



A suite solution to Calgary's housing challenge

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Calgary's boom is attracting 186 new people to the city every day. That's 5,658 every month or about 67,890 annually. Many of these new arrivals belong to Generation X or Y (35 and younger), here to launch a new career, perhaps meet a partner, maybe settle down and raise a family. The majority are eager to embrace Calgary's can-do spirit and make a good living.

Each one needs and deserves a decent place to live – a challenge because Calgary is now the second most expensive Canadian city.

Calgarians are renowned for both their entrepreneurial spirit and their desire to stash more money in their jeans. For the past 100 years, they have welcomed newcomers into their homes, made a little money in rent, and helped them integrate. Not surprisingly, these gestures built tight-knit communities such as Inglewood, Bridgeland, and Sunnyside.

Today's solutions seem less neighbourly. The City's approach to secondary suite – units with a kitchen, bathroom, and private entrance – is to only allow them in new communities or existing areas approved for land use redesignation. This onerous process requires public hearings and Council approvals. Few people take the time and even fewer are approved.

Naturally, these options fail to acknowledge Gen X and Y's values. They have a strong commitment to conserve land so want to live in inner-city districts or areas close to the existing LRT system. They need easy access to schools, work, sports arenas, day care facilities, and parks – all located in existing neighbourhoods.

The debate at City Hall also disappoints young families and immigrants who lack the extra cash for a down payment on a basic bungalow (priced at close to \$500,000).

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce asks the City to give landlords (in every community) the right to build secondary suites in their homes -- providing they meet the municipality's rigorous fire, safety, and zoning regulations. Basement apartments help homebuyers qualify for mortgages, help pay the mortgages and rising living costs. Granny suites offer cosy homes for elderly parents.

The Chamber recognizes that secondary suites could alleviate the current housing affordability shortage in our city and address the critical labour shortage in every sector of our economy. This makes better use of existing infrastructure, reduces demand for new development, and properly constructed suites increase property values.

Cities such as Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Saskatoon have changed their zoning to allow suites in all residential areas and in all types of housing: detached, semi-detached, and duplexes. To address community concerns about parking, character, infrastructure and safety, they have imposed owner-occupancy requirements, set parking and apartment size restrictions, limited exterior changes, and provide incentives to legalize existing suites.

Great cities look after everyone's welfare. The business community wants its employees to have decent, affordable housing. Therefore this suite solution just needs to pass City Council.