

# Coach house rules get planning committee's blessing



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Coach houses, like this one in Toronto, may soon be legal in Ottawa. Brent Foster / PST

Tiny houses could soon pop up in a neighbourhood near you now that Ottawa's planning committee has approved new rules for coach houses.

In an effort to increase the availability of affordable housing, the province made changes to the Planning Act in 2012 that required municipalities to allow secondary units both within and detached from a home. The city has already responded with guidelines for basement apartments, and is now proposing rules for coach houses — making Ottawa the first big city in the province to do so.

“We’re being watched by others,” said Alain Miguelez, one of the planners who drafted the rules. Council will be asked to endorse them on Oct. 26.

But, Miguelez cautioned, just because coach houses may soon be technically permitted in most corners of the city, that doesn’t necessarily mean there will be a huge number of them. He’s estimating at most 50 per year.

As Kanata South Coun. Allan Hubley said: “This is not going to be every backyard.”

There are a number of limitations, including the size of the main lot, setbacks and access. Because of these limitations, it would be very difficult to fit a coach house on the lot of a typical new development outside the Greenbelt, for example, but it would be possible in older subdivisions with more space between houses.

A coach house can't be larger than 40 per cent of the footprint of the main house or 40 per cent of the yard, whichever is less, but in either case it can't exceed 80 square metres (95 square metres or 1,022 square feet in the rural area).

The land a coach house sits on can't be severed to create its own lot, and the new buildings must be designed and located so they don't affect the privacy, shadowing or overlook of neighbouring houses.

Water and sanitary servicing will come from the main house, which must be serviced by a public or communal system. Height is capped at 3.6 metres and the coach house must be a permanent structure (not built on a trailer frame).

Although the city commenced its coach house study last fall with an online discussion paper and questionnaire — which was later followed by a second paper and the draft guidelines — representatives from several community associations complained Tuesday that the proposed bylaw needed more work and public consultation.

They expressed concerns about mature trees, sensitivity to the look and feel of different neighbourhoods, and potential adverse affects on neighbouring properties.

And given how few coach houses are actually expected to be built annually, one speaker also questioned whether allowing them would actually create much new affordable housing in the city.

The committee voted to review the new coach rules in two years to see how they are working.

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