

NOTICE OF MOTION

Clarifying the Distinction Between Duplexes and Secondary Suites

Moved by: Councillor Rachel Chernos Lin _____

Seconded by: Councillor James Pasternak _____

SUMMARY:

Since 2023, permissions for multiplexes have existed in neighbourhoods across Toronto. In the years since, the City has monitored the rollout of duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes citywide to identify issues, address challenges and improve the City’s approach to their implementation. This approach has already resulted in a range of improvements to our multiplex by-laws, responding directly to situations that were not anticipated in the initially adopted permissions.

An issue as-of-yet unaddressed in the City’s approach to multiplexes arises from the definition of “duplex” as it currently exists, which is a subset of the broader “houseplex” definition. Houseplexes are entitled to expanded permissions beyond what would typically be allowed for a single-family dwelling, or a detached dwelling with a secondary suite, including relaxed restrictions for height and setbacks.

To meet the definition of a duplex, an applicant must only provide two units on separate levels. No requirements are in place for proportionality between the units in a multiplex, or for minimum unit size beyond what is prescribed in the Ontario Building Code. Notably, this definition is almost indistinguishable from existing “secondary suite” permissions, which are proposed to be harmonized under houseplex permissions.

In practice this has resulted in applications where a minimal secondary dwelling is proposed in the basement of a home, effectively allowing for a larger home than would typically be permitted for a single-family detached building. Where the City’s multiplex policy intends to deliver multiple livable units on lots throughout the City, the lack of clarity around expectations for duplexes results in builds that in some cases do not deliver more than could be accommodated through the existing secondary suite permissions, while receiving the benefit of relaxed restrictions intended to provide more substantial living space.

Reviewing our approach to duplexes will help to align the City’s policy with intended outcomes. If applicants are granted permissions for larger buildings as a result of the inclusion of a second unit, those permissions should be justified by the unit’s scale or proportionality to the primary dwelling unit. Buildings with secondary units achieving the bare minimum required under the Ontario Building Code do not warrant expanded building envelopes and should continue to be regulated under secondary suite permissions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. City Council request the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to provide clarification on what constitutes a “duplex” versus a secondary suite under the City-wide Zoning By-law, including recommendations on minimum unit size or proportionality between dwelling units to uphold the intent of multiplexes and potential updates to secondary suite definition and permissions to reflect distinctions between the two forms, in their upcoming Multiplex Monitoring Program report.
2. City Council request the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, in consultation with the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, to explore the ability to track whether secondary units created under duplex permissions are retained post-construction through the Multiplex Monitoring Program report.

Date: April 21, 2026