

## POSITION STATEMENT

CREB<sup>®</sup> supports secondary suites in the city of Calgary

### ISSUE

Housing affordability and choice are critical contributors to Calgarians' quality of life. To remain an attractive place to live, Calgary must offer a range of housing options to meet the needs of its citizens at different stages of life and with different financial capabilities. This includes sufficient stock of affordable rental units. The City of Calgary and City Council has the opportunity to cost-effectively provide more affordable rental housing by allowing the development of secondary suites in all residential neighbourhoods.

Currently, in the city of Calgary, secondary suites are only permitted in select land use districts and only as a discretionary use in the R-2 district in both developed and developing areas. The Land Use Bylaw will not allow secondary suites to be developed on parcels that are currently designated R-1, without a formal land use re-designation. As a result, there are currently secondary suites throughout the city of Calgary that provide important affordable housing options, but are considered illegal or are in non-compliance.

The City of Calgary did launch the Secondary Suite Grant Program in April 2009 which offers a grant of up to \$25,000 to cover up to 70 per cent of the costs of developing or upgrading a legal secondary suite. This is an important move in the right direction, but a number of barriers remain to increasing the number of legal secondary suites in the city of Calgary.

For example, the process for seeking a land use redesignation is arduous and time consuming and, according to a recent report<sup>1</sup>, completed on behalf of The City of Calgary, the Grant Program is not seen to provide enough incentive for a homeowner to take on re-designation. Furthermore, while meeting fire and safety code issues is critical, it was noted in the same report that if there were fewer restrictions and requirements to building legal secondary suites, there would be less need for a grant program. Additionally, REALTORS<sup>®</sup> reported that they have more clients interested in secondary suites than there is supply and more than 90% attending a recent information session believed that secondary suites make homes more affordable.

### POSITION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to this issue, CREB<sup>®</sup> proposes that City Council considers the following recommendations:

- The City of Calgary provides a process to fast-track and simplify the approval of secondary suites.
- The City of Calgary authorizes secondary suites as a permitted use in all residential neighbourhoods, provided there is sufficient parking and infrastructure and safety concerns are met. In addition, secondary suites which are permitted in single family areas should be restricted to owner-occupied properties only.
- The City of Calgary implement incentives to reduce the cost of improving or developing secondary suites to comply with the building code.

## BENEFITS

The provision to make secondary suites permitted in all residential neighbourhoods in the city of Calgary offers a number of important benefits:

- Provides a cost-effective supply of affordable rental housing options for Calgarians.
- Offers flexibility for changing lifestyles and demographic shifts and helps to provide a range of housing options for students, young professionals, aging parents, live-in care takers/nursing aides and extended family.
- Allows homeowners to increase the value, flexibility and attractiveness of their home.
- Provides economic and social benefits, including helping families to achieve homeownership and for seniors to stay in their homes longer, through the support of rental income.
- Protects and preserves property rights of homeowners—allowing homeowners to choose how their property can best meet their unique needs.
- Increases urban density and supports smart growth principles—reducing the need for unnecessary suburban sprawl.

## Sources

1 CitySpaces Consulting Ltd. (2010) Secondary Suites Grant Pilot Program Evaluation Progress. Report #1. March 2010