



# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

## Project overview

The City of Calgary wants people to register their secondary suites to ensure they are safe, for homeowners and renters. There are a variety of reasons why someone may choose to register their secondary suite. Through this project, The City wants to identify and understand these reasons.

### Key outcomes:

- Help The City gain a better understanding of the barriers and challenges to registering a secondary suite in Calgary.
- Help The City improve the current processes, supports and incentives to encourage the registration of more secondary suites.
- Use this information to improve or develop new resources for homeowners, landlords and tenants.

## What did we do and who did we talk to?

### Online engagement:

Online engagement took place from November 6 until December 15, 2023, on [engage.calgary.ca/suitesfeedback](https://engage.calgary.ca/suitesfeedback). Homeowners with registered or unregistered suites and renters of secondary suites were asked specific questions. During the online engagement period 7,687 people viewed the project page, with 4,740 being unique visitors. 762 participants made 693 contributions. This includes 332 homeowners with registered suites, 190 homeowners with unregistered suites and 206 renters of secondary suites.

### Project communications:

A comprehensive communications plan was developed to inform citizens of the project and direct people to the engagement portal web page to provide their feedback. The following is an overview of the tactics used to advertise engagement:

- Mall kiosk ads
- Website banner ads
- Targeted social media ads (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram)
- Mailer to registered secondary suites
- Road signs in targeted communities

## What we asked/ What we heard

Below are charts summarizing the online engagement responses to specific questions. The results are meant to demonstrate trends for further consideration.

Additionally, the themes that were most prevalent in the comments received for each open-ended question are summarized. Themes are listed in order from most mentioned to least mentioned. Each theme includes summary examples of verbatim comments. The comments shown are the exact words submitted by



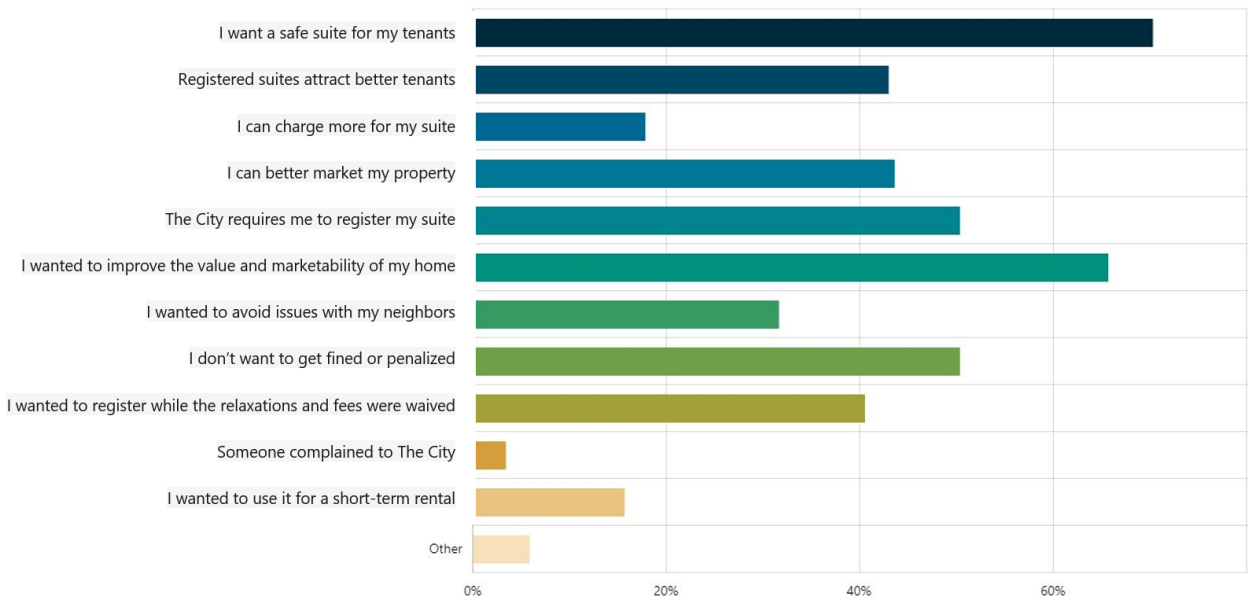
# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

respondents. For the sample comments shown below, in some cases, only the portion of a comment that spoke to a particular theme was utilized. A comprehensive list of all verbatim comments in their entirety is included in the “Verbatim comments” document.

## Homeowner with a registered suite

Q: I registered because...



Most participants want a safe suite for their tenants and want to improve marketability of their home. Participants identified The City requiring them to register and not wanting to get fined or penalized as some of the reasons they registered their suite.

**Q: “Other” reasons listed were:**

Theme	What We Heard Explanation	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Existing suite already registered	Some participants bought their property with a suite that was already there and registered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Was already registered when we bought the house but we bought it over others because it had a registered suite.”</li> <li>✓ “It came with the new build”</li> <li>✓ “Was previously registered by the original owner of the home”</li> </ul>
Responsible landlord	Most participants wanted their suite to be legal and safe. Liability was also a factor in wanting to be a responsible landlord.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “If my suite is not registered and something happens I now get sued”</li> <li>✓ “I am responsible landlord that likes to do the right things for my tenants”</li> <li>✓ “We live in the suite and want a legal address”</li> </ul>
Financial reasons	Many wanted a legal suite for financial reasons like increased property value, access to financing options and resale value of property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Better ability to finance / refinance a property when the suite is registered.”</li> <li>✓ “Easier to get financing for future mortgages due the income it brings”</li> </ul>

**Q: Do you have any suggestions to make the registration process better/ easier?**

Theme	What We Heard Explanation	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Improve permit approval process	<p>Participants want to see quicker approvals for permits or more flexible timelines, including removal of zoning restrictions.</p> <p>Some requested supports such as a checklist, step-by-step guidebook and one-on-one support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Communication from the city. The process is taking way too long. And the standards are keep changing. One day we could do sprinkler. Next day we cannot. One day Inspector is coming to tell you what needs to be corrected. Next day you have to submit pictures. The city needs to streamline and be more efficient.”</li> <li>✓ “The City's secondary suite online info is not great. It does not lay out an easy to</li> </ul>

## Secondary Suites Feedback

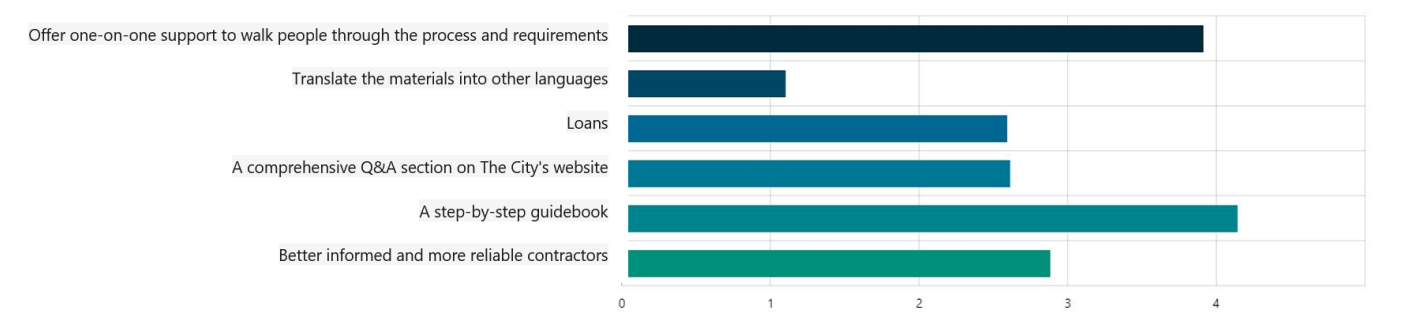
Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

		<p>follow step by step process. Some of the diagram visuals appear incorrect.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Plain language process and next steps. Not clear on process and changes based on who you talk to or the inspection. I speak English as my first language, have a Master Degree and found it extremely challenging.”</li> </ul>
Share consistent information	<p>Mixed messages from The City and inspectors were a concern mentioned frequently by participants.</p> <p>Communication between The City and the suite owner throughout the process can be improved, ensuring all City staff and inspectors are providing consistent information.</p> <p>Suggestions such as one inspector per permit and an online portal for homeowners to track their progress were offered.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Instead of interacting with different departments such as plumbing, electrical, development. There must be one department that approves all. The problem is dealing with different inspections and at times the work may have to be redone.”</li> <li>✓ “More consistency with the inspectors. Every inspector we have had interprets the building codes differently. What one inspector will pass, another will have an issue with. It causes many frustrations, some times very costly repairs. There should be a checklist for EXISTING SUITES and that’s what should be adhered to.”</li> <li>✓ “Every inspector tells you something different. One will say you don’t need venting outside for the stove and one will say you do. One will say you need a certain thickness of door between units and one will say it just needs to be solid core. I followed the descriptions given on the city of calgary website but some inspectors say you need more than what is required there. It isn’t a fair way when there is so much irregularity between which inspector you get.”</li> </ul>
Lower costs	<p>Many participants want to see the registration fees kept low or free, tax relief and financial support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Cost of registration and the process needs to be streamlined.”</li> <li>✓ “Financial support for Secondary suites in the form of palliatives and/or interest-free loans.”</li> </ul>

	<p>Some want to see some of the requirements be more flexible or removed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “People don’t want to register because they are not capable financially to pay for the upgrade needed to bring it to code.”</li> <li>✓ “Relax the requirements on suites ( separate heat controls, sound proofing and drywall needed under the stairs in a common stairway exit ). So many illegal suites causing parking issues and city wants to charge for street parking in front of your own home.”</li> <li>✓ “The building requirements are too challenging: separate hearing sources, sprinklers in furnace room, interconnected smoke detectors that tenants disconnect anyway. Building codes are FAR too restrictive and too costly relative to value provided.”</li> </ul>
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**Q: Which of the following do you think will encourage people to register their secondary suite?** Rank the tools from most helpful at the top to least helpful, by dragging them into the box on the right in order of preference.



Most participants want to see a step-by-step guidebook and one-on-one support to walk people through the process and requirements. Better and more reliable contractors, loans and a question-and-answer section on the website were also listed as helpful tools to encourage people to register their suites.

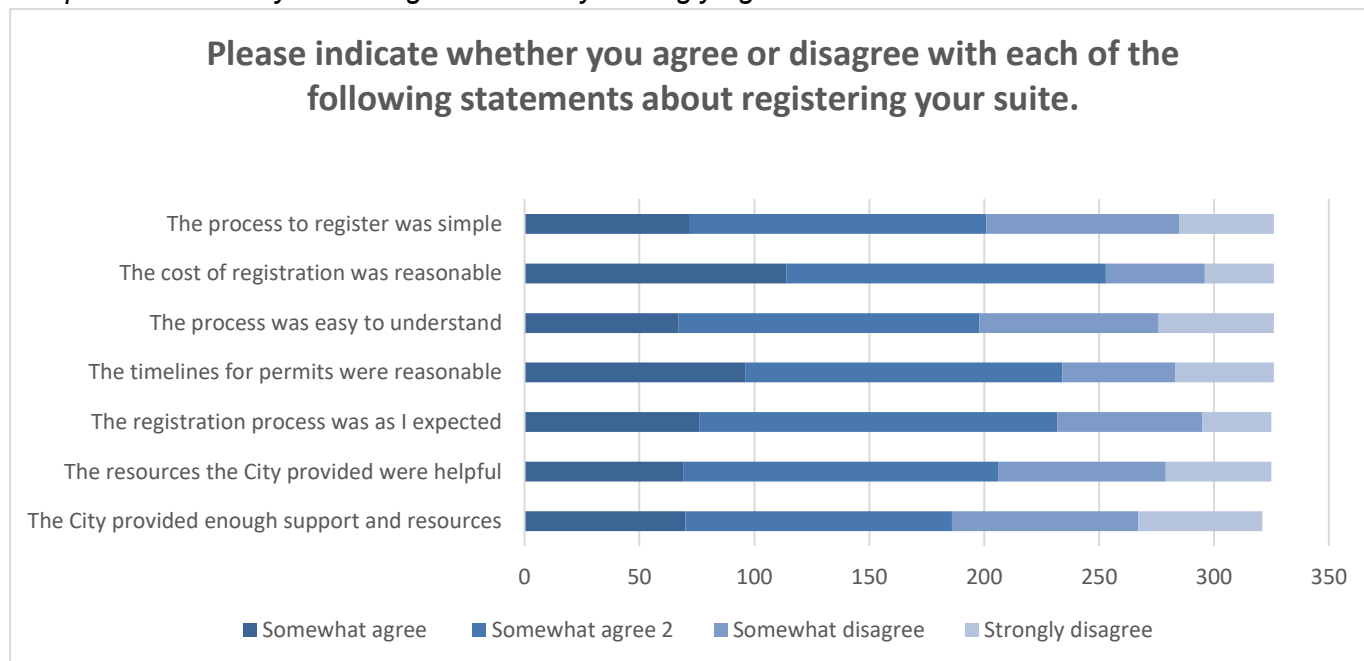
**Q: Would you encourage others to register their suites? Why or why not?**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Yes - Safety	<p>A safe suite protects landlords and tenants. Provides tenants with a safe place to live. Provides homeowners with peace of mind.</p> <p>Many homeowners were proud to add safe and livable units to Calgary's affordable housing stock.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Yes, better from a liability standpoint (insurance) as well as shows you are looking out not only for yourself as a landlord but you care about your tenants as well - registering a suite, shows you are up to code and the place is safe."</li> <li>✓ "Absolutely. A legalized suite protects landlords and tenants."</li> <li>✓ "Yes - should not have people living in basements or parts of peoples' houses without understanding that they are doing so. Opens a risk of people taking advantage of people, offering less than acceptable living standards."</li> </ul>
Yes -To reduce complaints or issues	Many participants legalized to avoid problems with insurance, liability and neighbours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Absolutely! It was a bit of a process to get mine, legalized, but totally worth it in the end. It has increased the market value of the property, and also allows me to have peace of mind, knowing that if an issue occurs, there is less liability or possible penalties, compared to having an illegal suite."</li> <li>✓ "To prevent complaints from neighbours and tenants. It is just the right thing to do."</li> <li>✓ "Well I encourage people to register because I don't want to get in trouble with the law or taxes."</li> </ul>
Yes – Financial benefits	Registered suites increase the property value for resale or better marketability of the unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I sure will encourage other to register because it is a better value for your property and safe."</li> <li>✓ "Insurance, marketability oat time of sale, complaints, future Mortgage qualification purposes."</li> </ul>
No – Too much cost for benefit	Some participants felt the cost was not worth it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "No. The cost to benefits do not make sense, significant cost barriers versus little to no benefits"</li> </ul>

		<div> <div>✓</div> <div>           “Not really, the contractors often ask for 70000 to 100000 CAD for conversion of fully developed basements. You cannot recoup that cost in years of renting. Also the requirements for 2 separate entrances make it complicated to convert old homes as a structural engineer needs to be involved.”         </div> </div> <div> <div>✓</div> <div>           “This should be mandatory but the costs is too much so when you way the risk vs reward factor after doing two suites it’s probably not worth it sadly.”         </div> </div>
No – Difficult process	Participants expressed frustration with the process, inspectors and timelines. Some felt the process was unclear or too long.	<div> <div>✓</div> <div>           “No. I don’t believe the City is able to manage suites now and inspectors are not consistent in their reviews/inspections for owners to rely upon their inspections.”         </div> </div> <div> <div>✓</div> <div>           “No. I have seen no benefits to registering my suite as opposed to many I know who haven’t. I however had a hefty loan and many Grey hairs now due to the process.”         </div> </div>

**Q: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about registering your suite.**

*\*NOTE: There was an error in the survey so it had two “somewhat agree” categories where one of them should have been “strongly agree”. 11 respondents noted this error in the comments, however most completed the survey assuming it should say “strongly agree”.*



More than half of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with most of the criteria. The largest areas of disagreement were those who identified they did not get enough resources and support and the process was not simple or easy to understand.

**Q: For any “somewhat disagree” or “strongly disagree” please explain why.**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Process issues	<p>Some participants felt the requirements changed all the time.</p> <p>Many different permits throughout the process and inspections create confusion.</p>	<p>✓ “The process was not very simple as I feel a lot of requirements were not mentioned on the website. For me, it was a lot of trial and error.”</p> <p>✓ “The process is hard for people who don't know much English and technologies how to send all the pictures that the City required.”</p> <p>✓ “The application goes through a preliminary reviewer and picks at the</p>



# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

		<p>small things just to get returned and more work and money is required. The timeline took me a year to work through because of interpretation by all parties of what needs to be done. Watching the status on Vista and when I get to a point a get transferred to multiple departments between customer service, cashiers, inspectors, and the development office. The electrical inspectors option leads to dead end and provides a phone number that doesn't work."</p>
Conflicting information provided	<p>Some participants received conflicting information from City staff and inspectors during their experience. This increased feelings of frustration and uncertainty.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "The cities keep changing expectations. Every time different Inspector wants different things. Would be nice one Inspector gives the list of inspection and we submit to the city. The pictures that it's corrected. Or Video. Otherwise (name redacted) book and next time comes different Inspector and he finds different things, and again you start over."</li> <li>✓ "We were discouraged when different inspectors came to do inspections and had different changes required. First guy overlooked one thing and asked for changes somewhere else. After we made the changes and different inspector would come and pick out changes the other guy had "passed". Either the inspectors need some consistent guidelines or the same inspector should come every time."</li> </ul>
Poor applicant resources	<p>Some participants found resources either difficult to navigate, confusing or lacking.</p> <p>One-on-one support and a step-by-step guidebook or pre-inspection checklist for homeowners were mentioned as supports that may help.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I did not find some of the city resources, very helpful. I actually ended up contacting others who had gone through the legal suite application process and got advice from them as well as other third-party online sources."</li> <li>✓ "For first timers, the process and requirements to register a suite are unclear and the resources are not easy to find. When I tried asking questions online</li> </ul>

## Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

		<p>or through 311 we couldn't get a clear answer on everything. It made the decision to renovate and register our suite feel risky due to the uncertainty"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I would suggest the City to create a step-by-step guidebook and make people available to answer questions."</li> <li>✓ "I would like to see a checklist for owners to review and prepare the suite prior to inspection"</li> <li>✓ "Would be great if we can have a guidebook. Too many requirements and not easy to understand"</li> </ul>
Cost	Participants mentioned costs as a barrier to registration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "The cost of applications aren't reasonable. The fact is you need a 100 permits, you need to apply for each permit separately, you need to pay them separately, all inspections are separate cost and take a lot of time with permit and inspections. Inspectors do not relay all the needed enhancements for legalising in first visit , i had to do 3 separate inspections which I had to pay for because the first two were adding more things to do after each inspection."</li> </ul>
Timelines	Participants mentioned timelines for approvals is a barrier to registration. They feel the approval timelines can be shortened.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I think the timeline of 3 months to be too long. I think each section of the process can be shrunk to expedite the approval."</li> </ul>

**Q: Is there anything else you'd like us to know about the process? Your experience?**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Reduced or flexible registration requirements	Although some participants were able to navigate the process of registration, many had additional suggestions for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I felt many of the requirements to be over the top. My suite now has 6 smoke alarms in about 800 square foot area! I had to replace windows that were two</li> </ul>

# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

	<p>improvements to inspection, working with contractors, City staff support and available resources.</p> <p>Many participants mentioned the high cost of Building Code requirements and a need to understand why certain items are being required.</p>	<p>years old with windows that open a different way, although both had the same size “opening”. This seems irrational.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Allow the option of water sprinkler in mechanical room. Air-tight sealing of mechanical room is cumbersome, and also not as effective as intended. Water sprinklers allow access to other installations in mechanical room while keeping a fire safety device in place.”</li> <li>✓ “I feel like there should be flexibility on heating - for many years our "non conforming" suite used one furnace for the whole house for primary heat which was augmented with a convection oil-filled electric heater or a cabinet infrared space heater in the basement. Used properly they are safe heaters to augment the main furnace, much easier to do in a basement suite than requiring an entirely separate system. A separate heating system is optimal but there should be some flexibility in heating requirements.”</li> </ul>
Information and resource improvements	<p>Information provided about the registration process can be clearer and easier to understand. There is interest in offering translation services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “The content online is like you got an internal resource to write it, but didn't spend enough time making sure each step or the content was super clear. The content is okay, but it's not great. And the steps are not clear. My my spouse and I have a fairly high level of education, so the fact that we found it a challenge to understand makes me think other people would as well.”</li> <li>✓ “I didn’t have an issue registering. But not all home owners understand it well . So it would be great if you can add more languages. I would love to help or translate my language.”</li> <li>✓ “Consolidate information!”</li> </ul>

<p>Reduce costs/ provide financial incentives</p>	<p>Participants want financial supports and options to reduce costs of permits, taxes and construction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Financial incentives such as Edmonton’s Cornerstone Grant should always be available so that there is motivation to create safer registered suites.”</li> <li>✓ “Make it easy and inexpensive. Don’t force properties to do crazy things that you see in a newly built home. The cost to do this in a 1960s home is way too much and not worth it. Unfortunately homeowners see the costs and the risk vs reward just isn’t there therefore the city will always have issues with illegal suites and affordable housing.”</li> </ul>
<p>Inspection improvements/ contractor support</p>	<p>Issues with inspectors and contractors were frequently raised. Inspectors need to provide consistent information.</p> <p>Some contractors recommend unnecessary changes that aren’t required by The City. Consistency between what The City requires and what contractors recommend will be helpful.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “All went well until inspections were done by different inspectors. Each one had a different idea of what met codes”</li> <li>✓ “Contractors take advantage of the costs and also suggest things that are not needed to comply with the city”</li> </ul>

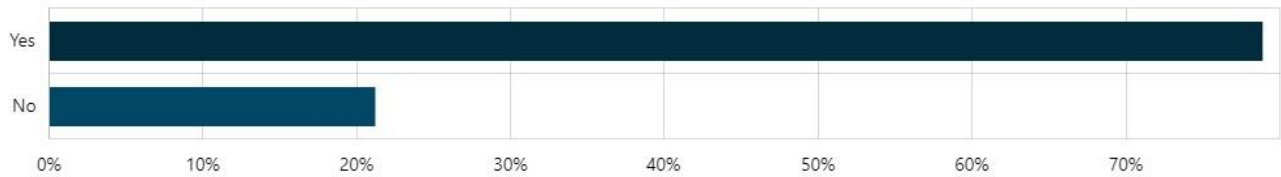


# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

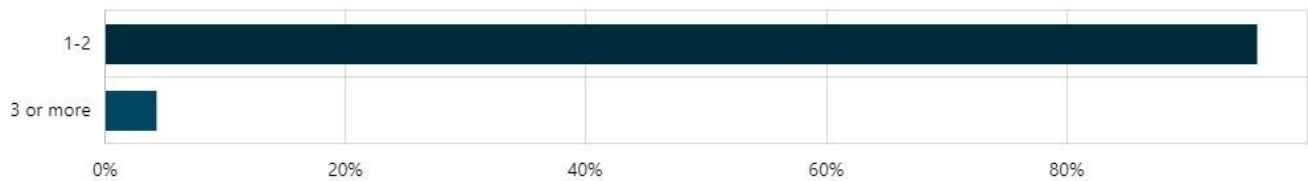
## Homeowner with an Unregistered Suite

**Q: Do you live in the home where your suite is located?**



Most participants who completed this survey live in the home where their suite is located.

**Q: How many suites do you own?**



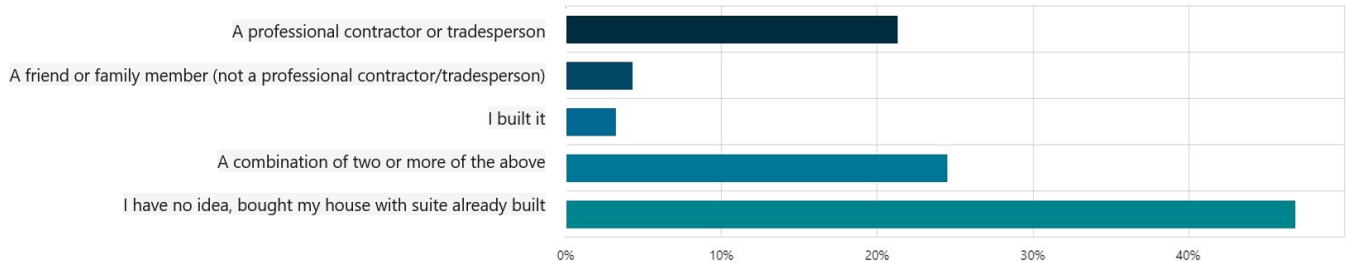
Most participants who completed this survey own 1-2 suites, with a small minority owning 3 or more.



# Secondary Suites Feedback

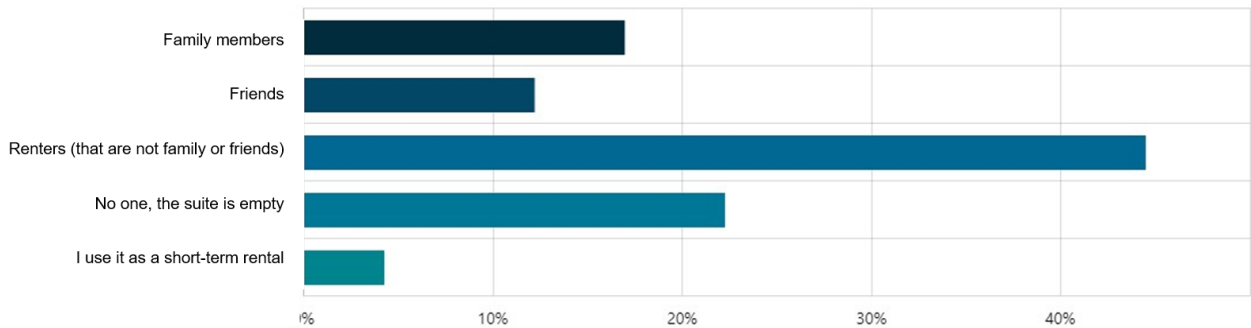
Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

## Q: Who built your suite(s)?



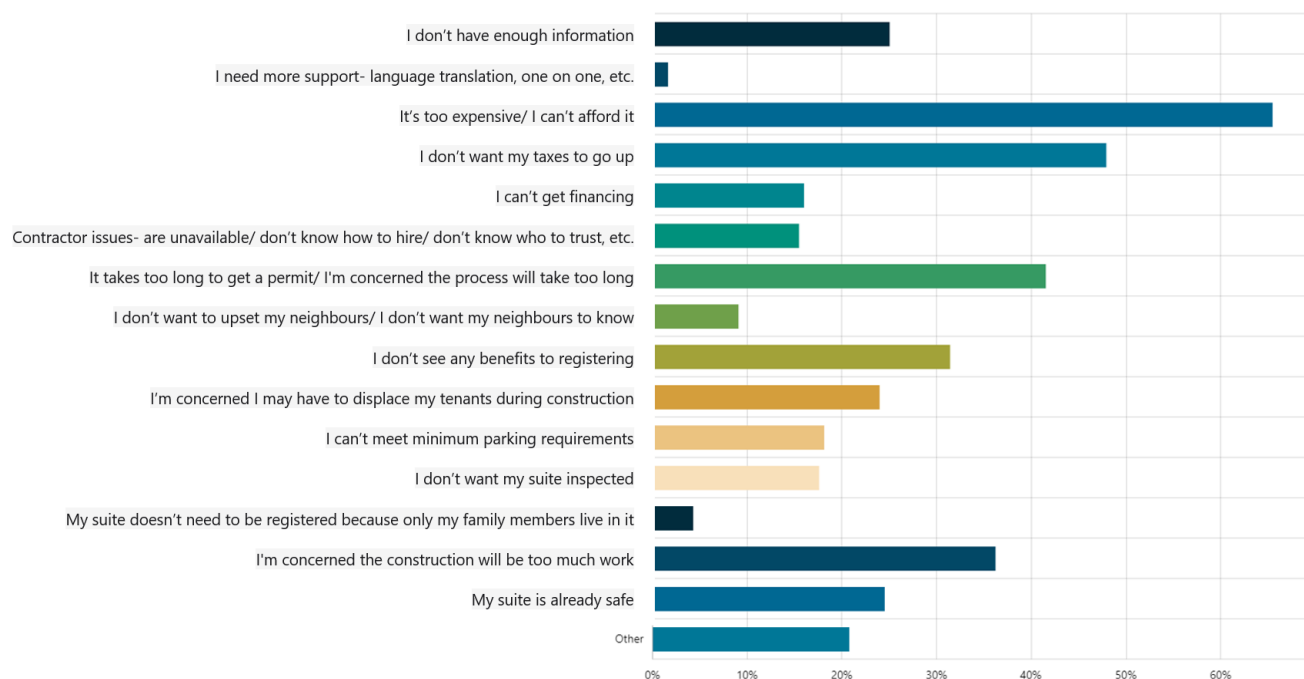
Most participants do not know who built their suite as they purchased their home with the suite already built. The next largest group of participants built their suites with a combination of professionals, doing work themselves or with friends or family helping.

## Q: Who lives in your suite(s)? Select all that apply



Most participants have renters who are not family or friends living in their suite. The second highest participants had an empty suite or family or friends living in it.

**Q: What keeps you from registering your suite?** Below are some comments we have heard from others but feel free to add something new. Select all that apply...



Most participants listed it being too expensive or being unable to afford registering their suite as the main barrier. The next three concerns preventing the registration of a suite included taxes increasing, the process taking too long to get a permit and construction being too much work.

**Q: "Other" reasons listed were...**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Requirements	<p>Some participants felt that the building code requirements are too much, specifically the heating source and fire safety requirements. These requirements can be quite costly.</p> <p>Some participants do not understand the reasons for some requirements or think they are too restrictive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "The code requirements are ridiculous. I'm all for safety but they seem designed to make having the suite impossible in anything but a new build."</li> <li>✓ "I'm worried I may have to get an additional furnace and/or water tank, water meter, etc. Big ticket items"</li> <li>✓ "It's too hard and expensive to drywall and smoke seal the furnace room due to the age and existing infrastructure"</li> </ul>

## Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I don't know exactly what I would have to do to make it legal. I called the City and asked if an inspector could come to the house, but they said only once everything was completed. If you don't know exactly what might need to be changed, it's hard to have it completed!"</li> </ul>
Inspection concerns and confusion	There is some confusion about the rules and requirements. Some participants already have a suite and are unsure of what needs to be done, and others want an inspector to come out before starting the work. Many participants said inspectors gave them different opinions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "The inconsistency of requirements vary with each inspector. There should be a regulating body / ombudsman that can investigate inspectors reports to ensure they are being consistent and following requirements properly."</li> <li>✓ "City Inspectors are making it unrealistic to comply. The city has mislead me in making me believe that this is a safety based compliance."</li> </ul>

**Q: What were the biggest factors (TOP 3 from above) in not registering your suite? Tell us more**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Cost - taxes	Costs were the most mentioned reason to not register a suite. Participants were concerned about cost of construction and changes required to meet the building code requirements (heating source mentioned many times). Other financial concerns mentioned include increased taxes and displacing tenants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I would have to spend more than 20k in renovations to register and I can't afford it, additionally the tenants were there when I bought the house and have lived there for 12+ years and I would have to displace them during upgrades"</li> <li>✓ "It is very costly and I can't afford it. I don't have proper knowledge of what are minimum requirements to register suite. I have heard permits take a long time and inspections take longer as well and if something goes wrong in inspection then i might loose all money that i spent."</li> <li>✓ "1- city's requirements for suites built after March 2018. 2- separate furnace is expensive especially if suite is already finished. 3- expensive process."</li> </ul>



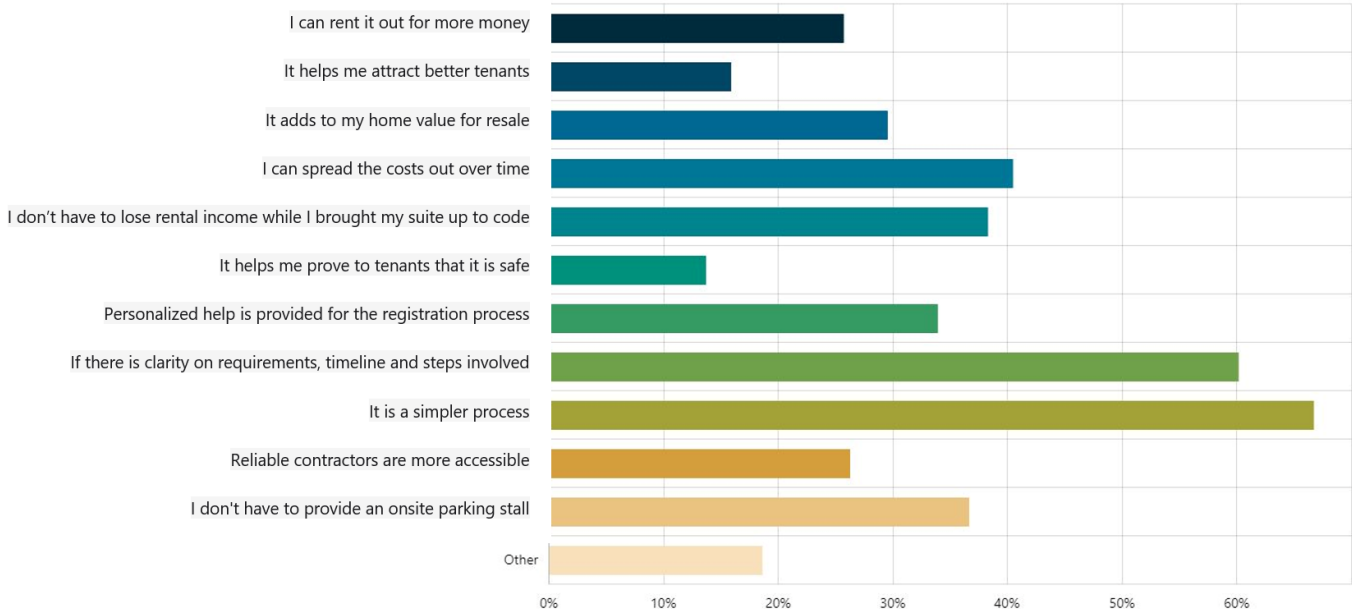
Process concerns	Some participants feared the process will take too long, found unclear information, or information provided was lacking. Some participants had a poor experience with the process or found it too complicated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I want to register the suite. I want to legalize it. But the processes established by the city are so cumbersome and confusing. Plus, the fact that a city official could just barge in my property, inspect property in my absence, and present a notice to me seems so intimidating and untrustworthy."</li> <li>✓ "Permit application is too demanding."</li> <li>✓ "Process too hard. Too many forms."</li> <li>✓ "The process is to much and the requirement are to much."</li> </ul>
No incentive/ reason to register	Some participants simply said there is no incentive to register or there are concerns that are a barrier.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "I don't want my suite inspected and then told I have to make major changes which will be costly. My suite is up to code in terms of safety but I found some of the requests to be invalid like having a inspection before plumping pipes which wastes time of the construction process since I have to wait for the inspector. If I'm also living in the house, I don't see why I would be incentivized to have an inhabitable secondary suite, it's actually the opposite where I would want it to be safe for me as well."</li> <li>✓ "We want to provide safe, reliable housing to our tenants but the steep cost, unclear and difficult process, and upsetting and displacing our tenants make it hard to justify."</li> </ul>



# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

**Q: I would be more inclined to register my suite if...(Check all that apply)**

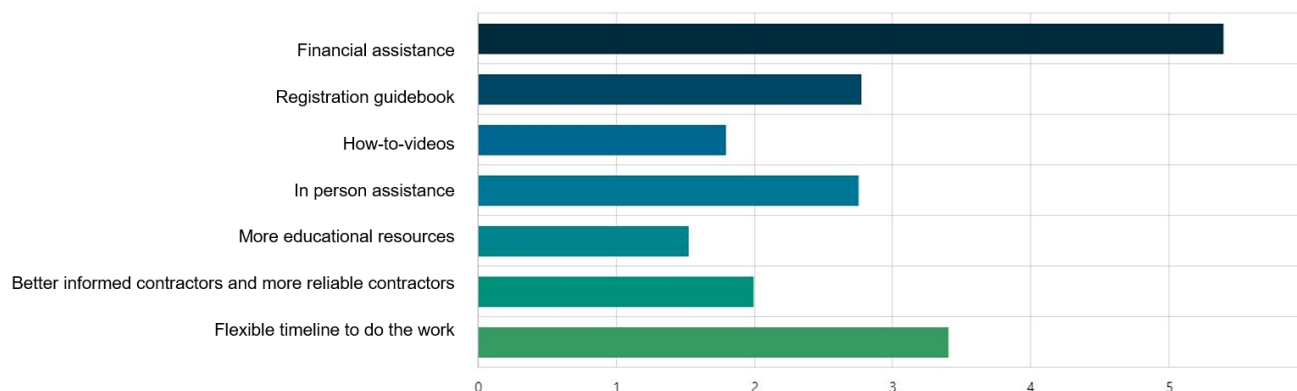


Most participants are more inclined to register if the process was simpler, if there was more clarity on requirements, timeline and steps involved. Participants also said it will be helpful if they can spread the costs out over time and they will not lose rental income while bringing their suite up to code. They are also more inclined to register a suite if they do not have to provide an on-site parking stall.

**Q: “Other” reasons listed were...**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Flexible requirements	Many people mentioned the difficulty meeting Building Code requirements, with heating being mentioned frequently and some wanting to see some requirements grandfathered for older suites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “two furnaces is unreasonable and not required. this is not a safety issue. whenever we talk about secondary suit, its marketed on safety but the biggest hurdle (2 furnaces) has nothing to do with safety. independence of temperature control can be achieved with one furnaces with splitter and two thermostats. this requirement of 2 furnace is work of hvac industry lobby who want to creat more work for them resulting in expensive and unaffordable homes. i agree with all safety and fire code requirement. they add to safety and are not prohibitively expensive.”</li> <li>✓ “Requirements were changed to allow me to adequately heat the house with a single furnace”</li> </ul>
Financial incentives	Some participants feel there are no financial incentives in place. They are interested in seeing no new permit fees, no increases in property taxes for adding a secondary, etc. There is interest in receiving a decrease in property tax rate or a bonus paid when a secondary suite is registered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Financial incentives rather than disincentives were in place (ie. no additional permit fees, no additional property taxes, perhaps the opposite: a reduction in property tax, a bonus being paid to register)”</li> <li>✓ “There are some financial incentives to incentive registration”</li> </ul>
Process improvements	Some participants suggested simplifying the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Don’t charge so much for permits and make the process more streamlined”</li> </ul>

**Q: Would any of the following supports and incentives encourage you to register your suite?** Rank the tools from most helpful at the top to least helpful, by dragging them into the box on the right in order of preference.



Most participants said financial assistance may encourage them to register. Participants also highlighted a flexible timeline to do the work, followed by a registration guidebook and in-person assistance as tools that may be most helpful.

**Q: Are there any other supports and incentives that may encourage you to register your suite?**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Cost – taxes, financial incentives needed	Cost is a major issue, and many participants want to see financial incentives, financial assistance or tax reductions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “This situation is shocking and unsustainable. Contractors dissuade landlords from even bothering to bring an existing suite up to registration standards due to the excessive costs it would entail. They are not even willing to do quotes or when they come one never hears back from them. They suggest it is a major investment that does not make financial sense. There isn't even any evidence of how much the reno would increase equity or resale value, so for small landlords it appears to be an impossible trap. One even considers just selling and leaving Alberta because of this situation.”</li> <li>✓ “Property tax credits for registered suites”</li> <li>✓ “financial incentive will definitely encourage me to register my suite”</li> </ul>

## Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Funding availability or property tax reductions for providing safe &amp; affordable housing in our neighbourhood"</li> </ul>
Simplified and clearer process	Participants want to see the process simplified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Cut the city red tape around how long it takes and make it cheaper."</li> <li>✓ "Easy process and relaxation for houses built before 2010"</li> <li>✓ "If I can get to talk to someone from city of Calgary and they can help explain the process and provide a reasonable timeline"</li> <li>✓ "Permit application should be simpler, period."</li> </ul>
Flexible code requirements	Participants want to have more flexibility to meet the requirements in older vs. newer homes, various sizes of suites and varying unique instances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Fewer requirements that aren't absolutely essential. I care about safety but it feels impossible to bring my sure up to code now with the new requirements."</li> <li>✓ "Common-sense adjustments to requirements (eg. able to heat the house with a single furnace)"</li> <li>✓ "Losen the requirments of registering a suite like the requirments if separate furnace and changing house zone."</li> </ul>
Conflicting information provided	Some participants have had difficult experiences with inspectors or have received conflicting information from inspectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Clear guidelines. From the past experience every inspector has different answers."</li> <li>✓ "Just make it easier to get the job done and don't use (redacted word to describe unhelpful) inspectors. I had a city inspector come out to take a look At how far along I was and he was a total (redacted) and felt he just failed me because he woke up on the wrong side of bed"</li> </ul>

Better information and support from The City	Participants are looking for more support from The City, want to see better information shared online and clearer guidance on requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “The information on Calgary's website is not clear just lots of information and no real help. Calling 403-268 5311 is almost useless as they say that go check the website. Nothing can be done until you have a permit and all what I want is somebody from the city to tell me exactly what I need to do in the basement in order to upgrade to a legal suite - possibly after inspecting the basement.”</li> </ul>
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**Q: Is there anything else you think needs changed for you to register your suite?**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Financial incentives	Cost and taxes are mentioned as the largest obstacle, with many advocating for financial incentives or tax reductions to register a suite.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Continue to make it easier for landlords to provide high-quality housing by cutting costs, simplifying the process, and offering credits or incentives to go through the stressful process required.”</li> <li>✓ “The cost of the required upgrades must be reduced or the small landlord will necessarily have to sell and flee Alberta.”</li> <li>✓ “At the end of the day, everything comes down to cost. If it weren't so expensive to do, more people would do it. It's that simple”</li> </ul>
Flexible regulations	The code requirements are mentioned by many as an obstacle either due to cost or retrofitting an older home, with many not understanding the safety rationale for these requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “I think the "2018 Second suit Standards" are fully applicable and very safety. If this is used as a renovation standard, more people will be encouraged to carry out renovations and declare legally house.”</li> <li>✓ “More relaxed rules. Having to drywall the entire mechanical room is very challenging and futile. A sprinkler which was previously allowed was alot more reasonable.”</li> <li>✓ “You need to stop pursuing perfection at the cost of practicality. There are many, many suites that are perfectly safe but</li> </ul>

		<p>don't meet the code requirements of your suite policy. They've existed for decades and will continue to exist. These requirements make sense when they can be designed and built from the ground up. There needs to be flexibility and and understanding of how difficult some of the work can be in older homes."</p>
<p>Improve process and supports</p>	<p>People want flexible timelines with helpful and supportive City staff and inspectors.</p>	<div> <div>✓</div> <div>"We started the process to register our suite and then got a scary letter stating if we didn't finish within a month we would have to prove no one was living in the suite or face up to \$100k in fines. It felt like we were being punished for being honest about having an unregistered suite. If we had known that was going to happen I don't think we would have started the process in the first place."</div> </div> <div> <div>✓</div> <div>"Help with submitting the required docs and how to do that would also be extremely helpful."</div> </div> <div> <div>✓</div> <div>"Better help in understanding the process"</div> </div> <div> <div>✓</div> <div>"Simplify process."</div> </div> <div> <div>✓</div> <div>"Processing time"</div> </div>



# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

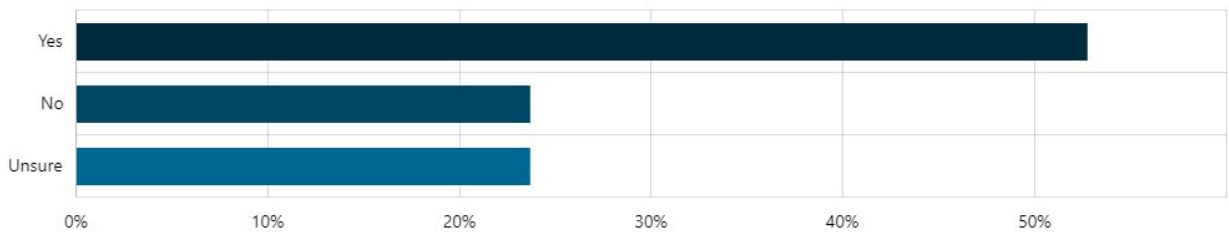
## Renters of Secondary Suites

**Q: Before taking this survey, I knew what a registered suite was...**



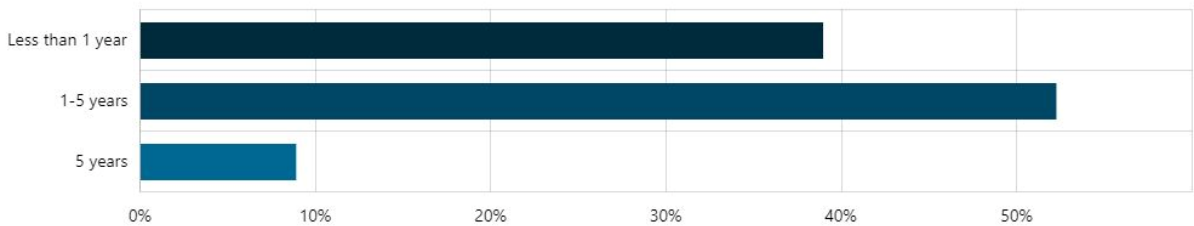
Most participants who took this survey knew what a registered suite was prior to participating.

**Q: The suite I live in is registered.**



Most renters who participated in this survey live in a registered suite. Out of the other participants, half say they are unsure and half say the live in unregistered suites.

**Q: I have lived in this suite for ...**



Most renters who participated in this survey have lived in their suite for 1-5 years, with the next biggest cohort renting for a year or less and a small percentage renting their suite for more than 5 years.



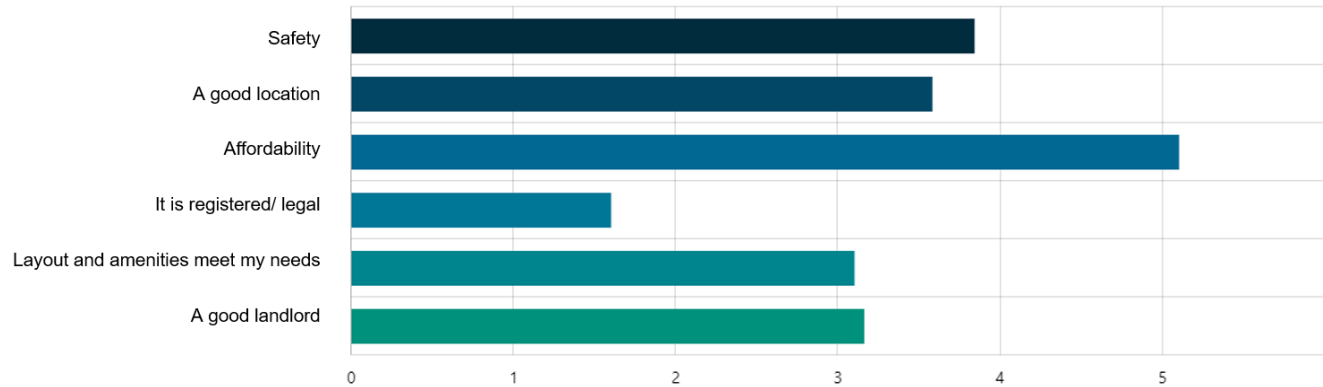


# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

**Q: Please rank the following factors in terms of importance when looking for a place to rent (most important at the top and the least important at the bottom).**



Most participants ranked affordability as their top factor when looking for a place to rent, followed by safety, a good location, a good landlord and a layout and amenities that meet their needs.

**Q: Please share any other factors that are important to you and tell us why.**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Affordability	Affordability was the most mentioned topic, with many saying the rental market is very tight which limits options.	<div><div>✓</div><div>“Affordability. Affordability. Affordability. It doesn't matter if it's safe or convenient or way to small if I can't afford it and end up homeless. Regardless of the fact that I make 70-80k/yr.. because that's where this country is headed. Reasonable incomes can no longer sustains people. Can't save to buy if 80% of my income goes to somebody else's mortgage.”</div></div> <div><div>✓</div><div>“Affordability is key. I would make compromises in every other factor- I need somewhere I can afford”</div></div> <div><div>✓</div><div>“Honestly I would love to rate a legal suite as a top priority but there are too few and I am priced out of them even with a graduate degree and a decent job.”</div></div>

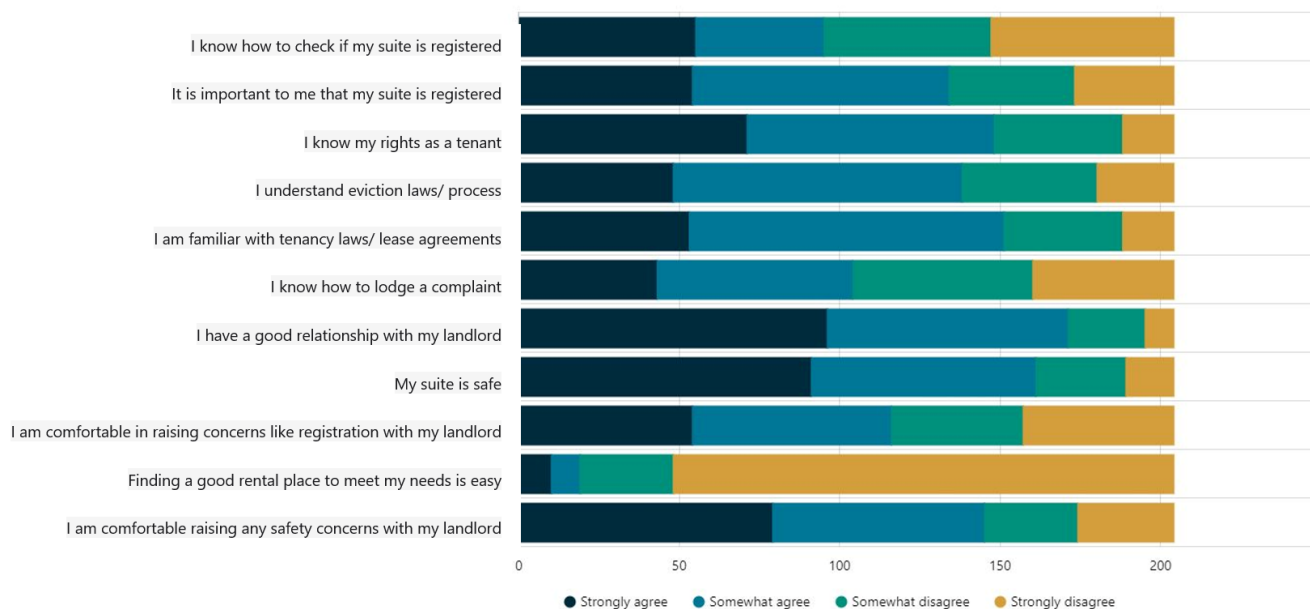
## Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

Condition of property	The condition of the property was a large consideration for people, with many renters desiring windows, light and a well-maintained property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Well maintained."</li> <li>✓ "Too many slum landlords in the city, squeezing every penny from tenants while doing nothing to maintain suites or properties"</li> </ul>
Safety	Safety of the suite was important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "It has to be safe everything else I can deal with"</li> <li>✓ "I won't die in an electrical fire"</li> <li>✓ "It is ridiculous that any suite is unregistered and held to a basic minimum health standard. Calgary needs to step up and act humanely and hold landlords accountable ...it is their business- they should be required to provide some basic safety &amp; have severe penalties non compliance."</li> </ul>
Location – safe and close to transit	A location in a safe neighbourhood, close to transit is desirable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Close to public transit"</li> <li>✓ "Safe neighbourhood for personal safety"</li> </ul>
Personal requirements	Participants listed specific requirements for a home to suit their needs. These included being pet friendly, a safe or quiet neighbourhood, parking, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Having pet friendly accommodation. Landlords should not be able to deny pets."</li> <li>✓ "There should be more affordable pet friendly rentals. The insane higher prices and being forced to live somewhere unsafe is scary. Even if we had wanted to surrender our pets to find a safer place, the shelters are full and not accepting"</li> <li>✓ "Parking - it's not safe to park 10+ minutes away and walk after my shift. Or lug groceries for 5 blocks"</li> </ul>

**Q: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.**



The number of participants who know how to check if their suite is registered is evenly split between all options provided. Most participants “somewhat agree” it is important their suite is registered. Most also “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that they know their rights as a tenant and understand the eviction laws and process. While most participants “agree” that they are familiar with tenancy laws and lease agreements, only half know how to lodge a complaint.

Most renters who participated have a good relationship with their landlord and feel their suite is safe. Half of participants “agree” they are comfortable raising concerns like registration with their landlord. Most participants are comfortable raising safety concerns with their landlord. Most renters overwhelmingly “disagree” with the statement “Finding a good rental place to meet my needs is easy”.

**Q: If you disagreed with the statement “I am comfortable raising any safety concerns with my landlord.” Why are you not comfortable doing this?**

Themes	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
Nothing will change	Many renters mentioned it will not make a difference if they raise concerns with their landlord because they either do not respond, keep delaying repairs or threaten the tenant with eviction or other measures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “My experience is landlords are not willing or interested in doing preventative maintenance or repairs, or otherwise investing in a property to even bring it up to code unless they are actually being forced to do it, by active enforcement. Any suggestion from a tenant that they need to spend money out of their pocket</li> </ul>

## Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard

January 2024

		<p>is an almost guaranteed retributory rent increase.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “In the past we have done this and he is very dismissive. He resorts to blame instead of solutions. He often lies to tenants to achieve his goals or cheap fixes. He’s threatened to evict us for “complaining,” stating we should be lucky to have a place to live. We’ve learned to manage things quietly out of fear of being evicted.”</li> <li>✓ “Majority of landlords don’t care. If you don’t rent their suite, someone else will.”</li> </ul>
Fear of eviction	<p>Participants fear they will be evicted if they raise safety concerns with their landlord. Financially, they cannot afford to move and cannot afford to fight an eviction. Many mention it is not easy to find another place to live if they are evicted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Because i don’t want to be evicted”</li> <li>✓ “Don’t want the unit to get shut down, as I can’t afford to move”</li> <li>✓ “Fast track to eviction. If I had the time/money/resources to fight an illegal eviction why would I be renting a secondary suite in the first place?”</li> </ul>
Fear of retaliation from landlord	<p>Most renters feel the landlord has more power and control than the renter. They don’t want to cause problems that may lead to them being punished with rent increases, eviction or other measures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “As a tenant you feel very at the whims of the landlord and you don’t want to risk disturbing whatever agreement you have. If a cheaper place you may forego safety or repairs so rent isn’t raised, or you’re evicted for renovations and cost increase. When landlords are focused on maximizing revenue and there are no controls and you’re not sure what your rights are you don’t want to risk it. Even if you know your housing is unsafe”</li> <li>✓ “I am not comfortable because I am worried I will not be able to find somewhere else to rent if I raise any concerns! I’m worried my landlord may raise the rent to fix anything in the unit.”</li> <li>✓ “When rent is determined on the ‘emotional whims of your landlord’, upsetting them is death to renters. They</li> </ul>

		could very well retaliate by raising rent to stupid high amounts or just plainly kick you out."
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**Q: If you disagreed with the statement "Finding a good rental place to meet my needs is easy." Why is it not easy?**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
High rental costs	Participants repeatedly emphasized how expensive renting is in Calgary, how much rent has increased and how there is no rent control to prevent landlords from increasing rent further.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Because even with a dual income household, I am barely able to afford to rent a 600 square foot one bedroom apartment. I work two jobs and I my husband works full time and we can barely afford to live. I searched for months to find this place and it is small and way too expensive."</li> <li>✓ "Housing as become unaffordable for almost HALF of Calgarians. To find a SAFE, AFFORDABLE place is almost impossible, it's one or the other not both. I have to make massive sacrifices, needing to rent both parking and a storage locker due to over inflated rental prices"</li> <li>✓ "The rental market has doubled over the last two years so it's impossible to find something safe and in a decent area within my budget."</li> </ul>
Lack of rentals	Participants mentioned that there are few homes available to rent. Due to the lack of options and availability of rentals they often must choose less desirable living conditions to meet their budget.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "It's is almost impossible to find a good rental that meets my needs. I make a decent living but landlords have raised prices so much, I can no longer afford a safe place. I have no choice but to put up with unsafe unregistered conditions and bad landlords just to have a roof over my head."</li> <li>✓ "A good place with a decent landlord and reasonable pricing is not easy to find and rental market is very very slim compared to just a few years ago, you would see at least a 300-500\$ increase monthly moving to a new rental"</li> </ul>



# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ “Because the cost of living has sky rocketed, and most places for an reasonable price are not maintained or clean - regardless if registered or not.”</li></ul>
Pets	<p>If a person has a pet, it is more difficult to find a place to rent. Some landlords do not allow pets in their rental units. There are few pet-friendly rental units, so they are in high demand and difficult to find.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ “I have a large dog, reptiles, and large aquariums. Finding a rental that would allow all these types of pets was extremely difficult.”</li><li>✓ “If you have any pets of any kind or have a one income household it’s nearly impossible to find something affordable.”</li><li>✓ “Pet friendly locations are in high demand and overall rentals are low”</li></ul>

**Q: Please tell us more about what may improve your experience as someone who rents a secondary suite. Explain why.**

Theme	What We Heard	Supporting Verbatim Comments
More low-cost rentals	Participants want more safe and affordable rentals. Many want rent control or some financial assistance to help with cost of living.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Immediate rent control. Immediate, city funded, affordable housing. Rent relief payments for low-income renters."</li> <li>✓ "Affordability. Rent is my single largest expense month to month and it is getting to the point where I am barely saving any money."</li> </ul>
Better tenancy laws/ education for renters	Participants indicated that they want to see stronger tenancy laws. They also want better education for renters on tenancy laws and how to submit complaints about landlords.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "Tighter tenant protection laws."</li> <li>✓ "Tenants have very little power or practical recourse when landlords do illegal things. It is difficult to simply "find somewhere else to live" when the market is as tough as it is"</li> <li>✓ "Hold landlords to account more. They rarely follow rules, knowing that tenants have little recourse. Even though it's possible to file a complaint, it comes at the risk of losing the housing. As well filing complaints is expensive and the resolution is rarely timely. I rent a basement suite because I'm broke, I don't have the resources to participate in the process like a landlord does. It feels stacked in favour of the landlord"</li> </ul>
More safety enforcement	Participants indicated that they want easier ways to report unsafe suites and landlord issues. They are interested in a database or place where they can check to see if any complaints have been submitted against a property or landlord.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ "A website where I can check if there have been complaints/lawsuits/police visits against my landlord. I have had landlords just "inspect" my suite with no notice at night."</li> <li>✓ "As I said I believe follow up to ensure suites are still up to code after being legalized is important. I never would've thought of a landlord legalizing a suite only to renovate it to fit in more rental units after the fact, but that is exactly what happened in my case. Doing onsite</li> </ul>

## Secondary Suites Feedback

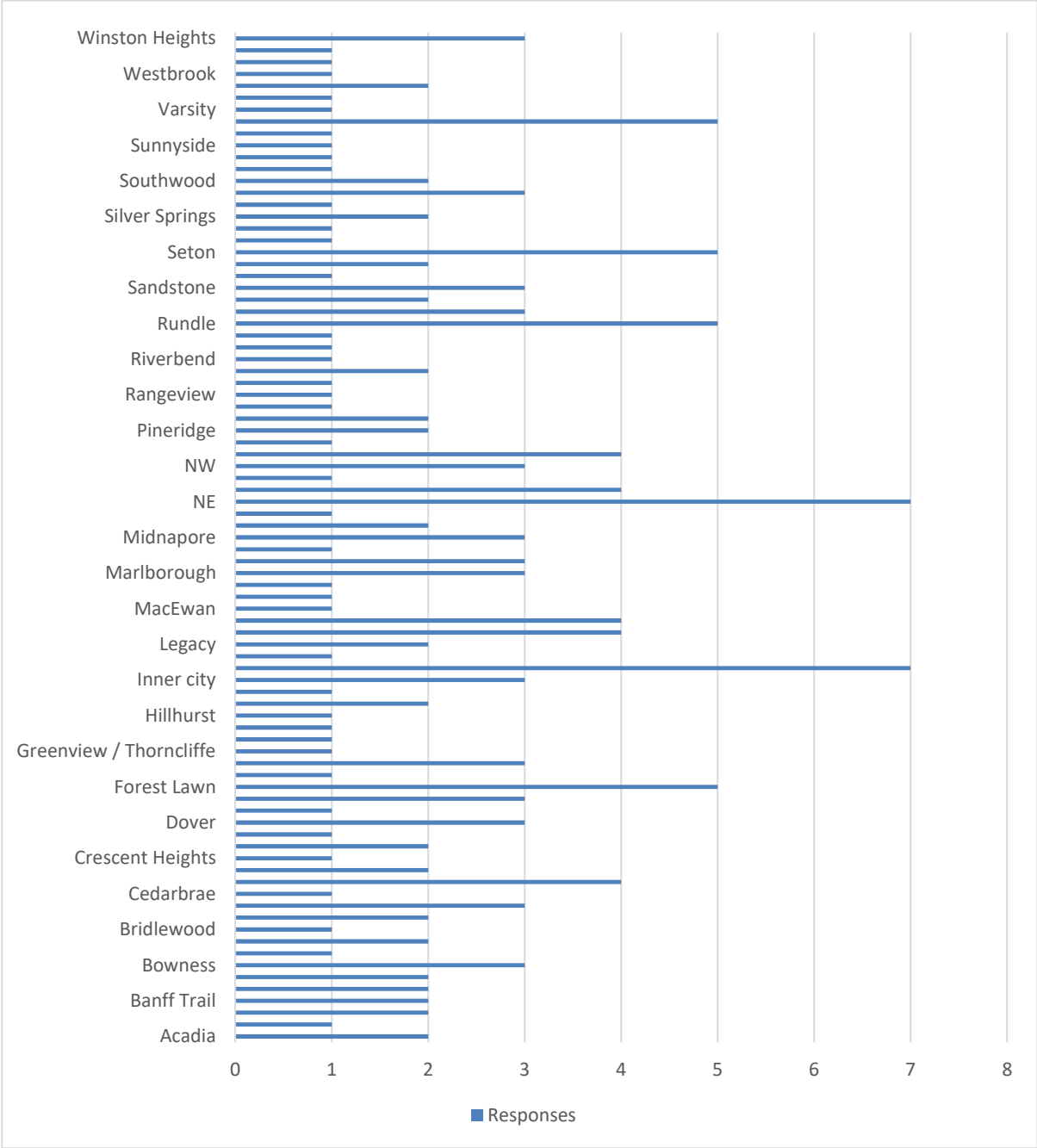
Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

		<p>inspections obviously is necessary to avoid situations like this. As I renter I feel deceived and find myself now stuck in an unsafe situation, because I believe this suite to be legal, as it was registered with the city as such.”</p>
Enable more suites	Some participants advocated for providing more and lower cost housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “Making it easier and faster to create and register secondary suites would be a big help, as it will give me more options when finding a place to live”</li> <li>✓ “More availability, less restriction so there are more places.”</li> <li>✓ “There needs to be more middle scale housing, like 3 or 4 stories that can be built anywhere. This will reduce the cost of rent and put more attractive options on the market.”</li> </ul>



**Q: What neighbourhood do you live in?**

A broad range of communities were mentioned by respondents who answered this question from all quadrants of the city. A full listing of the neighbourhoods is in the verbatim responses document.





# Secondary Suites Feedback

Report Back: What We Heard  
January 2024

## Next Steps

The project team is reviewing the feedback provided by participants. Where possible, feedback will be used to improve the current processes, supports and incentives to encourage the registration of more secondary suites. This information will be summarized and shared in a What We Are Doing report.

As resources for homeowners, landlords and renters are developed they will be shared on [Calgary.ca/secondariesuites](https://calgary.ca/secondariesuites).