



# Converting an accessory building to an accessory dwelling unit (ADU)

This bulletin provides guidance from the City of Courtenay Building Division for converting an existing accessory building into a habitable accessory dwelling unit (ADU). Not all accessory buildings can be converted. Requirements will depend on when and how the building was constructed, and whether upgrades are needed to meet current standards.

## Before you begin

- The existing building must have been constructed with a valid building permit.
- If details of the construction are hidden (for example, walls or ceilings are finished), you may need to expose them or provide confirmation from a registered professional (architect or engineer).
- Additional approvals may be required depending on site conditions and design.

## Building code and construction requirements

Converting an accessory building into a home means meeting all applicable requirements of the BC Building Code (BCBC). This may include:

### Structural and foundations

- **Seismic design:** A structural engineer must confirm the existing construction or provide approved plans for upgrades.
- **Foundation/footings:** Must comply with BCBC standards. Depth, drainage, and damp proofing must be confirmed.

### Walls, roof, and slab

- **Exterior walls:** Must meet insulation and fire-resistance standards. Cladding may need to be upgraded to non-combustible material depending on proximity to property lines.
- **Roof/ceiling:** Must meet insulation, ventilation, and fire safety requirements. In some cases, solid soffits may be required.
- **Slab:** Must meet insulation, radon protection, and damp proofing requirements.

### Energy efficiency

- Must meet the City's energy step code requirements. An energy advisor report will be required.

### Fire and life safety

- **Egress:** Each sleeping room must have a safe exit window or door. All exits, stairs, and handrails must meet code.
- **Spatial separation:** Must meet minimum distances between buildings.
- **Fire and sound separation:** Required if the ADU is in a building that also contains a garage or workshop.

- **Smoke alarms:** Hardwired and interconnected on each floor, in every bedroom, and in hallways.
- **Carbon monoxide alarms:** Required if the building has a garage or fuel-burning appliance.

## Mechanical and utilities

- **Heating and cooling:** A cooling system must keep at least one room below 26°C in summer. Mechanical ventilation is required.
- **Plumbing:** A licensed plumber must confirm fixture load, supply line, and sewer line capacity. Upgrades may be required.
- **Electrical:** Proof of existing Technical Safety BC permits or new permits for additional work must be provided.

## Other considerations

- **Planning review:** The building must meet zoning requirements, including height and setbacks.
- **New Home Warranty:** May be required if the building was constructed within the last 10 years. Contact BC Housing for details.
- **Development Cost Charges (DCCs):** May apply to your project.

## Next steps

1. Review the City of Courtenay's ADU webpage: [www.courtenay.ca/adu](http://www.courtenay.ca/adu)
2. Consult with a designer or registered professional if structural upgrades are needed.
3. Confirm zoning and site eligibility with the Planning Division: [planning@courtenay.ca](mailto:planning@courtenay.ca).
4. Apply for a building permit: [Building Permit Application Form](#).
5. Contact the Building Division at [building@courtenay.ca](mailto:building@courtenay.ca) with any questions.