



GARDEN SUITES HOW-TO GUIDE

Edmonton



If you've heard about garden suites and are interested in what it would take to build one in Edmonton, this guide is for you.

Building a garden suite is an exciting undertaking, but it won't necessarily be a quick one! From initial planning to construction completion usually takes at least a year. The information provided is intended to help that process go as quickly and smoothly as possible.

We'll walk you through the stages of planning, designing, and building your garden suite while also educating you on the bylaws and regulations you'll have to follow to get your project approved.

The tables, diagrams and resources we've included are here to make the process easier. So read on, get inspired by the idea of a garden suite in your own backyard, and help us as we work to build Everyone's Edmonton!



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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A GARDEN SUITE?

A garden suite is a small living space that's located in the backyard of a single detached house, semi-detached house and row houses. To qualify as a garden suite, the space needs to have its own kitchen, bathroom, sleeping and living space.

Some garden suites include garage space and some have no garage at all.

In the past, you may have heard or read about both garage and garden suites in the City's bylaws. But now, to simplify things, both are treated the same by our bylaws and are referred to inclusively as Garden Suites. By any name, they're a great way to create more housing options in our city.

WHY GARDEN SUITES?

Garden suites are great for adding flexibility to our neighbourhoods. By including smaller, lower maintenance and more affordable living options in our communities, older residents can downsize while staying in the neighbourhoods they love, and younger residents can find housing that fits their budget.

By building a garden suite, homeowners remain the sole residents of their home, while adding some extra rental income from their lot.

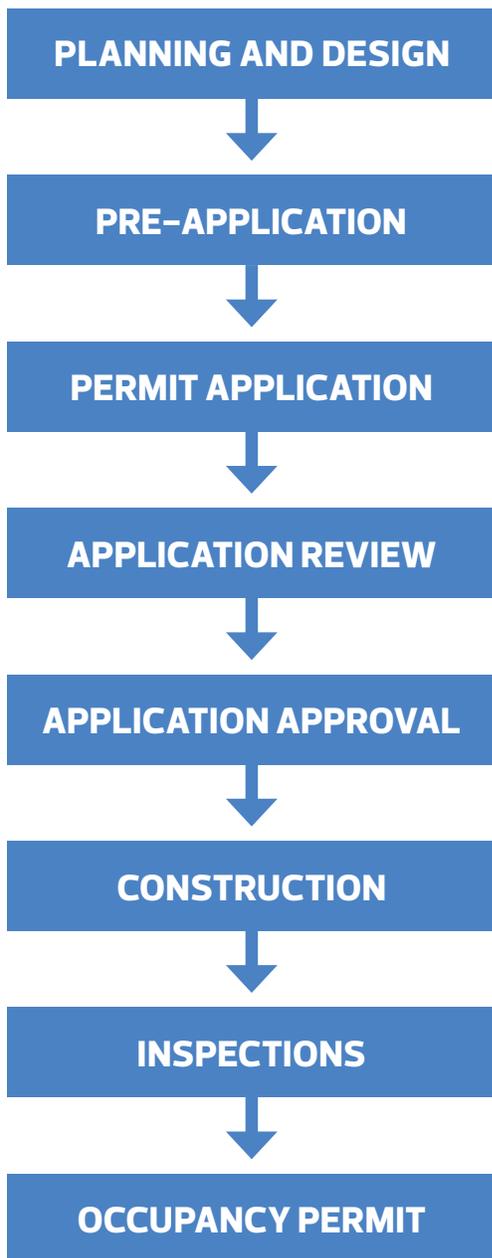
Other homeowners choose to build a garden suite to accommodate an extended family member, like a parent or grandparent, allowing them to live nearby while still maintaining a level of privacy for both.

It's a win-win, and a great way to add housing choice to our neighbourhoods. That helps us be more efficient with our utilities, allows more people to use existing transit routes, and creates more opportunities for local main streets to flourish.

PLANNING OVERVIEW

WHAT STEPS ARE INVOLVED?

Once you confirm your property is eligible for a garden suite (see page 7 for eligibility requirements), you can start taking steps toward having it built. There will be planning, permit applications, construction and inspections before anyone can occupy the space.



1. PLANNING AND DESIGN

The first step is to develop a concept plan for your garden suite. If you don't have experience with design or construction, you can contact an architect or building company to help. This concept plan will be necessary during the application and permitting stages, as it will help City Development Officers determine whether your garden suite meets all the applicable Zoning Bylaw regulations.

This is also a good time to look closer at the cost for your project and to gather whatever financing you'll need. A contractor or architect can help determine these costs.

You may wish to reach out to your neighbours and let them know what you want to build and why. Keeping them informed early in the process can avoid delays later on, and can give you a chance to incorporate their perspectives in your garden suite design. Good neighbours are what makes our city a great place to live.

2. PRE-APPLICATION (OPTIONAL)

To help expedite the application process, the City offers infill pre-application meetings for individuals building garden suites in Edmonton's established neighbourhoods. During these meetings, you'll share your concept plans with the City's planning department for some preliminary feedback. The feedback you receive can be used to get a better idea of the development process you'll be going through as you build your garden suite, and will also provide you with a better understanding of the design considerations you'll have to make for your garden suite.

Keep in mind the more information about your design you are able to provide the City at these meetings, the better the feedback they'll be able to give you.

Visit the [Pre-application Meetings](#) page at [edmonton.ca](#) for more information.

For those not in one of Edmonton's established and mature neighbourhoods, you may wish to call the Edmonton Service Centre at 780.496.8487 or visit in person on the second floor of the Edmonton Tower (10111 104 Avenue). You can speak directly to a Development Officer who can provide basic information and guidance.

PERMIT APPLICATION

Next, you'll have to apply for your development permit and building permit. The information you gathered at your pre-application meeting or conversations at the Edmonton Service Centre will be helpful in ensuring your permit application contains everything City Development and Safety Codes Officers check for.

Keep in mind, if you plan on demolishing an existing garage, you'll need to indicate this on your application as well.

The permit application form can be downloaded at [edmonton.ca/gardensuites](#).

Permit Requirements

Your building project will need to comply with the Edmonton Zoning Bylaw, the Alberta Building Code, and the Safety Codes Act. A development permit and building permit ensures that your project complies with these regulations. If you're tearing down an old structure, like your old garage, you'll need permits for demolition as well. Approval for these permits must be obtained before any construction begins.

When you apply for a development and building permit you'll need to submit your application forms, fees and plans.

3. APPLICATION REVIEW

Your application will be reviewed by:

- A Development Officer to ensure compliance with the Edmonton Zoning Bylaw.
- A Safety Codes Officer to ensure compliance with the Alberta Building Code and Safety Codes Act.

The Development Permit

This permit is used to ensure your garden suite follows the regulations in the Zoning Bylaw that affect your lot.

City staff will review your project against all relevant regulations. When you're coming up with your design concept, remember this: if your garden suite follows all the regulations in the Zoning Bylaw and is a permitted use on your property, your development permit cannot be denied by the City. That's why the pre-application meeting is so helpful. They'll let you know if your concept conflicts with any bylaws. If your project conflicts with any regulations, changes may be required, or you will need to get a variance on your permit which means all neighbours within 60 m of your property will be notified of their right to appeal the permit. If your development permit is refused because it doesn't comply with the regulations or because it's a discretionary use on your property, you can appeal this decision to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board.

The Building Permit

This permit ensures your building is constructed safely and in accordance with the Safety Codes Act and Alberta Building Code.

City staff will review your project against the Alberta Building Code and other safety codes. If your project conflicts with any of these regulations, changes may be required.

4. APPLICATION APPROVAL

You'll need approval for your demolition permit (if required), development permit and building permit before you start any construction.

If your application is approved with variances, your neighbours will be notified of their right to appeal the decision to the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board.

As noted earlier, keeping your neighbours informed throughout the process can help avoid delays at this stage.

If you live in a mature or established neighbourhood, you'll have to post a Development Permit Notification Sign on your property within 14 days of the decision date. The sign must be posted before any demolition or construction begins. Download the City's [Infill Signage Requirements](#) guide for more information about Development Permit Notification Sign requirements.

For more information about what builders should know when working with neighbourhoods, visit [edmonton.ca's Working with Neighbourhoods](#) page.

5. CONSTRUCTION

It's time to build! Undertaking a construction project in your backyard might be disruptive for you, but you also need to think of the disruption for your neighbours. Make sure you talk to them about what's going to happen, and if there will be any especially inconvenient days due to construction equipment taking up space in the alley. This allows your neighbours to plan for any disruptions and will help you to maintain a positive relationship with the people in your community. Check the City of Edmonton infill website for resources like the Good Neighbour Guide.



6. INSPECTIONS

Inspections will occur at certain stages during construction and when the development is complete.

If you're in an established neighbourhood, the Infill Compliance Team may also conduct proactive site inspections to make sure your project complies with City bylaws, like our Zoning Bylaw, Community Standards Bylaw and Traffic Bylaw.

7. OCCUPANCY PERMIT

Once construction is complete and all the required inspections have been approved, an Occupancy Permit will be issued. Your garden suite is finally ready to become a home!



REGULATIONS

This section outlines the key regulations you'll need to follow for your development permit.

IS MY LOT ELIGIBLE? FIND YOUR ZONE

In the past, garden suites were only eligible in certain locations, like corner lots or next to commercial zones. Today, because of updates to the Zoning Bylaw, a garden suite can be built on many more low density residential lots.

To determine whether your lot is eligible, you'll need to know your zone that's affecting your lot.

If you don't know your zone you can visit maps.edmonton.ca to find your information.

FINDING YOUR ZONE

Visit maps.edmonton.ca and click Zoning. The link will take you to a map. Look on the left side of the screen for a series of text boxes. Here you can enter your House Number and Street or Avenue Name. Enter your property's information and click Find Address. Once your property has been found, look under the General tab in the lower right portion of the screen. There you can find your zone under Current Zone and you can open the hyperlink to find your zone specific regulations.

Once you know your zone, you can determine whether garden suites are a permitted use for your zone, and, if so, whether your lot is eligible for a garden suite based on its size.

Being a permitted use means that if you meet all the rules of the Zoning Bylaw, your permit will be approved by the City. Discretionary use means a Development Officer can use their discretion to decide whether a garden suite will be allowed based on the specific context of your property.

The screenshot displays the Edmonton Zoning Map application. On the left, there is a 'Locate' panel with input fields for 'House Number', 'Unit (optional)', and 'Street or Avenue Name', along with a 'Find Address' button. The main map area shows various zoning districts such as RA9, RA7, DC2, and RF2. A specific lot at 87 AVENUE NW is highlighted in red. Below the map, a 'Results' panel is open, showing the address '87 AVENUE NW, T6E2P2' and a detailed 'Legal Description for Title Lot' with the following information:

Address:	
Legal Description for Title Lot:	
Area:	357,245 m ²
Year Built:	1941
Neighbourhood:	Strathcona
Ward:	Ward 8
Community League:	Strathcona Centre Community League
Waste Collection:	More Information
Current Zone:	Small Scale Infill Development Zone (RF3)
Current Bylaw:	12800
Proposed Applications:	None
Proposed Zone:	None
Proposed Bylaw:	None
Overlays:	Mature Neighbourhood Overlay
Plan in Effect:	Strathcona ABP

LOCATION ON THE LOT

Your garden suite must be built within certain boundaries on your lot.

You'll need to make sure you provide the required amount of space between your garden suite and the back property line (rear setback), front property line (front setback), side property lines (side setback), and your house.

REAR SETBACK

If the garage door on the garden suite faces the lane, the building must be at least 1.2 m from the back of your property. If the garage door on the garden suite does not face the lane, the building can be 0.6 m from the back of your property.

FRONT SETBACK

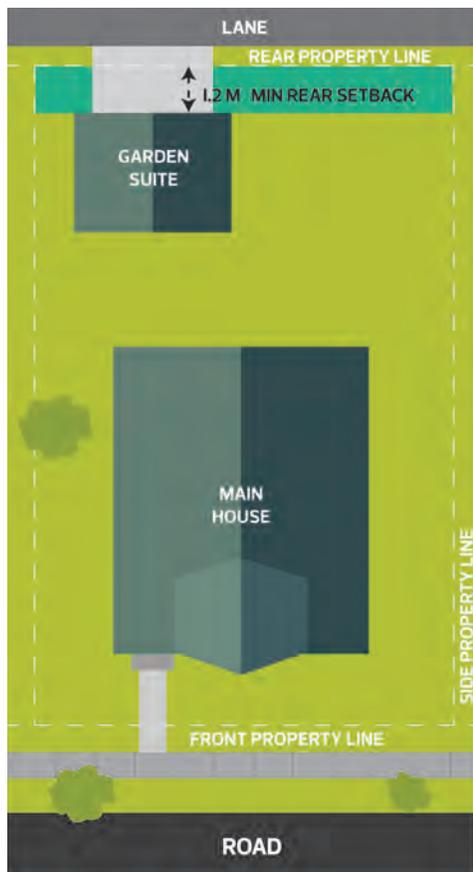
A garden suite must be at least 18 m from the front of your property. If you are in a neighbourhood where the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay applies, your suite can't extend farther than 12.8 m from the back of your property.

SIDE SETBACK

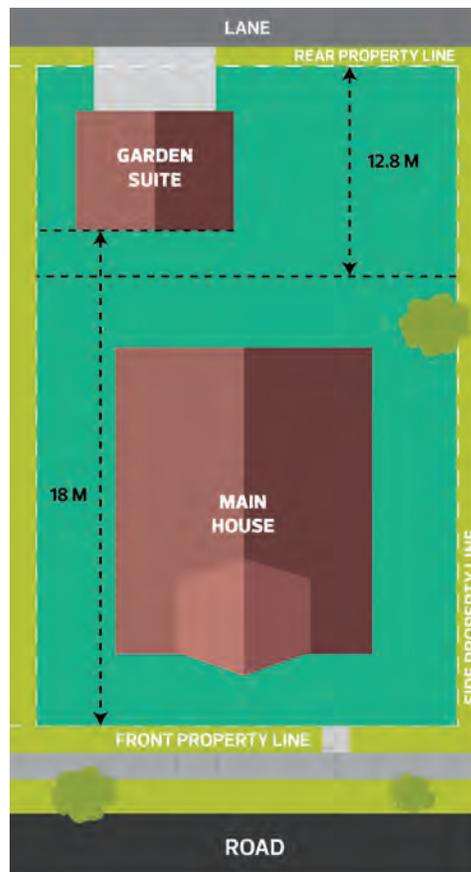
The minimum distance from the garden suite to the side lot lines is the same as what is required for the principal dwelling in your property's zone or overlay. Residential zones can be found in Part II of the Zoning Bylaw. If you're in a mature neighbourhood, your side setback may be determined by the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay (Section 814).

HOUSE

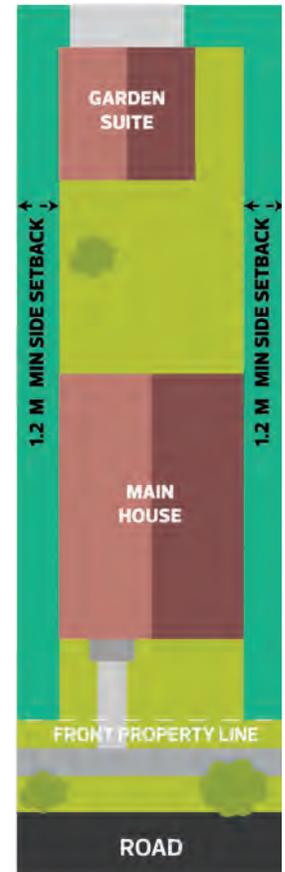
A garden suite must be at least 4 m from your house.



Rear Setback



Front Setback



Side Setback



SIZE & HEIGHT

HEIGHT

The maximum height for a garden suite no longer depends on the height of the existing house. Instead, it depends on:

- Whether you have a sloped roof or flat roof
- Where your property is located



If you're designing a garden suite with a **sloped roof**, the height will be measured to the **midpoint** of the roof.

If you're designing a garden suite with a **flat roof**, the height will be measured to the **highest part** of the roof.

Section 52 of the Zoning Bylaw provides information about measuring height and how to calculate the grade for garden suites.

Table 2: Maximum Heights

Location	Sloped Roof (slope 4/12 greater)	Flat Roof
Garden suite with back lane		
	6.5 m	6.2 m
Garden suite without lane		
	4.3 m	4.3 m
In TSDR, TSLR & GLG zones	7.5 m	7.5 m

Note: Depending on the roof slope, there is a different height requirements. The above table shows the maximum height allowed for the Garden Suite with a roof slope of 4/12 (18.4°) or greater. See Section 87 of the Zoning Bylaw for more information.

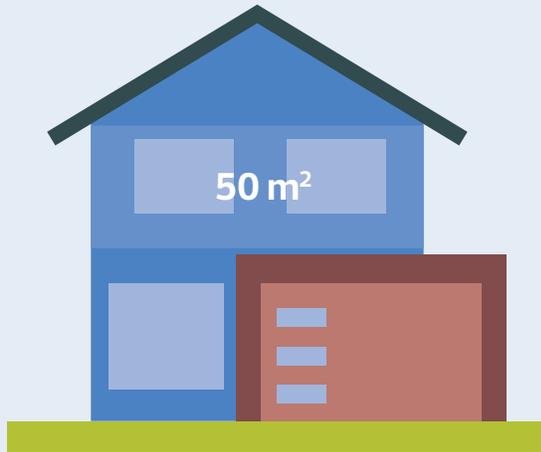
BUILDING SIZE

The total size of your building is determined by two regulations—floor area and site coverage.

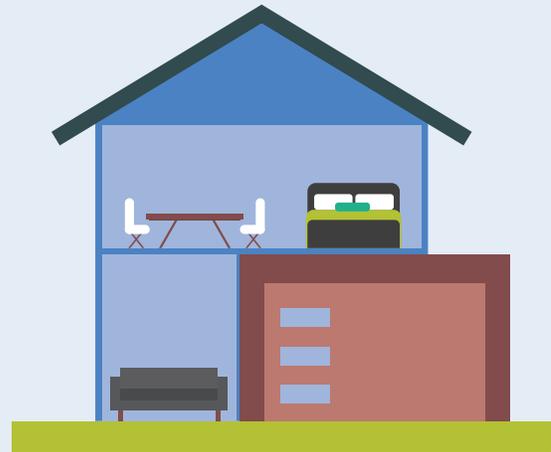
- **Floor area** is the total square footage of your building.
- **Site coverage** is the size of your building's footprint, or in other words, the amount of your property the building covers.

Floor Area (Square Footage) – The floor area of a garden suite includes the living area (bedrooms, kitchen, etc.) and garage parking spaces.

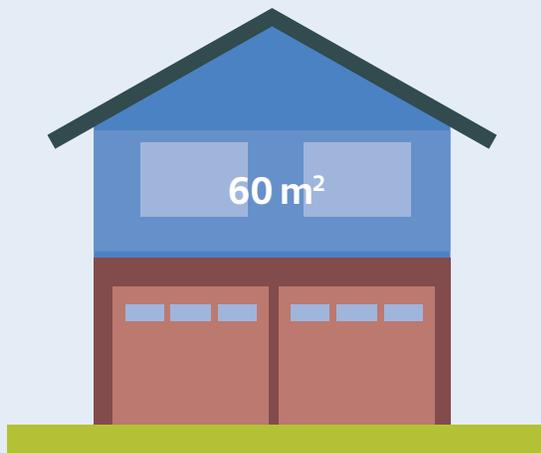
The **maximum total floor area** allowed for a garden suite is **130 m²**, including living area and garage parking spaces.



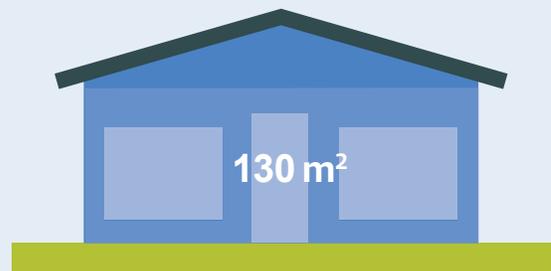
There are some restrictions on where the 130 m² living space can go—specifically how big your second storey can be. The maximum second storey floor area in the RF1, RF2, RF3, RF4, RF5, RF6, RA7, and RA8 zones is 50 m².



Because the size of the second storey is limited, you may want to build a split-level suite in order to get as much living space as possible. Some cities, like Vancouver, have a lot of suites built this way that you can look to for inspiration.



In every other zone, the maximum second storey living space can be 60 m². If your Garden Suite meets inclusive design requirements in Section 93 of Zoning Bylaw, the maximum second storey living space can be 60 m².



On larger sites, you might also consider doing a single storey garden suite, with all living space at ground level.

If you're installing a staircase or elevator inside the building, you can exclude **up to 6m²** from the total floor area calculation and **up to 6m²** for the elevators and any associated landing areas

Building Footprint (Site Coverage) – The total footprint of your building is calculated as a percentage of your property's overall size. The percentage of your property your garden suite can cover depends on:

- Your property's zone
- Whether you have a large main house

In the **RF1, RF2, RF3, RF4, RF5, RF6, RA7, and RA8 zones**, your garden suite and any other accessory buildings can cover up to 18% of your lot.

In all cases, the garage parking areas and other accessory buildings (such as sheds) on your property cannot cover more than 12% of your property. The extra site coverage can only be used to accommodate living spaces on the ground floor, including storage and staircases.

In **all other zones**, your garden suite can cover 2% more of your lot than you'd be allowed for a normal accessory building, like a detached garage. You're also allowed 2% more total site coverage for all the buildings on your property.

To determine the site coverage you're allowed, look to your property's zone and find the site coverage regulations. Add 2% to the number specified for accessory building coverage to find the maximum footprint for your garden suite. Add 2% to the number specified for total site coverage to find the maximum footprint for all structures on your property.

In all cases, the garage parking areas and other accessory buildings (such as sheds) on your property cannot cover more than the number specified for accessory building coverage. The extra site coverage can only be used to accommodate living spaces on the ground floor, including storage and staircases.

Table 3: Maximum Site Coverages

Zone	Maximum Site Coverage for the Garden Suite and other Accessory buildings	Maximum Site Coverage for Parking Areas in the Garden Suite, and Other Accessory Buildings	Total Maximum Site Coverage for Principal Dwelling, Garden Suite, and Other Accessory Buildings
RF1, RF2, RF3, RF4, RF5, RF6, RA7, and RA8	18% 	12% 	Add +2% to the maximum total site coverage in your zone 
All Other Zones	Add +2% to the maximum accessory building coverage in your zone 	Equal to the maximum accessory building coverage in your zone 	Add +2% to the maximum total site coverage in your zone 

The space underneath balconies and other structures higher than 1m above the ground are counted in site coverage.

PARKING

Homeowners can decide how much parking to provide with their garden suite based on their own particular needs. Specific details about parking requirements can be found in Section 54 of the Zoning Bylaw. The standards your garden suite must be built to in order to be considered wheelchair accessible can be found in Section 93 of the Zoning Bylaw.

LANDSCAPING

We encourage residents to work with their architect or building company to build attractive landscaping into their garden suite concept.

Consideration should go into how that rear lane can be transformed into an inviting entrance.

Shrubs, lighting and small landscaping improvements will not only be appreciated by the suite's occupants, but by neighbours who use the laneway. Windows at the ground and second storey that face onto the lane can also improve safety.

If you're lucky, it might catch on and over time your rear lane will become as attractive and inviting as the front.

ACCESSIBILITY

Edmonton is a winter city, and the exteriors of our homes are subject to precipitation and frigid temperatures. We encourage property owners who develop garden suites to be mindful of the suite's accessibility.

For example, if your garden suite is on the second storey of a garage, we encourage you to install the staircase inside the building instead of outside. This will prevent the buildup of ice and snow on the stairs and make access to the suite much easier.

As an incentive to encourage interior staircases, the City has changed its bylaws to allow up to 6 m² for stairs to be excluded from the square footage calculation for living space.

We also want to make sure garden suites are accessible for people with all levels of mobility. If you are installing an elevator in your unit, up to 6 m² for the elevator and landings can be excluded from the square footage calculation.

For more information about building an accessible or barrier-free suite, check out Section 93 of the Zoning Bylaw and visit www.homeforlife.ca.

OVERLOOK & PRIVACY

The addition of a garden suite, especially one with a second storey, can have implications for neighbour's privacy.

In the spirit of being a good neighbour, and to comply with the Zoning Bylaw, you and your designers should try to minimize the amount of overlook created by a garden suite.

If your garden suite is two storeys, you must submit information about the proposed location of second storey windows in relation to the neighbouring yard spaces and windows. Second storey windows must be designed to reduce views into neighbouring yards and windows. This can be done by:

- Off-setting windows
- Locating windows above eye level
- Adding frosting to windows
- Positioning windows to face trees or neighbouring garages
- Placing larger windows to face a lane or street

BALCONIES

Balconies are an excellent way to provide some private outdoor space for your garden suite's occupants. But, you'll need to consider the balcony's location and overlook into your neighbours' yards.

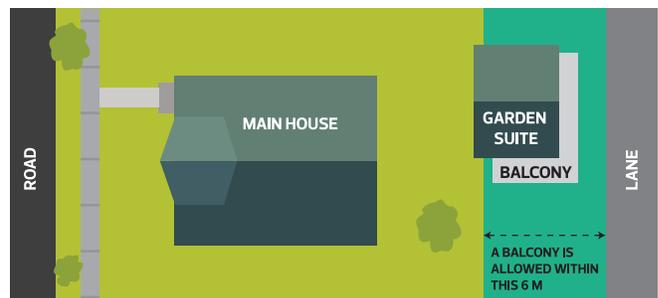
Garden suites balconies must follow the regulations below:

LOCATION

Balconies higher than 1 m must be located no further than 6 m from the back of your property.

Exception: If your suite is next to a side street or side laneway, the balcony can wrap around that full side facing the street or side laneway.

Rooftop terraces are not allowed on garden suites.



PRIVACY SCREENING

Balconies higher than 1 m require privacy screening to reduce overlook onto properties that share your property line.

More information about privacy screening requirements can be found in Section 49 of the Zoning Bylaw.

LIGHTING

Lighting can be an excellent design element to your new garden suite, and pedestrian-friendly lighting, such as porch lights or bollard lights, help make the rear lane a safe and welcoming public space.

The sides of your garden suite that face a lane must have exterior lighting, but instead of simply thinking of it as a requirement, consider it an opportunity to add some extra safety and ambience to the rear lane. You may wish to check out Edmonton's Light Efficiency Community Policy for suggestions on how to make sure your outdoor lighting doesn't negatively impact the environment.

DESIGN REGULATIONS

We encourage homeowners to develop their garden suites with as many of the below design elements as possible. However, each exterior side of the garden suite must have at least two of the following features:

- Projection or recession of portions of the façade
- Projecting architectural features
- Balconies
- Two or more exterior finishing materials
- Entrance features facing a road or lane
- Dormers
- Window trim with a minimum width of 7.5 cm

The full list of features can be found in Section 87 of Zoning Bylaw

On corner sites, the sides facing the lane and the street need to use consistent building materials and architectural features.

When a garden suite contains a garage, there must be an entrance to the living space from a common indoor landing or directly from outside. This must be separate from the vehicle entrance to the garage.

Entrances must also include a covered feature over the main door to the suite.

DESIGN IN CONTEXT

If you're building in an established area, you may wish to consider the architectural styles of the surrounding homes, and the typical placement and orientation of other garages and garden suites in your area. This can help integrate your garden suite into the existing context.

DESIGN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

As with any new development in our city, we encourage residents to build for the long term. That means designing sustainable structures that integrate well with the city, are built for generations to enjoy, and have limited impact on our environment. Low impact development can also save you money in the long run by reducing utility bills.

You can design for sustainability through the following:

- Retain existing trees
- Install south-facing windows, when possible, to increase passive heating from the sun
- Maintain permeable surfaces to help with drainage and the city's water table
- Add insulation to minimize the energy cost of heating and cooling
- Incorporate green technology such as solar panels or geothermal heating

REIMAGINE THE REAR LANE

The addition of garden suites to our city's mix of housing will give more people more living options. But you, as a homeowner in a localized area of the city, can think of it as an opportunity to reimagine the potential of your rear lane.

Instead of seeing it as a secluded alley where you leave your garbage for pick up once a week, you can begin its transformation into a quaint street with friendly neighbours, lovely architecture and beautiful landscaping.

The garden suite invites us all to throw out our preconceptions of the alley, and start doing a better job of using all the living space offered to us in our city. The rear lane has a lot more potential than we've ever asked of it in the past. Garden suites, and their purposeful design, are a chance to build beauty into our underutilized back lanes.



CONSTRUCTION

The construction process can be one of the most exciting, and also one of the more disruptive times on the way to your completed garden suite. You'll have a construction project going on right in your backyard, and the equipment, noise, and mess can be a lot to handle.

While you'll have to go through the permitting process to ensure your project fits within the City's bylaws and provincial requirements, it's also worth spending time to consider how you can ease the process for everyone.

Think of your neighbours and talk to them about what's about to happen.

Think of the builder and consider how you can work with them to streamline the process.

Think of the City, the trees, the streets and other factors that every citizen enjoys when they're in your neighbourhood.

WORKING WITH NEIGHBOURS

You aren't the only one who will be living through the construction phase of your new garden suite. Your neighbours will share in the noise and inconvenience of swinging hammers, demolition equipment, and construction trucks taking up room on your street and laneway.

Try to work with your neighbours to get them as excited as you are about your new garden suite.

Tell them about why you decided to build it, what you think it can do for your neighbourhood, and how it could transform the streetscape of the rear lane.

And, of course, be mindful for the inevitable disruption caused by construction.

Try to let your neighbours know when you plan to demolish any existing buildings, or if there will be any especially inconvenient days (like extra trucks taking up street parking or a piece of equipment blocking the rear lane) so that they can plan for the disturbance.

The best thing you can do is maintain open lines of communication with everyone involved. It will help bring your community together and help keep you in your neighbours' good books.

WORKING WITH BUILDERS

Builders are busy professionals who work to balance quality, costs, and timelines on their projects. Your garden suite is no different.

As a homeowner, you have a different set of concerns. Quality, costs and timeline are important, but you're also mindful of the state of your surrounding assets like your trees, fences, and yard, and you want to consider the neighbours, as they'll remain neighbours long after the builder packs up and leaves.

Below are a few pointers to keep in mind while working with your builder so that both parties achieve the results they're after.

STAY INFORMED

Because your builder is building on your private property, any damages that occur to the trees, street, or neighbouring properties are your responsibility.

Do your best to stay informed about building practices being used by the construction team. You don't want to slow them down, but you will want to stay on top of what's happening.

TALK TO YOUR BUILDER

We suggest you read the City of Edmonton's Construction Best Practices Guide and ask your builder to follow the suggestions in Section 1: Site Management and Maintenance.

In Edmonton, noise from construction activity is only permitted during certain times of the day. To view the current rules, visit edmonton.ca's [Noise](#) page. Tell your builder that even though these are the bylaws, you'd appreciate it if they could limit more disruptive noise to the mid-day hours.

Let your builder know you'll be informing your neighbours there will be an increase in the number of vehicles parked on the streets in the coming months, but that you'd also appreciate it if the builder and their team could be respectful to the parking needs of the other residents.

TREE PROTECTION

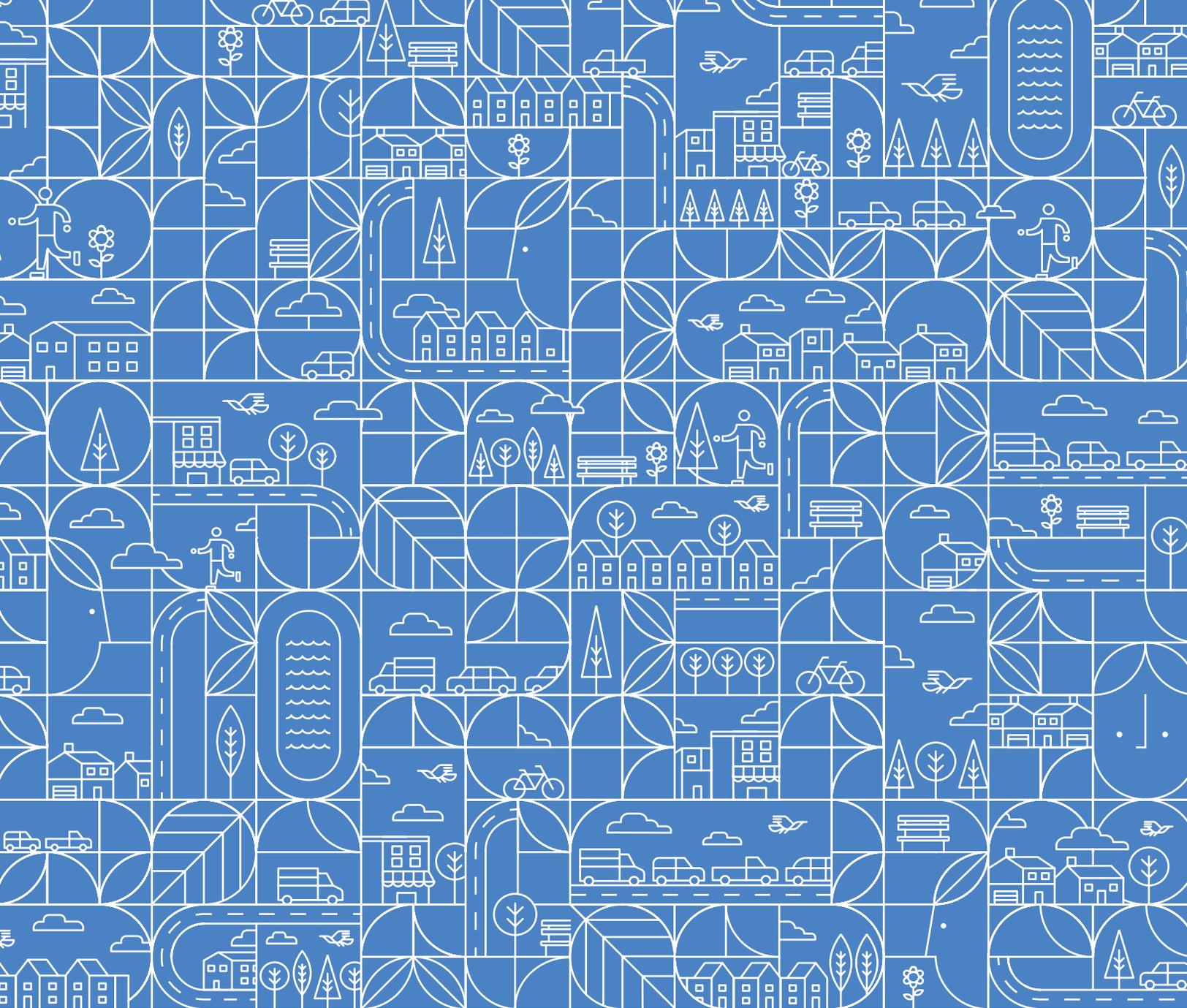
Trees are an asset to our city. Mature trees play an essential role in the environmental quality and biodiversity of the city, and contribute to the livability of our neighbourhoods. They're a beautiful feature of our mature communities and we need to be vigilant in the face of new construction and development if we're to keep them swaying.

Diverse, attractive landscaping and plant material on private properties also reinforces the unique community character of existing mature neighbourhoods, and helps reduce the visual impact of new development.

If the development of your garden suite takes place within 5 m of any city trees, you'll need to provide a tree protection plan to Urban Forestry. You can request an Urban Forester to help you create your tree protection plan by calling 311.

Taking on a garden suite project is an exciting but challenging process. We hope this guide will help you to build a beautiful home for yourself or someone else. For additional resources, please see the back page of this guide.





CONTACT

311 or if outside of Edmonton **780.442.5311**

Edmonton Service Centre

2nd Floor, 10111 104 Avenue NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0J4

Last updated on December 2021

For more information and for resources like our Conversation Toolkit, the Residential Construction Guide and more, check out:

edmonton.ca/gardensuites

edmonton.ca/permits