce the required exit width. The door must be operable from the inside without keys, tools, or special knowledge — a single-action lever handle or panic bar is standard. Deadbolts are permitted as long as they have a thumb-turn on the interior side.

The **landing at the exterior door** must be at least 900 millimetres by 900 millimetres (roughly 3 feet by 3 feet), level, and slip-resistant. If there are steps down from the landing to grade, they need a handrail on at least one side if there are more than three risers, guards if the landing or stairway is more than 600 millimetres above adjacent grade, and the stairway must be at least 860 millimetres wide. In Metro Vancouver's climate, covered landings and stairs are strongly recommended to prevent ice buildup and moisture damage, though not strictly required by code.

**Weather protection at the entrance** deserves special attention given our marine climate. While the BC Building Code doesn't mandate a roof over the suite entrance, building science best practice — and most experienced builders in Metro Vancouver — will insist on at least a modest overhang or canopy. Rain driving against an unprotected exterior door leads to water infiltration at the threshold, and suite entrances on the side or rear of a home are often more exposed than the main front entrance. Budget **\$2,000 to \$5,000** for a properly built covered entrance with appropriate flashing and drainage.

Beyond the suite's main entrance, **every bedroom** within the suite must have an emergency egress window or door. These bedroom egress openings must provide a minimum unobstructed area of 0.35 square metres with no single dimension less than 380 millimetres. This ensures that in a fire, occupants can escape through a bedroom window even if the suite's main exit is blocked.

An important distinction: the BC Building Code permits an **interconnecting door** between the suite and the main dwelling, but this door cannot serve as the suite's required exit. The interconnecting door must be self-closing, have a fire resistance rating matching the required separation (one hour), and is essentially a convenience feature — not an egress path. Many families building in-law suites for aging parents include this interconnecting door for day-to-day access while maintaining the fully independent exterior entrance for code compliance.

Municipal bylaws sometimes add requirements beyond the provincial code. Some Metro Vancouver municipalities specify which side of the house the suite entrance must face, require it to be visually subordinate to the main entrance, or mandate that it not face the street. Check your local zoning bylaw before finalizing the entrance location in your design.

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## Fire Separation and Soundproofing for In-Law Suites in BC

The BC Building Code requires a minimum one-hour fire resistance rating on all assemblies separating a secondary suite from the principal dwelling, and while there is no explicit sound transmission class (STC) requirement for secondary suites in Part 9, the fire-rated assemblies inherently provide moderate sound reduction that can be significantly improved with relatively modest upgrades. Understanding both the mandatory fire requirements and the practical soundproofing options will help you build a suite that's both safe and liveable.

**Fire separation is the non-negotiable starting point.** Section 9.37 and Section 9.10 of the BC Building Code mandate a one-hour fire resistance rating on every wall, floor, and ceiling assembly that separates the secondary suite from the main dwelling. The most common wall assembly that achieves this rating is a **2x4 or 2x6 wood stud wall with two layers of 5/8-inch (15.9 mm) Type X gypsum board on each side**. For floor/ceiling assemblies, the typical rated system includes 2x10 or engineered floor joists with two layers of 5/8-inch Type X drywall on the ceiling below and a minimum 1.5-inch concrete topping or approved alternative above.

**Fire stopping at penetrations** is where inspectors focus their attention, and rightfully so — a perfectly built rated wall is defeated by a single unsealed hole. Every penetration through the rated assembly must be fire stopped with approved materials. This includes electrical boxes (which must be offset by at least 600 millimetres on opposite sides of the wall and fitted with fire-rated putty pads), plumbing pipes (fire-rated caulk or intumescent collars), HVAC ducts (fire dampers at every penetration), and any structural members that pass through. Recessed lighting in a rated ceiling must use fire-rated IC housings.

**Doors in the fire-rated separation** — such as an interconnecting door between the suite and the main dwelling — must be rated at 45 minutes (three-quarter of the wall's rating) and be self-closing. This means a solid-core wood door or a labelled fire-rated door, with an approved self-closing device and intumescent seals or smoke gaskets. Regular hollow-core interior doors do not satisfy this requirement.

Now for **soundproofing**, which is where code requirements and livability diverge. The BC Building Code's Part 9 does not specify a minimum STC rating between a secondary suite and the main dwelling in the same way that Part 5 does for multi-unit residential buildings (where STC 50 is the benchmark between dwelling units in apartments and townhouses). However, any builder constructing a new addition for an in-law suite in Metro Vancouver should treat **STC 50 as the practical target** — anything less and you'll hear conversations, televisions, and footsteps clearly enough to create friction between occupants.

A basic one-hour fire-rated wall with double drywall on each side of a single stud wall achieves roughly **STC 40 to 45**. To reach STC 50 or better, add these upgrades during construction — they're dramatically cheaper to install

during the build than to retrofit later. **Insulation in the stud cavity** (mineral wool batts like Roxul Safe'n'Sound are ideal — they're non-combustible and excellent for sound absorption) adds 5 to 8 STC points. **Resilient channel** on one side of the wall, which decouples the drywall from the studs, adds another 5 to 10 points. A staggered-stud or double-stud wall with an air gap provides even better isolation, achieving STC 55 to 60.

For **floor/ceiling assemblies**, impact sound (footsteps, dropped objects) is often more problematic than airborne sound. The metric here is **Impact Insulation Class (IIC)**, and achieving IIC 50 or better typically requires a combination of resilient channel on the ceiling below, mineral wool insulation between joists, and a floating floor assembly above — either an acoustical underlayment beneath the finished flooring or a concrete topping on an isolation mat.

The **cost premium for proper soundproofing** beyond the code-minimum fire separation is surprisingly modest: roughly **\$3,000 to \$8,000** for a typical in-law suite addition. Mineral wool batt insulation costs about \$1.50 to \$2.50 per square foot more than standard fibreglass, resilient channel adds \$1 to \$2 per square foot, and acoustical underlayment for the floor runs \$1.50 to \$3 per square foot. Given that you're already building rated assemblies, these upgrades represent perhaps 2 to 3 percent of total project cost for a transformative improvement in daily comfort.

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Q23

## Rear Setback Variance Process for Home Additions in Coquitlam

**Yes, you can apply for a variance to reduce the rear setback for your home addition in Coquitlam, and the City offers two distinct paths depending on the nature and scale of the variance: a Development Variance Permit (DVP) decided by City Council, or a Board of Variance appeal for minor siting adjustments based on hardship.** Both processes involve public notification and are not guaranteed approvals, but rear setback variances for residential additions are among the most common variance requests the City receives.

The **Development Variance Permit** is the more common route for planned additions where you know from the outset that your design requires a reduced rear setback. A DVP application in Coquitlam involves submitting detailed architectural drawings showing the proposed addition, a completed application form, a site survey from a registered BC Land Surveyor, and the applicable application fee. Coquitlam's development application fees vary — check the current Fees and Charges Bylaw (Schedule B) for the exact amount, but DVP fees in Metro Vancouver municipalities typically range from **\$1,500 to \$4,000**. The application is reviewed by planning staff, who prepare a report with a recommendation for Council. Neighbouring property owners within a specified radius (typically 30 metres) are notified by mail and given an opportunity to comment or appear at the Council meeting where the DVP

is considered.

The entire DVP process in Coquitlam typically takes **three to six months** from application to decision. The timeline depends on the completeness of your application, the volume of applications ahead of yours, and whether Council schedules the item promptly after staff complete their review. During this period, you cannot begin construction on the portion of the project that requires the variance.

The **Board of Variance** is an independent appeal body consisting of five Council-appointed members. This route is generally used for minor variances where strict compliance with the zoning bylaw would cause **undue hardship** — a legal standard that requires you to demonstrate that something about your specific property (its shape, topography, existing structures, or other physical characteristics) makes it unreasonably difficult to comply with the standard setback. The Board of Variance deals exclusively with the siting, size, and dimensions of buildings, which includes setback requirements. The application is submitted to the Building Permits Division with supporting documentation explaining the hardship. Application fees apply and are non-refundable regardless of the outcome.

The key difference between the two paths is the **basis for approval**. A DVP requires Council to weigh the merits of the proposal broadly — is the reduced setback acceptable given the neighbourhood context, the impact on neighbours, and the City's planning objectives? The Board of Variance requires a narrower finding of hardship specific to your property. If your lot is a standard rectangular shape with no unusual topographic challenges, a Board of Variance application may be difficult to justify because the hardship test is not met simply by wanting a larger addition.

Several factors strengthen a rear setback variance request in Coquitlam. **Irregular lot shape** is one of the strongest arguments — pie-shaped lots, lots that narrow toward the rear, and lots with angled rear property lines often make it physically impossible to build a reasonably sized addition while meeting the standard rear setback. **Existing non-conforming conditions** can also help — if the existing house already encroaches into the rear setback (perhaps because it was built under older regulations), extending the addition to align with the existing rear wall is easier to justify than pushing further into the setback. **Topographic challenges** such as steep slopes, rock outcrops, or drainage constraints that limit where on the lot you can practically build are also strong justifications.

Conversely, applications that are purely about **maximizing floor area** on a standard lot with no physical constraints tend to receive more scrutiny and opposition. Neighbours are the most common source of objections, and their concerns typically centre on loss of privacy (especially if the addition has windows overlooking the neighbouring yard), increased shadow casting, and reduced separation between buildings.

Before applying, schedule a **pre-application meeting** with Coquitlam's planning staff. This informal consultation is available at no cost and gives you a realistic assessment of whether your variance request is likely to succeed. Staff can review your preliminary design, identify potential issues, and advise on whether a DVP or Board of Variance application is the better route for your situation. Contact the Building Permits Division at 604-927-3441 or

email [permits@coquitlam.ca](mailto:permits@coquitlam.ca) to arrange a consultation.

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## How to Find Your Property's Zoning and FSR in Metro Vancouver

Every municipality in Metro Vancouver maintains its own zoning bylaw and mapping tools, so the first step is identifying which of the region's 21 member municipalities your property falls within — then using that specific municipality's online zoning map or planning counter to look up your exact zoning designation and permitted floor space ratio. There is no single regional zoning database for all of Metro Vancouver, and the rules, zone names, and FSR calculations differ substantially from one municipality to the next.

Here is how to find your zoning information in the major Metro Vancouver municipalities:

**City of Vancouver** uses VanMap, an interactive online mapping tool accessible through the City's website. Enter your property address, enable the zoning layer, and the map will display your zoning district designation (such as R1-1, which replaced most of the former RS zones in 2024). Once you know your zone, refer to the corresponding District Schedule in Vancouver's Zoning and Development By-law — available as downloadable PDFs on the City's website — which lists the permitted FSR, lot coverage, setbacks, height, and all other development regulations. Vancouver also has a **3D zoning map** created by community developers that visualizes the building envelope three-dimensionally, which can be helpful for understanding height and setback constraints together.

**City of Surrey** provides its zoning information through the COSMOS mapping system on the City's website. Search your address, and the system displays your zoning designation along with links to the relevant sections of Surrey Zoning By-law 12000. Following the July 2024 zoning consolidation, many former zones were merged, so if your previous zoning documents reference an older zone name, it may have been replaced.

**City of Burnaby** offers zoning information through its online mapping tools and the Planning Department. Following the 2024 consolidation into the R1 SSMUH district, most former single-family zones now fall under one unified designation with consistent regulations.

**City of Richmond** maintains Zoning Bylaw 8500 with interactive maps available through the City's website. Richmond's zoning is relatively straightforward for residential properties, with most single-family areas falling under a small number of zone designations.

**District and City of North Vancouver** each have their own zoning bylaws and online mapping tools. The District of North Vancouver uses its DNV Maps system, while the City of North Vancouver provides zoning information through its website. These are **separate municipalities** with different zoning rules, so make sure you are looking at

the correct one.

**City of Coquitlam, City of Delta, City of New Westminster**, and other Metro Vancouver municipalities each maintain their own online zoning maps and bylaw documents. Most can be accessed through the municipal website by searching for "zoning" or "zoning map" and entering your property address.

Once you have identified your zoning designation, finding the **permitted FSR** requires reading the relevant district schedule or zone section of the municipal zoning bylaw. FSR regulations are rarely a single number — they often vary based on lot size, number of dwelling units, housing type (single-family versus duplex versus multiplex), and whether the project qualifies for density bonuses. For example, in Vancouver's R1-1 zone, a single-family home with suite gets 0.6 FSR, while a multiplex gets 0.7 FSR base with potential for 1.0 FSR with secured rental units.

Beyond the zoning bylaw itself, several additional layers can affect what you can build. **Official Community Plans (OCPs)** set broader land use policies that may designate your area for future densification or restrict development beyond what the zoning allows. **Development permit areas** may impose additional design requirements. **Heritage designations**, tree protection bylaws, floodplain regulations, and geotechnical hazard areas can all impose constraints not visible in the zoning bylaw alone.

The most reliable way to confirm your property's development potential is to visit the **municipal planning counter** in person or by phone. Bring your property address and a description of what you want to build, and planning staff can confirm the zoning, FSR, and any additional constraints specific to your lot. This service is typically **free of charge** and takes 15 to 30 minutes. For addition projects, many municipalities also offer a pre-application review where staff provide written feedback on a preliminary design — this typically costs **\$200 to \$500** and is money well spent before investing in full architectural drawings.

For a comprehensive picture, also search your property's **title at the BC Land Title and Survey Authority** (available online for a small fee) to identify any registered easements, covenants, or rights-of-way that could limit where on your lot you can build. These legal encumbrances do not appear on zoning maps but can be just as restrictive.

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## Development Variance Permit Process for Additions in Surrey

The process for applying for a development variance permit (DVP) for a home addition in Surrey involves a formal application to the City's Planning and Development Department, a neighbourhood notification period, staff review, and a decision by City Council — and the entire process typically takes 10 to 16 weeks from submission to decision. Here is a detailed walkthrough of each step so you know exactly what to expect.

**Step 1: Pre-application consultation.** Before spending money on a formal application, book a pre-application meeting with Surrey's Planning and Development counter. This free consultation allows you to present your proposed addition and the specific bylaw relaxations you need (setback reduction, height increase, site coverage, or FSR) and get preliminary feedback from a planner on whether the variance is likely to be supported. The planner can identify potential issues, suggest design modifications that might reduce or eliminate the need for a variance, and explain the specific submission requirements for your situation. This step typically takes **one to two weeks** to schedule and complete.

**Step 2: Prepare and submit the application.** A DVP application in Surrey requires several documents. You will need a completed DVP application form, a **site survey** prepared by a BC Land Surveyor showing existing buildings, property lines, setbacks, and the proposed addition (\$1,500 to \$3,000), **architectural drawings** showing the proposed addition in plan, elevation, and section with all relevant dimensions and setback measurements, a **written rationale** explaining why the variance is justified, and the application fee. Surrey's DVP application fee is approximately **\$1,450 to \$2,100** depending on the type of variance, and this fee is non-refundable regardless of the outcome. Your architect or designer will need to prepare drawings that clearly illustrate both the standard bylaw requirement and the proposed relaxation, so the planner and ultimately Council can understand exactly what is being requested.

**Step 3: Staff review and neighbourhood notification.** Once your application is accepted as complete, Surrey's planning staff conducts an initial review to assess the variance against the Zoning Bylaw, the Official Community Plan, and any applicable neighbourhood concept plans. Simultaneously, the City sends **notification letters** to all property owners within a specified radius of your property (typically all properties within 50 metres or all properties on adjacent lots, whichever captures more addresses). A notification sign is posted on your property. Neighbours have a defined comment period — usually **14 to 21 days** — to submit written comments supporting or opposing the variance. This notification step is required by the Local Government Act of British Columbia and cannot be waived.

**Step 4: Staff report preparation.** After the notification period closes, the assigned planner reviews all comments received, assesses the variance against Surrey's evaluation criteria, and prepares a staff report with a recommendation. The evaluation criteria include whether the variance is **consistent with the intent of the bylaw**,

whether it creates **undue negative impact** on neighbouring properties (such as privacy intrusion, shadowing, or loss of views), whether there are **unique site conditions** that make strict compliance impractical, and whether the design quality and neighbourhood context support the requested relaxation. The planner's report includes a recommendation to either approve or deny the variance, and this report is a public document.

**Step 5: Council consideration.** DVPs in Surrey are decided by City Council (or in some cases delegated to the General Manager of Planning and Development for minor variances). The application is placed on a Council meeting agenda, and you or your representative have the opportunity to present your case. Neighbours who submitted comments may also attend and speak. Council either approves, approves with conditions, or denies the variance. The decision is final, though denied applications can be resubmitted after a waiting period if the circumstances change.

Several factors improve your chances of approval. **Modest variances** are far more likely to be approved than substantial ones — requesting a 0.5-metre setback reduction is viewed differently than requesting a 3-metre reduction. **Neighbourhood support or absence of opposition** is very influential; if no neighbours object, Council is much more inclined to approve. **Design quality** matters — a well-designed addition that enhances the streetscape and neighbourhood character is viewed more favourably than a utilitarian box. Having a **clear rationale** tied to unique site conditions (irregular lot shape, topography, existing building placement) is stronger than simply wanting more space.

The total cost of a DVP process in Surrey, including professional fees, typically breaks down as follows: application fee **\$1,450 to \$2,100**, site survey **\$1,500 to \$3,000**, additional architectural documentation **\$2,000 to \$5,000**, and your time investment over 10 to 16 weeks. The total direct cost lands in the **\$5,000 to \$10,000** range for most single-family addition variances.

One important alternative to consider: Surrey has been progressively updating its zoning bylaws and may have recently relaxed the specific regulation your addition conflicts with. Before applying for a DVP, check whether any **recent bylaw amendments** have changed the setback, height, or FSR requirements for your zone. Surrey's ongoing housing policy updates have reduced or eliminated some restrictions, particularly around secondary suites, laneway houses, and lot coverage, and a regulation that required a variance six months ago might now be as-of-right.

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## Recent Metro Vancouver Zoning Changes for Additions and ADUs

**Metro Vancouver municipalities have undergone some of the most significant zoning changes in Canadian history over the past two years, driven primarily by the Province of British Columbia's housing legislation that has fundamentally expanded homeowner rights to build additions, secondary suites, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) on single-family lots.** The most impactful changes stem from provincial Bills 44 and 47, which override local zoning restrictions to allow increased density on residential properties across the region.

**Bill 44 (Housing Statutes Amendment Act)** is the centrepiece of BC's zoning reform. Passed in late 2023 and progressively implemented through 2024 and into 2025, this legislation requires municipalities to allow a minimum level of small-scale multi-unit housing (SSMUH) on lots previously restricted to single-family homes. For homeowners planning additions and ADUs, the key provisions include the requirement that municipalities permit **at least one secondary suite or ADU** on virtually all single-family lots, and in many areas — particularly lots near transit — allow **up to four units total** including the principal dwelling, secondary suites, and detached ADUs. This means that the zoning barriers which previously prevented many homeowners from adding a suite, laneway house, or garden suite have been legislatively removed.

The practical impact varies by municipality because each city has been implementing the provincial requirements through their own bylaw amendments, with some moving faster and more generously than others:

**City of Vancouver** was already ahead of many municipalities with its laneway housing program (established 2009) and had progressively expanded permissions for secondary suites. Under the new provincial framework, Vancouver has updated its bylaws to align with SSMUH requirements, and the most notable recent changes include streamlined approval processes for secondary suites and reduced parking requirements for ADUs. Vancouver eliminated minimum parking requirements for secondary suites in many zones, removing one of the most common barriers to suite construction. The City has also been adjusting FSR allowances to accommodate the additional density, providing **bonus FSR** for properties that include a secondary suite or laneway house.

**Surrey** has updated its zoning to permit secondary suites and detached ADUs across its residential zones in compliance with Bill 44. Surrey already had a relatively permissive approach to basement suites, but the new framework extends permissions to detached garden suites and coach houses that were previously restricted in many areas. Surrey's implementation includes reduced setback requirements for detached ADUs and a streamlined permit process that aims to reduce approval timelines.

**Burnaby** has been actively amending its bylaws to comply with Bill 44 requirements. Notably, Burnaby has introduced provisions for detached ADUs in zones where they were previously prohibited, and has reduced parking requirements associated with secondary suites. The City has also been reviewing its FSR and lot coverage limits to accommodate the additional units without requiring variances.

**Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody** (the Tri-Cities) have each updated their zoning bylaws to permit the minimum SSMUH density required by the Province. Coquitlam in particular has moved to allow detached ADUs (garden suites) in its RS zones and has reduced the permit complexity for secondary suite conversions.

**North Vancouver (City and District)** has implemented Bill 44 changes with particular focus on laneway and coach house provisions. Given the topographic constraints in North Vancouver (many lots are on steep slopes), the District has been developing slope-adapted ADU guidelines that recognize the unique construction challenges of building detached units on hillside properties.

## What This Means for Home Additions Specifically

While much of the public discussion has focused on ADUs and suites, the provincial zoning changes also affect conventional home additions in several important ways. **Increased FSR allowances** in many municipalities mean that homeowners may now have room to build larger additions than were previously permitted. Where a lot was previously capped at 0.60 FSR, the addition of SSMUH provisions may have increased the effective allowable floor area to accommodate additional units — and even if you are not building separate units, the increased FSR envelope may benefit your addition project.

**Reduced parking requirements** across multiple municipalities mean that converting a garage to living space, building an addition where a parking space existed, or simply adding floor area without providing additional parking is now feasible in many areas where it previously required a variance.

**Streamlined permit processes** for housing additions have been mandated by the Province through Bill 47, which requires municipalities to meet specific approval timelines for small-scale residential projects. While enforcement of these timelines is still evolving, the intent is to reduce the 16-to-24-week permit timelines that were common across Metro Vancouver to something closer to **8 to 12 weeks** for straightforward projects.

The **BC Building Code** has also been updated to support the densification objectives, with new provisions for fire separation between units on the same lot, updated seismic requirements for additions that add dwelling units, and energy efficiency standards under the BC Energy Step Code that apply to all new construction including additions.

For homeowners in Metro Vancouver planning an addition or ADU, the current regulatory environment is the most favourable it has been in decades. However, the pace of change means that the specific rules for your municipality and zone may have been updated recently, and information from even 12 months ago may be outdated. I strongly recommend checking your municipality's current zoning bylaw — most are available online — and scheduling a pre-application consultation with the planning department to confirm exactly what is now permitted on your lot. The combination of provincial mandates and municipal implementation creates a dynamic regulatory environment where new opportunities are emerging regularly.

**Disclaimer:** This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver Home Additions. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any home addition project. Information is current as of March 15, 2026 and may change. Visit [vancouverhomeadditions.com](https://vancouverhomeadditions.com) for the latest answers.