

Backyard Housing: How-to Guide

Development Services

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Ensure use of the most recent version
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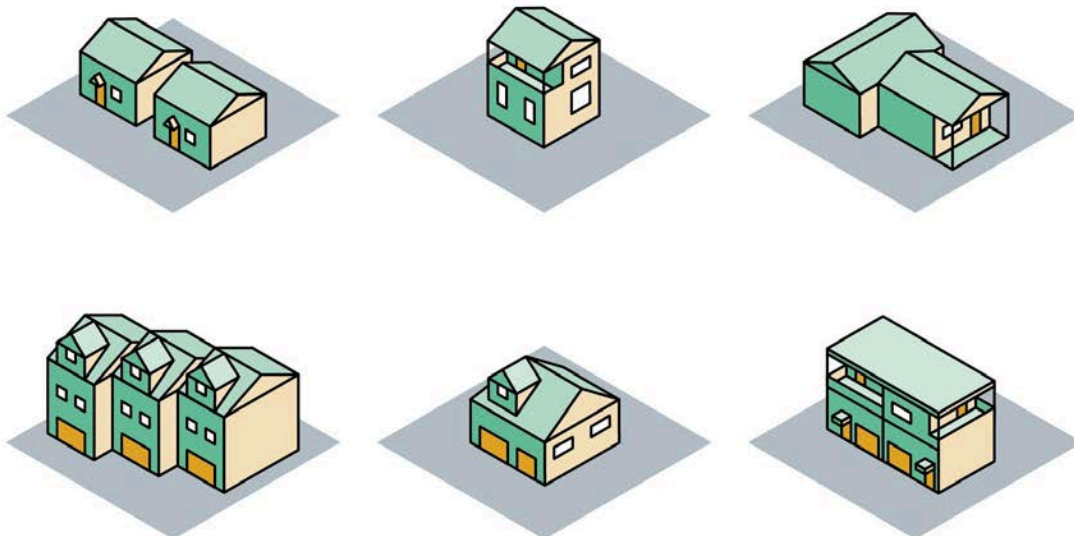
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WHAT IS BACKYARD HOUSING?

Backyard Housing is a self contained home in the rear yard of a residential property. To qualify as Backyard Housing, the space needs to have its own kitchen, bathroom, sleeping and living area.

Previously known as garage suites or garden suites, the term Backyard Housing reflects the more broad range of housing options made possible through new regulations, such as the City's updated Zoning Bylaw. Regulations were expanded to allow flexibility and more opportunity to develop this type of housing. Some of the key features of the new regulations include:

- Backyard Housing is no longer considered to be an accessory building. This means they are allowed to be constructed on vacant lots before any other housing, may be eligible to convert to a condominium, and may contain a Secondary Suite (such as a basement suite).
- They may be arranged in different built forms, such as single detached, semi-detached and row housing.
- There can be one or more Backyard House per lot.
- They may be attached to other buildings such as a garage or an existing Backyard House.



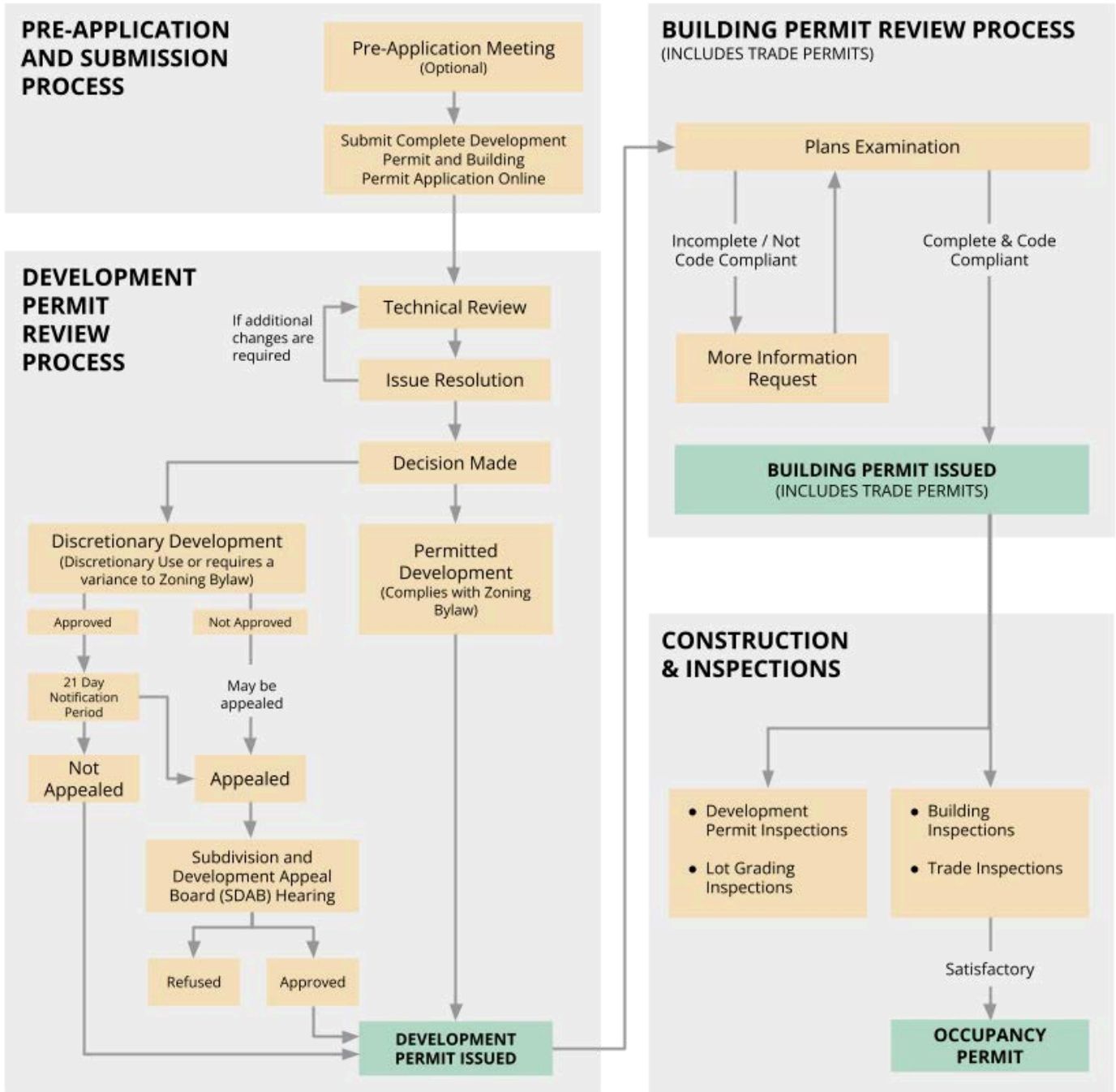
WHY BACKYARD HOUSING?

Backyard Housing continues to be a great way to add flexibility and choice 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 Backyard Housing, homeowners remain the sole residents of their home, while adding some extra rental income from their lot. Other homeowners choose to build Backyard Housing to support multi-generational living, allowing family members to live nearby while still maintaining a level of privacy for both.



TYPICAL PROJECT PROCESS



APPLICATION STEPS

Step 1: Before You Apply for a Backyard House

Do I Need A Permit?



Building a new Backyard House or constructing an addition to an existing Backyard House requires several types of permits, including a Development Permit and a Building Permit.

Why you need a development permit

Development permits ensure your projects are allowed and fit in with the surrounding neighbourhood as per the [Zoning Bylaw](#).

Why you need a building permit

Building and trade permits ensure that what is built is safe and that design and construction are done following the [Alberta Safety Codes Act](#).

Why permits are important

Permits are an important part of guiding development and achieving the safe, inclusive, vibrant and walkable city envisioned by [The City Plan](#).

Permits allow you to begin construction

Starting work without written permission can result in stop-work orders, fines or administrative penalties.

Who Can Apply?

Homeowner-builders can apply for a one unit Backyard House permit. They can also have their contractors apply for the permits on their behalf. Only professional contractors can apply for multi-unit Backyard Houses. All necessary trade permits are included in the building permit application. Inspections are required for each building and trades discipline separately.

Fees and Processing Times



For new construction of Backyard Housing, fees are based on the square footage of the building that is being constructed and the number of units.

A full list of fees for a standard single-dwelling Backyard House can be found in the annual "Residential Permits and Fees Listing" located on the [Permit Fees Listing](#) page. For Backyard Housing projects that are more complex, the fees will differ. You can find those fees in the "Planning and Development Fee Schedules" which are located on the same webpage.

Construction Values and Building and Safety Code (Trades) Permit Fees

Building permit and safety code fees are based on the proposed floor area. The "Planning and Development Fee Schedule" indicates in the notes how the floor area is calculated.

Payment

There are several ways to make a [payment](#).

Application Processing Times

Application processing times can be found on the [development and construction application processing times](#) page in the new home construction permits section. You can also visit the [building permit queue time](#) web page for general building permit processing wait times or check the status of your specific application by visiting the project dashboard in [selfserve.edmonton.ca](#).



Tips and Professional Support

Tips for Planning Your Project

Ensure that your application is complete and meets all requirements to avoid application processing delays. Consider hiring a contractor or other professional support to help with the design and construction of your project as required.

Be mindful of construction safety considerations, such as being aware of and not damaging gas or other utility line locations. Don't start construction until you receive your approved permits.



Hiring Professional Support

Homeowners are encouraged to consider [hiring professional contractors](#) and designers to assist them, especially for more complex projects. Professional contractors and designers can help make the application process smoother by designing your project and drawing your plans so they meet requirements and applying for permits on your behalf.

We recommend using a contractor experienced in the type of project proposed. Working without an experienced, certified professional may significantly increase the application review processing time as City staff may require you to modify your plans to comply with regulations.

Step 2: Understand Location Restrictions

Understand the location restrictions, such as zoning and ground utilities clearance, that impact the size and location of your proposed Backyard House.

Check Zone and Overlay Regulations

The [Zoning Bylaw](#) is a living document and regulations are subject to change. Always plan your projects based on the current zoning requirements at zoningbylaw.edmonton.ca.

Backyard Housing is allowed in most neighbourhoods and residential zones. However, not all residential properties have the same zoning regulations. Your proposed project will need to fit with the zoning regulations of the area where you plan to build.

To confirm a property's zoning, use the City of Edmonton's interactive zoning map.

- Go to maps.edmonton.ca/zoning.
- Click "I want to" in the top left and select "search by address". Enter the property's address and click "submit".
- The property's zoning will be displayed in the "related records" table. Click on the zone and select the "more info" link to be sent to the corresponding zone in the zoning bylaw.
- Open the "Permitted Uses" tab. Backyard Housing is considered a "Residential" use. If this use is listed, then Backyard Housing is allowed in that zone.

Backyard Housing is permitted in the following standard zones: RS, RSF, RSM, RSM and RR. If you live in a Special Area Zone, Backyard Housing may have different regulations or may not be allowed to be built in certain areas.

Contact developmentpermits@edmonton.ca if you need assistance.

Check Ground Restrictions

Check the following ground restrictions while planning your Backyard House:

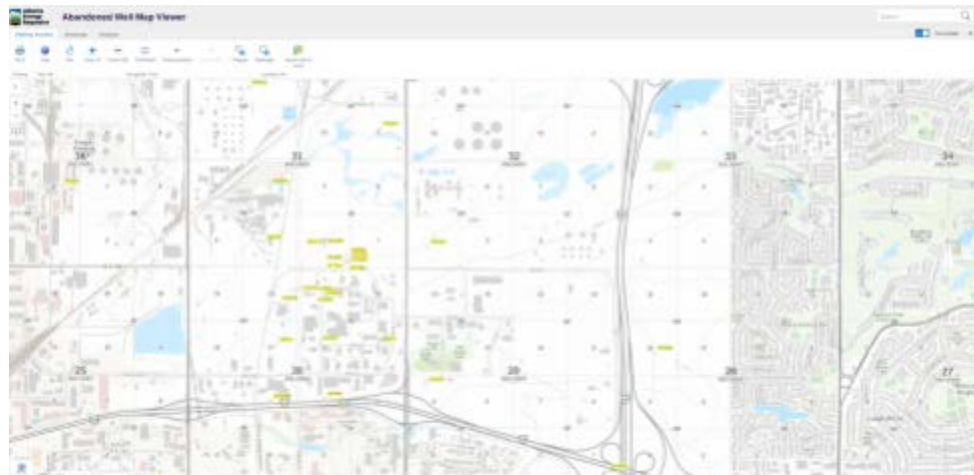
- Identify utility lines. [CLICK-Before-You-Dig](#) or DIAL-Before-You-Dig: 1-(800)-242-3447 for no-cost utility marking.
- Do not obstruct gas meters, bedroom windows, HVAC vents for dryer, furnace, heat recovery ventilation (HRV). [Contact ATCO](#) (780-424-5222) with questions about gas services and meters.
- Identify overhead utility lines. Maintain a minimum of 3.5 metres (11.5 feet) clearance to electrical wires above the building. [Contact EPCOR](#) (780-310-4300) with questions concerning clearance from power lines and power pedestals.
- Identify restrictive covenants, utility rights-of-way, or easements. Check your construction plot plan, real property report, and mortgage papers. Talk to your home builder or request a [Search of Records](#).



Learn more about
abandoned wells from the
Alberta Energy Regulator
[webpage](#).

Abandoned Wells Confirmation

This confirmation is required for any proposed development for a new building, or an addition to or alteration of an existing building which will result in the building being larger than 47 square meters or 506 square feet, as required by [Alberta Energy Regulator Directive 079](#). During the Backyard House application process, you will be required to submit a signed [Abandoned Wells Confirmation Form](#) and include a [printout of the map\(s\)](#) used to confirm the absence/presence of abandoned wells.



Step 3: Backyard House Design Considerations

When planning a new Backyard House there are many important design considerations to think about. For example:

- Where should the building be placed to maximize light, privacy, or protect existing trees?
- How will roof water drain from the site and how will existing on-site buildings be protected from stormwater?
- Where will new waste carts be located and managed?
- How will the new house be serviced by utilities?

This section contains some key topics to think about during the design phase and before making an application.

Designing 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.

Some of the ways you can design for sustainability include:

- Retain existing trees.
- Install south-facing windows, when possible, to increase passive heating from the sun.
- Consider [low impact development](#) and other ways to maintain permeable surfaces on the site to help with drainage and the city's water table.
- Add improved insulation to minimize the energy cost of heating and cooling.
- Incorporate green technology such as [solar panels](#) or [geothermal heating](#).



Lighting

Lighting can be an excellent design element to a Backyard House, and pedestrian-friendly lighting, such as porch lights or bollard lights, help make the rear alley a safe and welcoming public space.

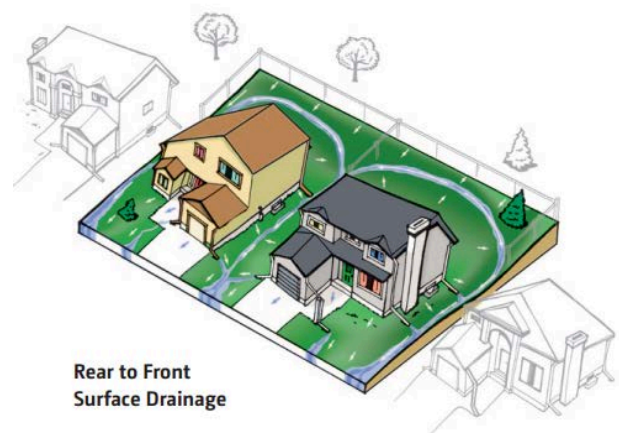
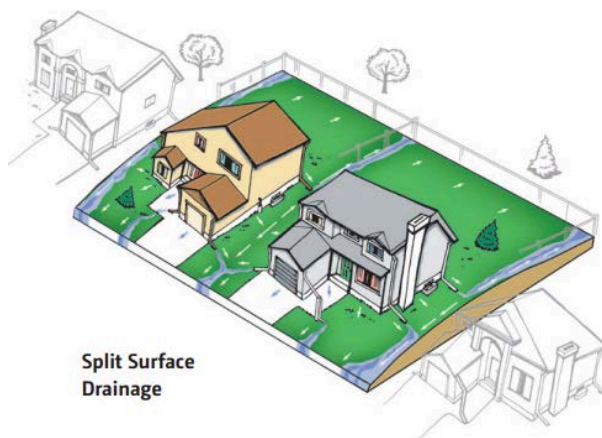
Generally, lighting should be installed and maintained to direct downwards and focus light away from surrounding sites to minimize nuisance, unless it is directed toward architectural features.



Lot Grading

Lot grading involves shaping the surface of the land so that stormwater drains away from buildings and towards a City right-of-way (street or alley), as required by [Drainage Bylaw 18093](#). If the Backyard House is proposed on a lot that is located in an older neighbourhood, as part of the development permit application you may be required to submit a lot grading plan for approval.

The purpose of lot grading plans are to show how a site will manage stormwater effectively, preventing issues like nuisance, hazard or damage. You can arrange for a pre-application meeting prior to submitting an application for a Development Permit, to help ensure the application meets all requirements. Following the Development Permit application, the Development Planner will advise if a lot grading plan is required, which must be designed to meet the [Residential Lot Grading Guidelines](#). For more information about lot grading and its requirements, see the [Residential Lot Grading](#) page.



Consider the building placement and access early in the design process and ensure there is enough space. Refer to the [Small Building Access Policy](#) for requirements and visual examples.

Access to the Backyard House

Backyard Houses must adhere to access requirements outlined in the Zoning Bylaw, and the building and fire codes. These regulations mandate a minimum 0.9 metres wide hard surface path leading from the street or alley, if one exists, directly to the main entrance. This pathway not only serves as the primary entry point for residents but also as a critical access route for firefighters and other emergency personnel.

Placement of the Backyard House is also important. Access routes must allow a fire truck to stop within 45 metres from the Backyard House entrance for emergency response. If the Backyard House design incorporates completely separate sections with no internal connection, each section must have its independent entrance accessible from the main pathway and within the 45 metre distance limit.

Site Servicing - Power, Water and Drainage Services

For new utility service connections, EPCOR will manage the process. It's important to consult with them in the early stages of your Backyard House design. This will help determine the best approach for delivering essential services like power, water and drainage. To learn more visit EPCOR's [New Connection page](#).



Courtesy of EPCOR

Amenity Areas

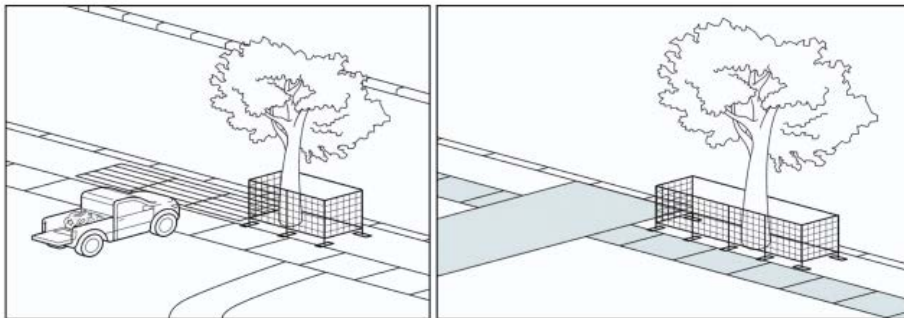
Consider dedicating an area on the site where occupants can enjoy the outdoor space around the Backyard House. This could include a deck, landscape feature, or fenced yard that can be used for recreational and social activities. The Zoning Bylaw does not have a minimum amenity area requirement for Backyard Housing, so you can design this area to suit your needs. Certain amenity area features, such as a hot tub, will have additional submission requirements and permits. For general information, see the [Home Improvement Permits](#) page.



Public Tree Protection



Construction and excavation work can put nearby trees at risk, along with the benefits those trees provide. Impacts that seem small like bark damage and root compaction can cause irreparable damage to a tree, and the benefits provided by mature trees are not replaced by planting a new tree for many years. [Public Tree Bylaw 18825](#) requires that a public tree permit is obtained if you plan to work within five metres of a boulevard tree or within 10 metres of a natural tree stand. This involves submitting a tree protection plan to the City's Urban Forestry team to demonstrate how you will prevent tree damage by installing physical protection measures around City trees and their root zones. To learn more about a public tree permit and its requirements, visit the [Public Tree Permit](#) page or contact treepreservation@edmonton.ca.



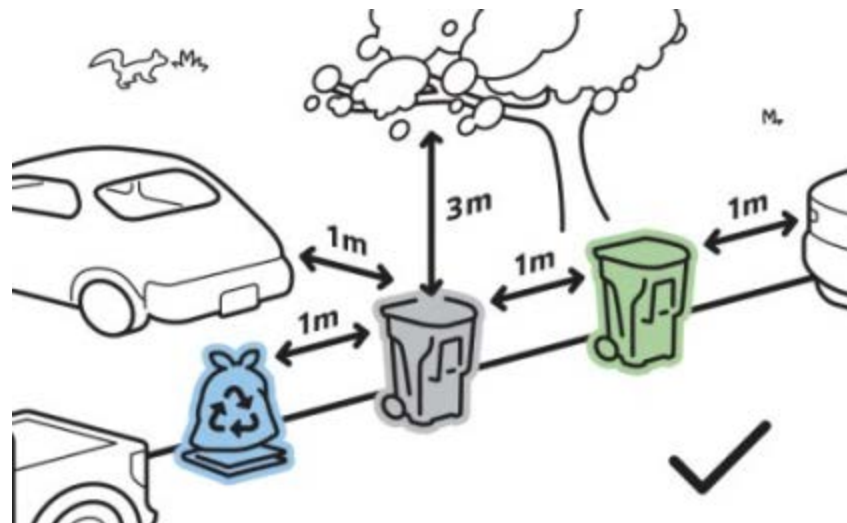
Waste Collection

When the number of dwellings increases on a site, more space for containers are required. If you are proposing multi-unit Backyard Housing, you are encouraged to contact wasteplanning@edmonton.ca or arrange for a pre-application meeting to ensure the site design will meet all Waste Services requirements.

Backyard Housing requires its own separate set of containers and is charged its own monthly utility rate. Waste Services completes a review during the development permit application process and requirements must be met before a permit is issued.

Waste standards require each unit of a development to be provided a black and green cart and to use blue bags for curbside collection. Sufficient space must be provided for waste collection vehicles. As per [Waste Services Bylaw 20363](#), one metre (3 feet) of clearance around each cart, and three metres (10 feet) above is required. For proposed developments which cannot accommodate the spacing required for the carts, curbside collection would not be approved and the development would need to use communal collection.

For more information about waste management, see the [Curbside Collection](#) page.



Attending a pre-application meeting can help reduce your development permit review timeline.

Pre-Application Meetings

Once you have a concept plan prepared for a Backyard House, consider booking a pre-application meeting. The City of Edmonton offers this optional service for Backyard Housing applications. The purpose of a pre-application meeting is to help applicants understand requirements, become more knowledgeable about the planning process, and their roles and responsibilities in the neighbourhood during construction. For more information and to book a time, visit the [Pre-application Meetings](#) page.



Step 4: Designing the Backyard House to Meet Requirements

Application Submission Requirements

For the most up-to-date application submission requirements, including drawing standards, sample drawings and resources, visit the [Application Requirements for House Permits](#) page.

Zoning Bylaw Requirements

Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw is the primary regulatory tool required to implement [The City Plan](#) and determines what can be built where. It sets the rules for where new buildings should go, what types of buildings they can be, and what types of businesses and activities can happen on a property. The Zoning Bylaw is the basis for reviewing all Development Permit applications.

The [Get to Know Your Zoning Bylaw Guide](#) can help you learn more about Edmonton's new Zoning Bylaw, including what it means for your property and neighbourhood. It contains overviews of the zones, frequently asked questions, key zoning terms, and more.



How do I know if my development permit application will be approved?

Designing to meet minimum zoning requirements provides certainty in the outcome of a development permit application. If a Backyard House is a permitted use in the underlying zone and the application complies with the regulations in the Zoning Bylaw, it must be approved by the development planner. This is referred to as "[permitted development](#)".

In some cases a proposal may not meet all zoning regulations. Applicants have the option to formally request relief from a zoning bylaw regulation through the variance process. Applications containing a variance are categorized as "[discretionary development](#)". The development planner reviewing the application must consider a variety of factors in determining whether the application will be approved or not approved and this process takes additional time. Review the [What is a Variance](#) guide for more information.



What zoning regulations apply to Backyard Housing?

The applicable regulations will depend on the nature of what you are proposing in your application. Since Backyard Housing can be built in a variety of shapes, sizes, layouts and number of units, this guide aims to provide the most common Zoning Bylaw requirements. It is not considered to be exhaustive. As a starting point, review [Section 6.10 - Backyard Housing](#) to see regulations that apply to Backyard Houses.

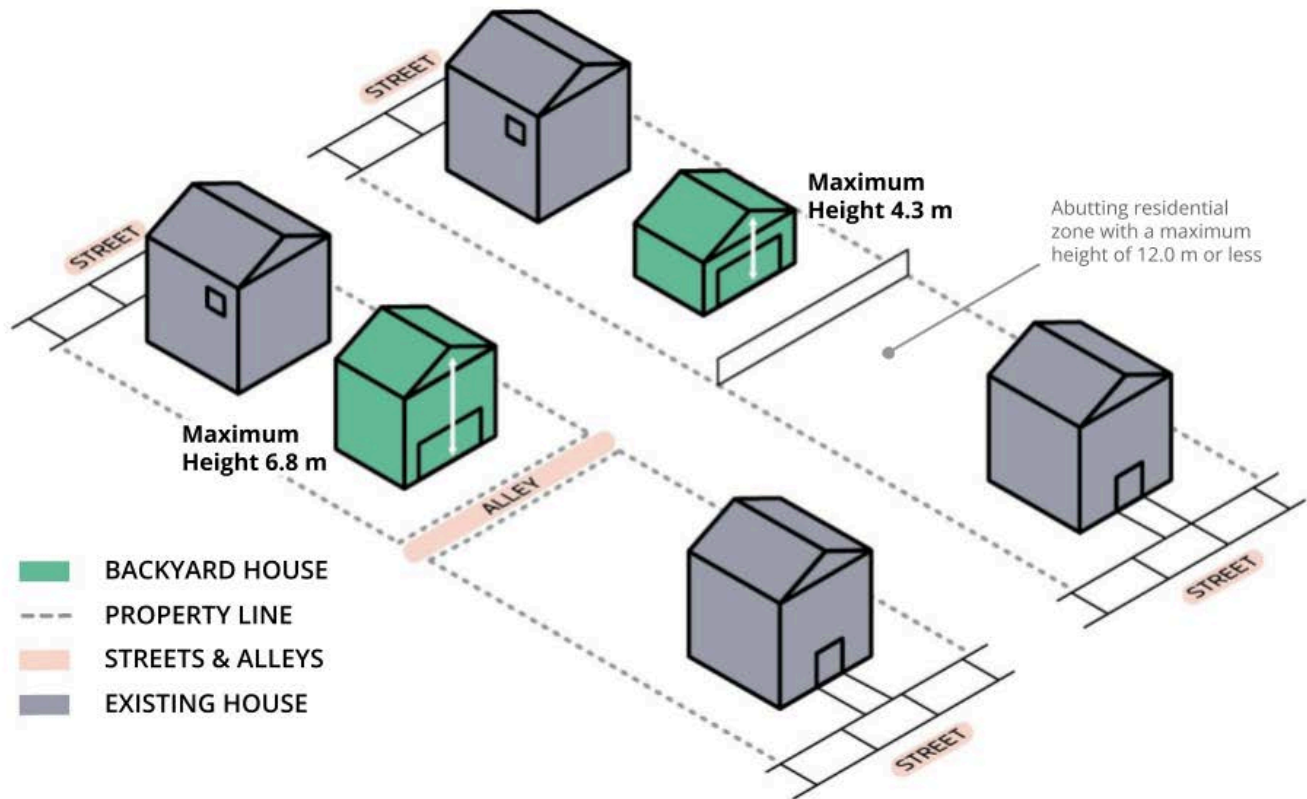
If you are proposing multi-unit Backyard Housing, this will increase the complexity in design, including the applicable Zoning Bylaw regulations. Working with professionals that are experienced in Backyard Housing can help reduce the number of changes required by designing to the minimum requirements and get your permits approved faster.

Zoning Bylaw Site and Building Regulations

Height

See the definition of [Site Coverage](#) in the Zoning Bylaw to see which structures and buildings count towards the maximum Site Coverage on your lot.

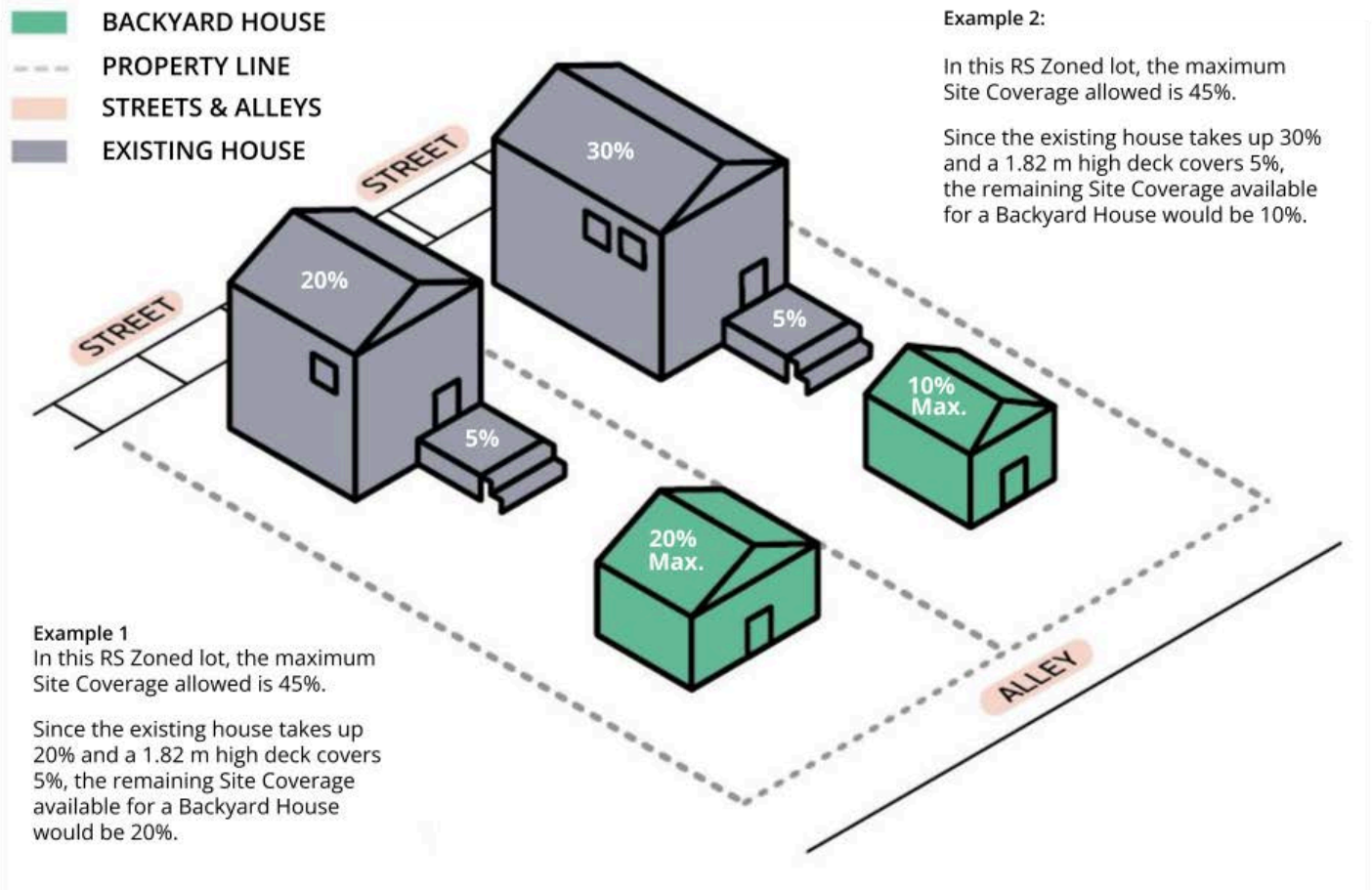
- The maximum allowable height for a Backyard House is 6.8 metres.
- If the site does not have an abutting alley and the maximum height of the abutting Zone is 12.0 metres or less, the maximum allowable height of the Backyard House is lowered to 4.3 metres to reduce the impacts of massing. Both examples are illustrated in the image below.



Site Coverage

See the definition of [Floor Area](#) in the [Zoning Bylaw](#).

- Backyard Houses have a maximum site coverage of 20%.
- Some zones specify a total maximum site coverage for all buildings on the site. It is important to review the regulations of the underlying zone to ensure that the combined site coverage of existing structures and the proposed Backyard House do not exceed the regulations. Two site coverage calculation examples are shown below.



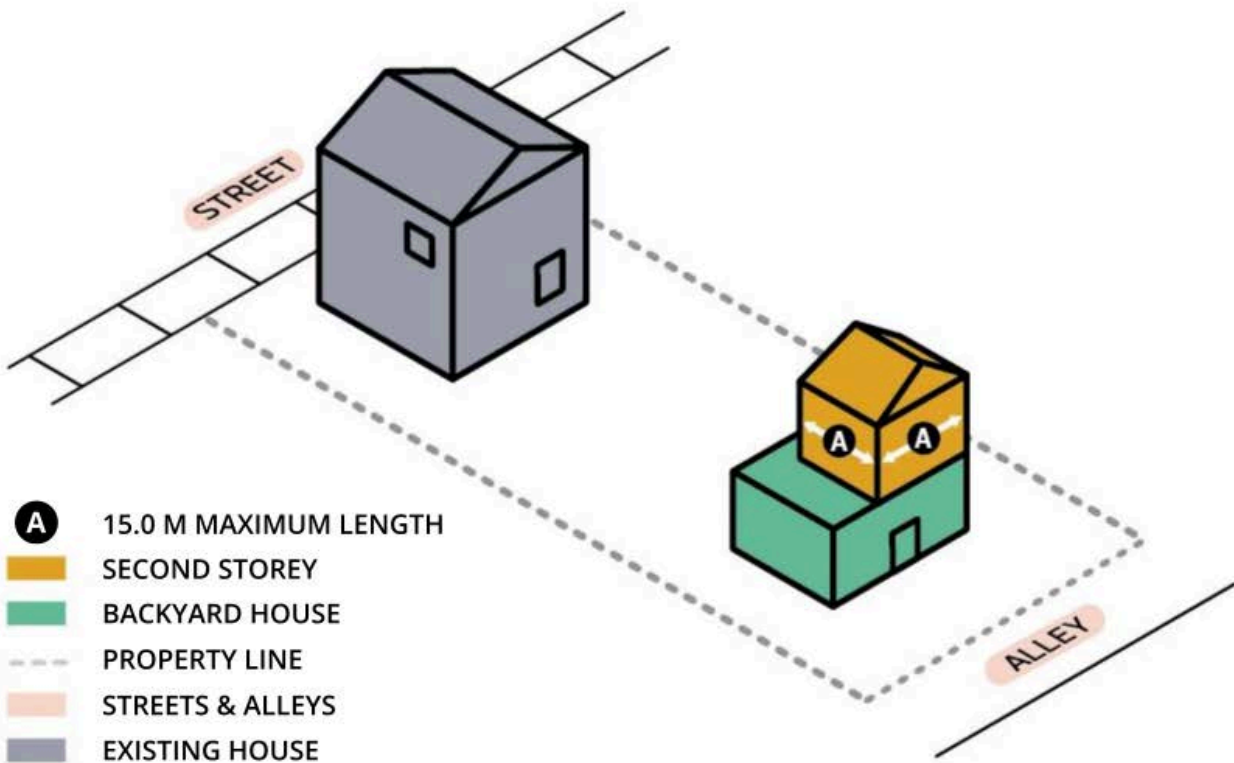
See the definition of [Setbacks in the Zoning Bylaw](#), including [Front Setback](#), [Rear Setback](#), [Interior Side Setback](#), and [Flanking Side Setback](#).

Floor Area

- The maximum second storey floor area of a Backyard house is 60.0 metres squared.
- The maximum second storey floor area of a Backyard House may be increased to 70.0 metres squared if the application complies with the Inclusive Design requirements section of [Section 5.50 - Inclusive Design](#). This maximum does not include up to 6.0 metres squared of area covered by elevators and any associated landing area on each storey.
- Elevator access to a [Rooftop Terrace](#) is only permitted where the Backyard House complies with the Inclusive Design requirements section of [Section 5.50 - Inclusive Design](#).

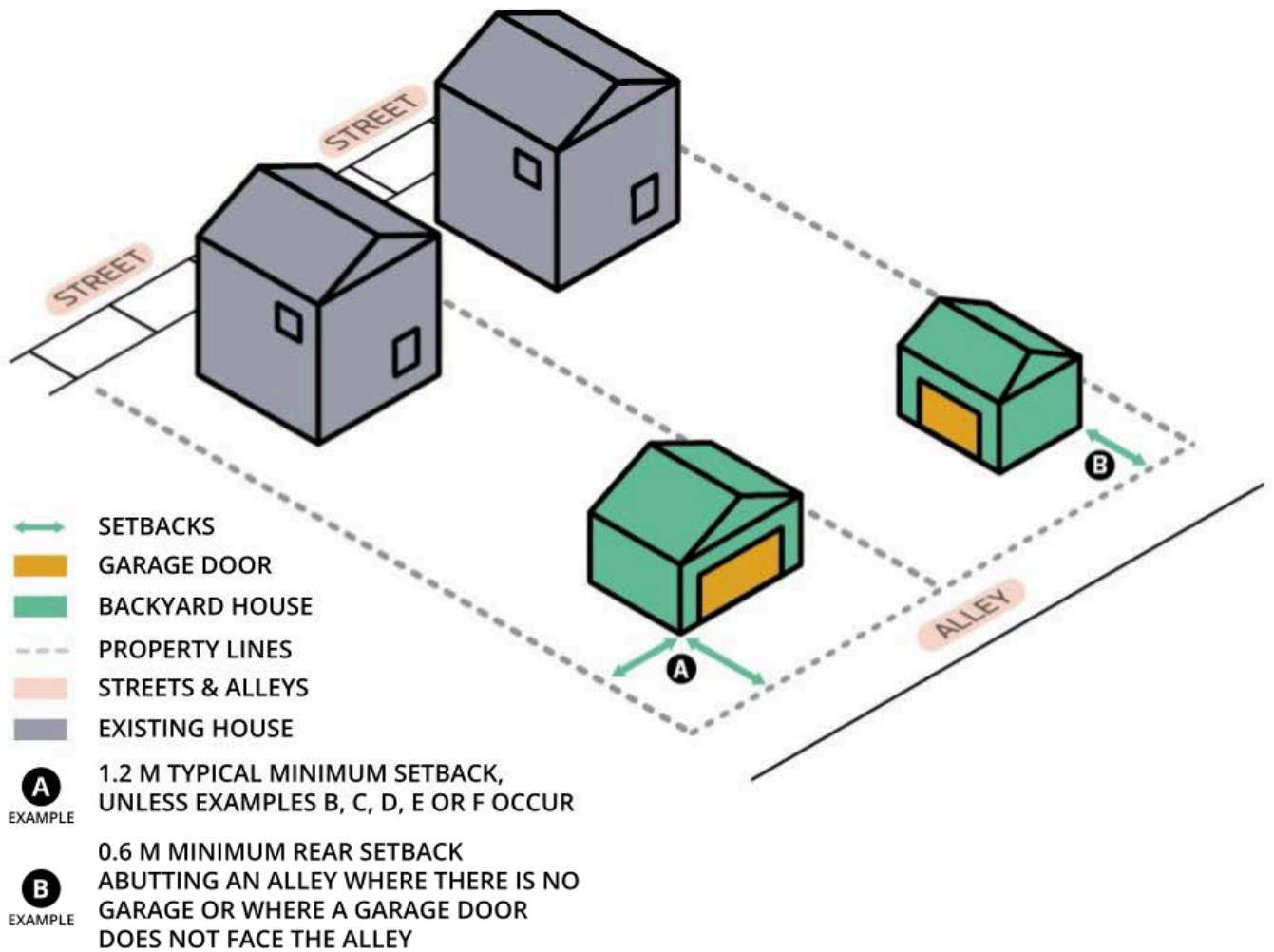
Building Length

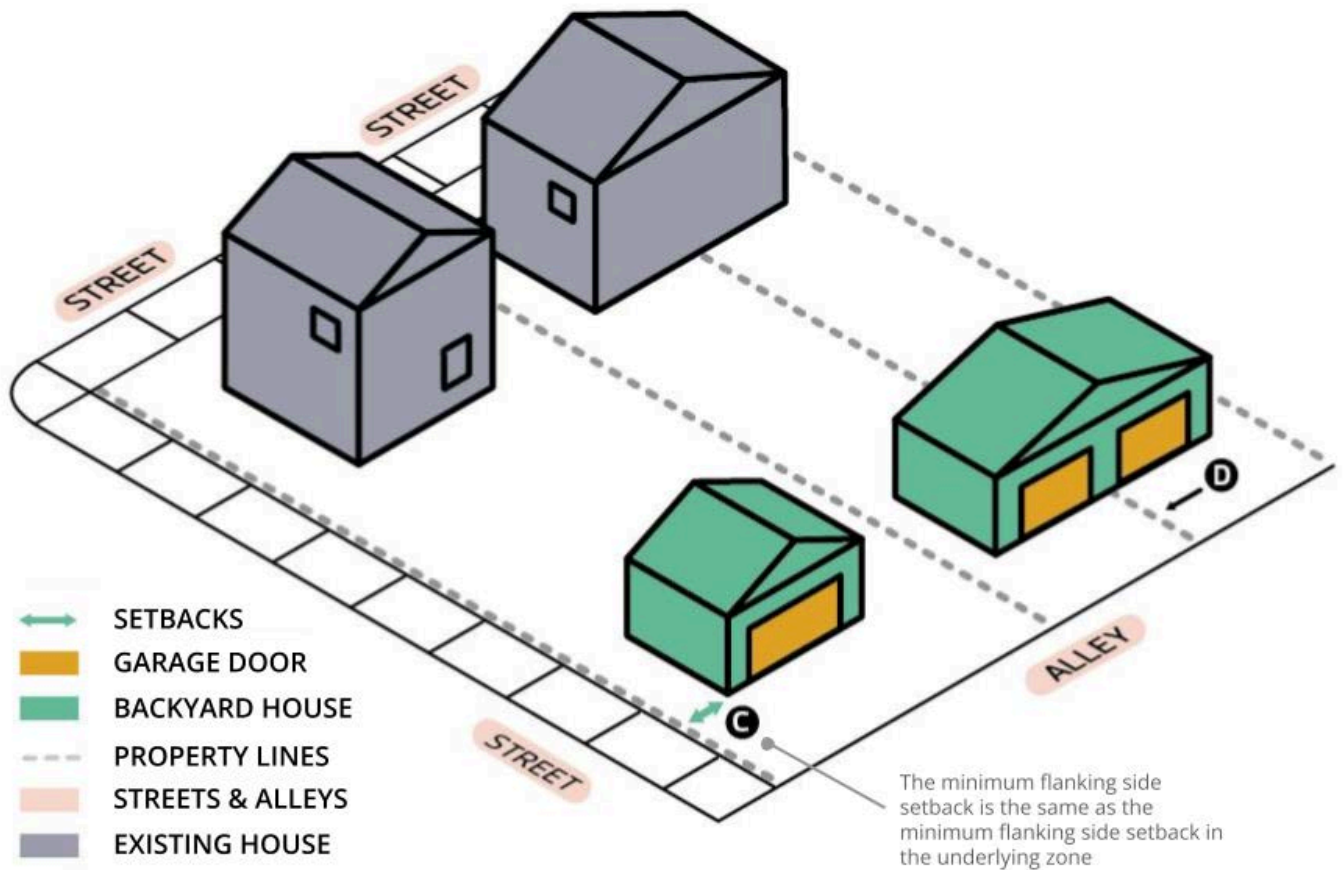
- The maximum total length of any second storey building wall is 15.0 metres, as shown below.



Setbacks

- Minimum setbacks for Backyard Housing depend on several factors, such as the type of lot, building style, and building orientation. The typical minimum setback for a Backyard House is 1.2 metres, but the Zoning Bylaw regulations allow for a variety of configurations. Refer to examples A through F below.





- SETBACKS
- GARAGE DOOR
- BACKYARD HOUSE
- PROPERTY LINES
- STREETS & ALLEYS
- EXISTING HOUSE

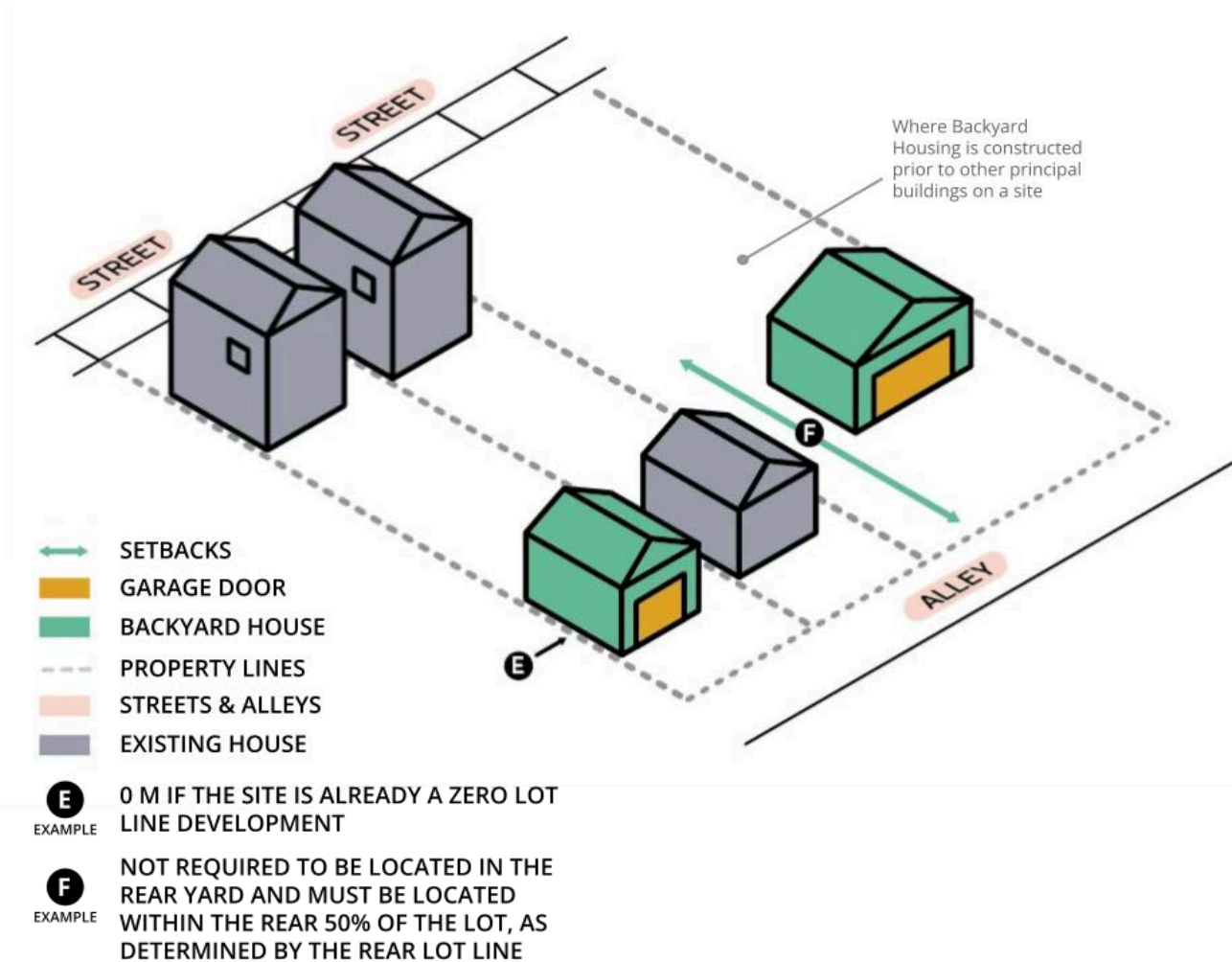
C CHECK UNDERLYING ZONE

EXAMPLE

D 0 M MINIMUM INTERIOR SIDE SETBACK WHERE BACKYARD HOUSING IS BUILT ACROSS PROPERTY LINES

EXAMPLE

The minimum flanking side setback is the same as the minimum flanking side setback in the underlying zone



See the definition of [Zero Lot Line Development](#) and [Rear Lot Line](#) in the [Zoning Bylaw](#).

A principal building refers to the primary use on a site, such as other houses. It does not include structures such as a shed, garage, deck or gazebo.

Building Separation

- In addition to setbacks, Backyard Housing must be separated from other buildings on the site. The minimum distance between Backyard Housing and other principal buildings on the same site, except other Backyard Housing is 3.0 metres.
- The minimum distance between Backyard Housing and any other Backyard Housing on the same site is 0.9 metres.
- The typical minimum distance between Backyard Housing and other Accessory structures such as a shed is 0.9 metres. See [Section 5.10 - Accessory Uses, Buildings and Structures](#) for all requirements.

Design Regulations

Facades

See the definition of [Facade](#) in the Zoning Bylaw.

- All exterior facades must use 2 or more design techniques, such as:
 - Variations in rooflines
 - Vertical or horizontal building wall projection or recessions
 - Visual breaks of building facades into smaller sections
 - Features such as windows, balconies, or porches
 - Using a combination of finishing materials
 - or other similar techniques or features
- On corner sites, facade design and materials must wrap around the side of the Backyard House.
- If the Backyard House is less than or equal to 4.3 metres in height, only facades facing a street or alley must be articulated using 2 or more design features.
- You may be required to use exterior finishing materials that are similar to, or better than, the standard of surrounding developments



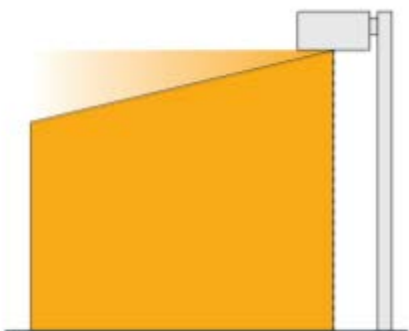
Entrances

- Backyard Housing must provide a main entrance feature that is covered and separate from a garage door.



Lighting

- Backyard Housing facades facing an alley must have outdoor lighting that complies with the lighting requirements of [Section 5.120 - Site Performance Standards](#).
- Generally, lighting should be installed and maintained to direct downwards and focus light away from surrounding sites to minimize nuisance, unless it is directed toward architectural features.



LIGHT GENERALLY DIRECTED DOWNWARDS



LIGHT DIRECTED AT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Landscaping

- For Backyard Housing developed in RS and RSF zones, at least 30% of the total lot area must remain as [Soft Landscaping](#).
- For Backyard Housing developed within the RSM zone, at least 25% of the total lot area must remain as [Soft Landscaping](#).
- If a green roof is proposed, it will be included in the calculation of Soft Landscaping.
- You may be required to provide additional landscaping or hardscaping to minimize negative visual impacts such as screening waste collection areas, privacy, and lighting.

Pathways

- All main entrances to a Backyard House must have an unobstructed 0.9 metre hardsurfaced [Pathway](#) that leads directly to a City sidewalk or public street where no sidewalk exists, or to a driveway.
- A handrail on 1 side may project to a maximum of 0.1 metres into the [Pathway](#).

Step 5: Apply for Backyard House Permits

Submit an application for the development permit, building permit and trade permits associated with the project once all plans and supporting documents are prepared. Submitting an incomplete application can result in delays.

For Homeowners	For Contractors and Professionals
<p>Apply online for a single unit Backyard House Permit.</p>	<p>Sign In / Sign Up to apply for Backyard House Permits, with single or multiple units.</p>

Step 6: After You Apply

City staff will review your application to ensure your project complies with the Zoning Bylaw and the Alberta Safety Codes Act.

Making Changes Before Permit is Issued

Applicants can make changes while the application is in progress. Consult with the City employee assigned to your file. Changes may be subject to additional fees.

Making Changes After Permit is Issued

Permit holders can request changes after the permit has been issued by visiting the project dashboard. Additional charges may apply for revisions.

Cancelling a Permit or Application

Complete and submit the [cancellation and refund form](#) if you no longer plan to continue with the work.

Replying to More Information Request

City staff may also reach out to you to request additional information at various stages of the permit application review process. See the [More Information Requested \(MIR\) Guide](#) for support in how to review and respond to these requests.

Step 7: Construction

Construction may only begin after all required permits are issued and conditions and requirements are met.

Project Implementation Plans

A Project Implementation Plan (PIP) outlines and records how the project team will comply with applicable safety laws during a construction project to effectively deal with unexpected or unsafe conditions. A PIP might include the following documents: site assessments, neighbourhood notifications, agreements with neighbours, plans for demolition and excavation, safety measures, and construction site fire safety plan.

While the PIP itself is not typically submitted for review, it must be created before work begins and be available on-site for reference by compliance officers. Review the [Project Implementation Plan Guide](#). The signed [Letter of Commitment](#) is required with your Building Permit application.

Working With Neighbourhoods

Considerate construction requires a conscious effort in applying precautionary measures and establishing communication with surrounding residents. Strong communication and construction management should improve overall relationships with neighbours and the City. Review the [Working With Neighbourhoods](#) page for a list of resources, tips and best practices for building.

Using Public Roadways during Construction

Temporary use or crossing of public roads (right-of-way) for demolition, deliveries, and construction requires [On-Street Construction and Maintenance \(OSCAM\) Permits](#). This is to ensure you are not damaging the boulevard, sidewalk or City-owned trees while you access your site. You should apply for your OSCAM Permit once your Demolition or Building Permit applications have been submitted.



Step 8: Inspections

Safety Codes Inspections and Occupancy



Building and trade inspections are conducted throughout each phase of construction. There are groups of inspections required before backfill, wallboard installation and occupancy. Every permit holder is responsible for requesting the required inspections for each stage of project construction. Check [Self Serve](#) to request the necessary inspections.

Inspections are completed by City of Edmonton Safety Codes Officers. They allow for proactive and reactive adjustments during construction projects. They also help ensure that what is being built is safe and meets minimum code requirements.

Required inspections are included in the permit cost. However, additional inspections resulting from deficient work will incur a fee. An Occupancy Permit will be emailed to the permit holder following successful completion of all mandatory inspections. Visit the [Residential Inspections](#) page for more information.

Development Permit Inspections



A Development Permit Inspection may occur for select residential sites to confirm that new construction is completed in accordance with an approved Development Permit. Inspections are scheduled automatically and may occur at any point during construction. Visit the [Development Permit Inspections](#) page for more information.

Lot Grading Inspections



During the construction phase, the owner/project manager must ensure that the site is configured to provide interim control of surface drainage to ensure that adjacent private properties are not impacted by stormwater run-off from the site. At the completion of the proposed development, the applicant or owner must apply for grading approval and inspection to ensure the surface grades are completed in accordance with the approved lot grading plan. Visit the [Residential Lot Grading Approval](#) page for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contacts

- For general inquiries, use the [Contact us](#) form
- [Book an appointment](#) for general questions about your project and permit requirements
- Development Permits: developmentpermits@edmonton.ca
- Building Permits: buildingsafetycodes@edmonton.ca
- Building Inspections: buildingic@edmonton.ca
- HVAC: hvactechdesk@edmonton.ca
- Plumbing and Gas: plumbingandgastechdesk@edmonton.ca
- Electrical: electricaltechnicaladvisors@edmonton.ca
- Self Serve Application Portal account issues: eservices@edmonton.ca

Additional Resources

- New Home Construction: edmonton.ca/buildingahouse
- Backyard Housing: edmonton.ca/backyardhousing
- Residential Safety Codes Inspections:
edmonton.ca/residentialinspections
- Zoning Bylaw 20001: zoningbylaw.edmonton.ca
- Self Serve Application Portal Frequently Asked Questions:
https://www.edmonton.ca/business_economy/user_manual_faq
- Public Tree Permits:
https://www.edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/gardens_lawns_trees/public-tree-permit