District of West Vancouver

Coach House Guidelines

June 2021

District of West Vancouver

Please contact the District of West Vancouver's Planning and Development department for additional information.

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cover images / **lanefab.com**

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Fig 0.1: *High quality materials and details in a contemporary coach house.*

photo: **christopherrollett.com /** design: **alexglegg.com**

Welcome

Welcome to the District of West Vancouver's Design Guidelines for coach houses.

Coach houses are explicitly referenced in the District's Official Community Plan as a form of housing capable of regenerating primarily detached, single-family neighbourhoods, without significantly changing the character of the neighbourhood. Coach houses provide rental opportunities, multi-generational housing options for family, more compact and affordable housing in existing neighbourhoods close to amenities, efficient use of existing services and infrastructure, potential supplemental income opportunities for homeowners, increased safety and beautification of lanes, and support the ongoing renewal and revitalization of established neighbourhoods. They are typically found at the rear of a lot and are often referred to as laneway houses or garden suites.

The guidelines are organized to provide guidance at three scales - the neighbourhood, the site, and the coach house.

Contents

There are many things to consider when building a coach house, including understanding how it will fit with the character of your neighbourhood, how it can be situated on your lot to retain natural landscapes and maintain the privacy of adjacent properties, and how to design it to an appropriate scale and with quality materials.

The Neighbourhood

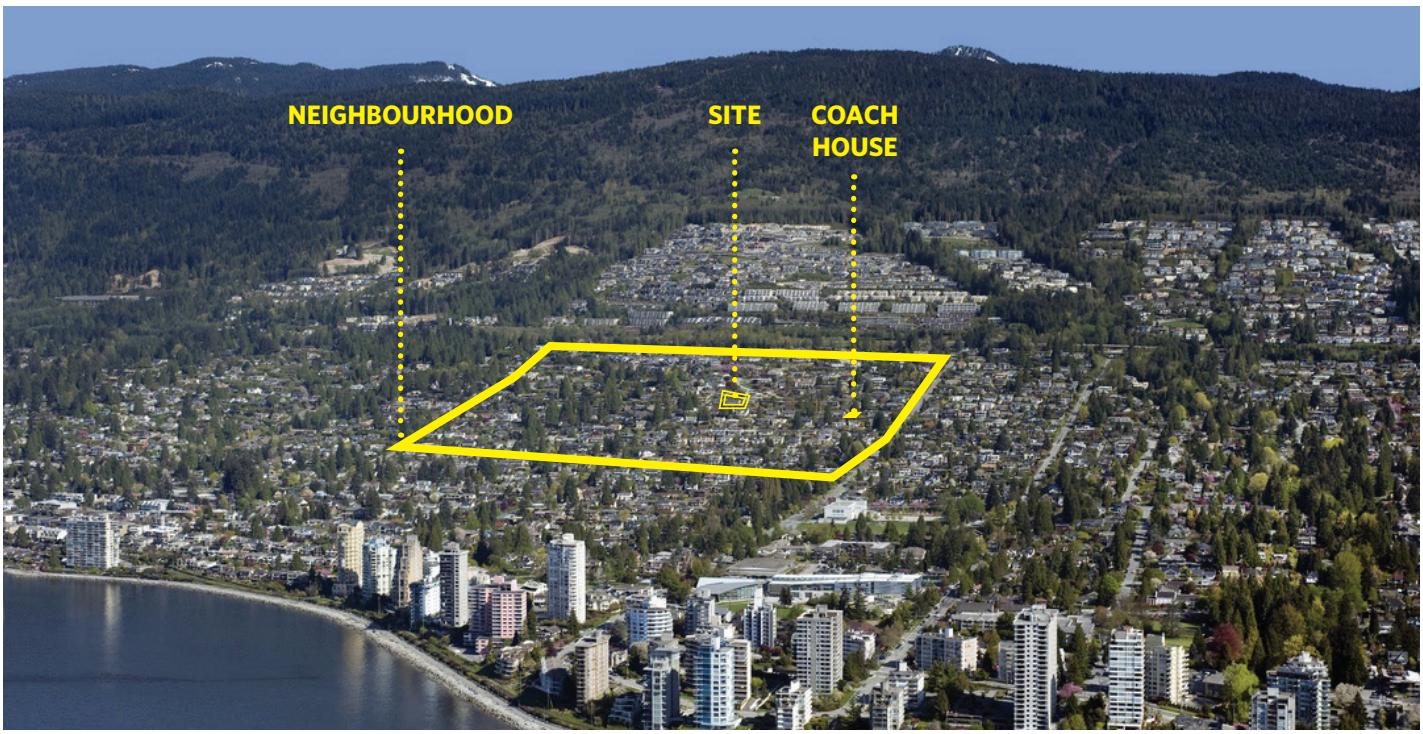
What needs to be considered at the neighbourhood scale? How is my coach house going to complement and contribute to the neighbourhood? What about my neighbourhood will help inform my coach house design?

The Site

What needs to be considered at the site scale? What are the qualities of my site that I should incorporate into my design? Does it suggest where I should put my coach house on the lot?

The Coach House

What needs to be considered at the building scale? What style of coach house am I considering and how will the materials and design I've selected contribute to neighbourhood character? How does the coach house relate to my main house? Does it complement the primary house?



1.0 The Neighbourhood

This section encourages the applicant to think about the neighbourhood character, its characteristics and qualities that contribute to its sense of place and reflect on these when considering a coach house.

1.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTER CONSIDERATIONS

Coach houses contribute to the residential character of a neighbourhood. They should be designed to be sensitive to the built-form patterns already established by existing houses, streets, and landscapes, and should be respectful of the principal dwelling.

Some key ways coach houses can contribute to the neighbourhood include:

- providing a welcoming 'face' to lanes from front doors, windows, and landscaping that reinforce the residential character;
- being of a scale that reinforces a residential neighbourhood with buildings that aren't too high, or too bulky;
- designing to allow for personal expression and to respond to the site and climate;
- emphasizing sustainable landscapes; and
- respecting adjacent properties and private open space.

Fig 1.1: *Example of a well detailed, modest coach house that illustrates residential character and identity.*

1.2 'GOOD NEIGHBOUR' CONSIDERATIONS

It's important for coach houses to consider adjacent buildings and surrounding sites - to be 'good neighbours'. When first considering a new coach house you should understand how it impacts your neighbours, including:

- siting your coach house to avoid overlook into adjacent properties and to minimize shadow impacts;
- siting your coach to respect established views from surrounding properties, both near and far;
- locating windows where they minimize overlook onto a neighbouring property especially into bedrooms and outdoor space such as patios;
- organizing building massing to respect any unique characteristics of neighbouring properties such as large setbacks or open space; and
- respecting how entrances are handled, especially for coach houses accessed by a lane.

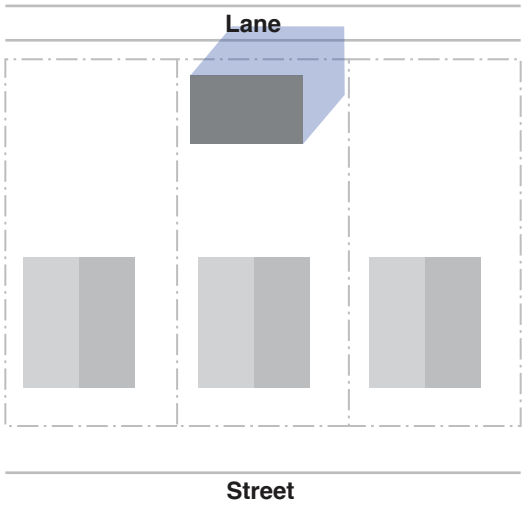


Fig 1.2: *Consider the impact of shadows on adjacent properties when starting your design process.*

Fig 2.0: *For corner lots, the main entry should be oriented towards the flanking street.*

/ smallworks.ca

2.0 The Site

This section encourages the applicant to think about their lot. To consider how the coach house sits on the lot and how the coach house will fit best considering site constraints and opportunities.

2.1 SITING

Siting - where the coach house is situated on the lot - is an important consideration for the successful introduction of coach houses in established neighbourhoods. There are generally two types of lots: those accessed by a rear lane and those accessed by a fronting street. In addition, lots can be regular or irregularly shaped.

In general, coach houses should be located in the rear portion of the lot. However, if site constraints do not permit the construction of a coach house in the rear, front yard coach houses may be considered but they must still adhere to the design guidelines.

Alternative siting proposals that require a variance but ultimately lead to a better outcome, should be considered:

- to avoid significant grade alterations and use of retaining walls on sloping lots or to encourage retention of natural site features;
- to address other unique site conditions such as irregularly-shaped lots.

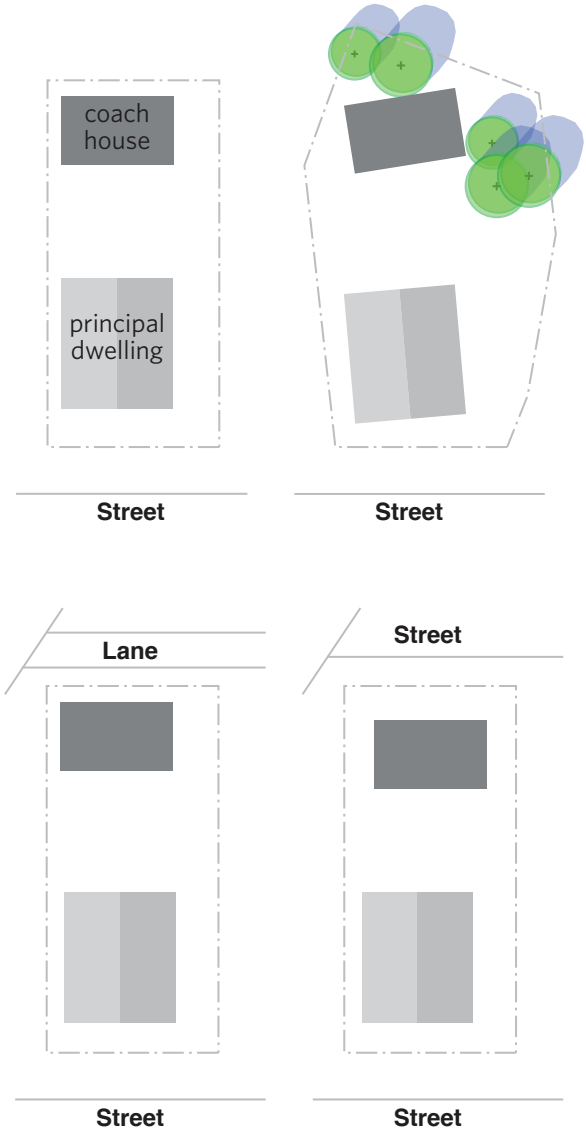


Fig 2.1: *Coach houses should generally be located in the rear of the lot with the final location respectful of natural site features and landscapes.*

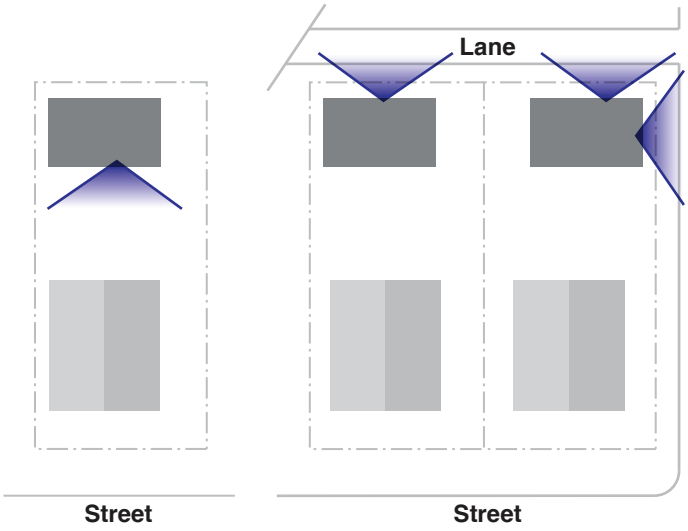


Fig 2.2: *General siting of coach houses at the rear of a lot. For sites without a lane, the building front towards the interior yard. For sites with a lane, the building should front towards the lane.*

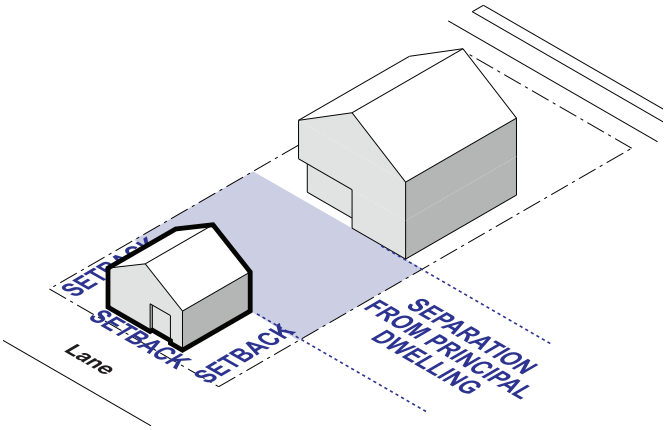


Fig 2.3: *Setbacks are prescribed distances from property lines around your lot; separation from principal dwelling means a clear zone between the coach house and principal dwelling.*

2.2 FRONTAGE

How the coach house faces the lane or street is important to how it contributes to the activities and vibrancy of the lane and in turn, the neighbourhood.

- **Lots with a lane:** For sites with a lane, the coach house should face the lane (i.e. entry off lane).
- **Lots without a lane:** For sites without a lane, a coach house should be accessed by a walkway from the fronting street. The walkway should be visible and provide direct access to the coach house from the front of the property.
  - For sites with an existing driveway to a rear yard garage, direct access to the coach house should be via the driveway or if space allows, a separate pedestrian path. In both cases, effort should be made to minimize impermeable surfaces.
- **Corner sites:** For corner sites, the coach house should be designed to take advantage of the dual frontage with the entry fronting the street or the lane.
- **Site fronting two streets:** On through (or double-fronting) lots, a coach house should be located in the yard opposite the principal dwelling and present a frontage to the secondary street.

2.2.1 Setbacks and Separation

Setbacks (rear yard and side yard) and separation distance from principal dwelling must adhere to the District of West Vancouver Zoning Bylaw.

- Zoning variances for setbacks and separation distance can be considered to protect natural site features such as mature landscapes and trees.
  - Where variances are considered, care must be given to minimizing overlook onto adjacent properties.

› A minimum distance is required between the coach house and principal dwelling to maintain privacy and sun access between the two buildings.

  » A reduction of 1m may be considered to accommodate thicker energy efficient walls, facilitate the retention of an existing tree or natural feature, or to facilitate a single storey accessible unit.

On larger lots, where space permits, generous setbacks should be provided to minimize overview and privacy impacts on neighbours.

2.3 TOPOGRAPHY + GRADE

The hillside nature of West Vancouver is one of its most distinguishable characteristics. Many lots benefit from south-facing views and increased access to sunlight. Careful consideration should be given to the role that topography plays when planning a coach house.

The existing topography and natural grade should be respected as much as possible when designing a coach house:

› alterations of existing grades and natural site features should be minimized;

› site clearing and excavation that includes significant removal of earthworks should be avoided;

› ground floors should reflect the site's existing grade and should not be unduly excavated for at-grade access.

Basements are permitted and should be designed to be as livable as possible and with access to natural light. To that end, basement should generally be no more than 1.8m below grade.

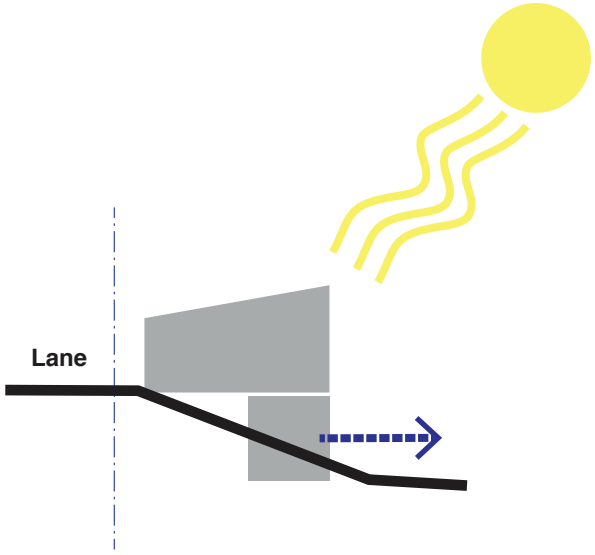


Fig 2.4: *Basements are permitted, however they should address livability by seeking opportunities to have direct access to outdoor space and natural light.*

2.3.1 Sloped Lots

Moderating the scale and massing of the new coach house will ensure it remains compatible with the principal dwelling and neighbourhood.

- Retaining walls at the property line are discouraged.
- Coach houses on uphill lots should minimize exposed foundations unless they are architecturally considered.
- Coach houses on downhill lots should consider how effective unit planning can reduce the need for excavation to facilitate usable outdoor space at grade. For example, locating living space on the upper floor to match exterior grade on the lot should be considered.

Where a lane exists, massing should respect the grades to reduce the visual impact of the coach house on the lane (i.e. upper storey setback).

Where possible, coach houses should be fully accessible.

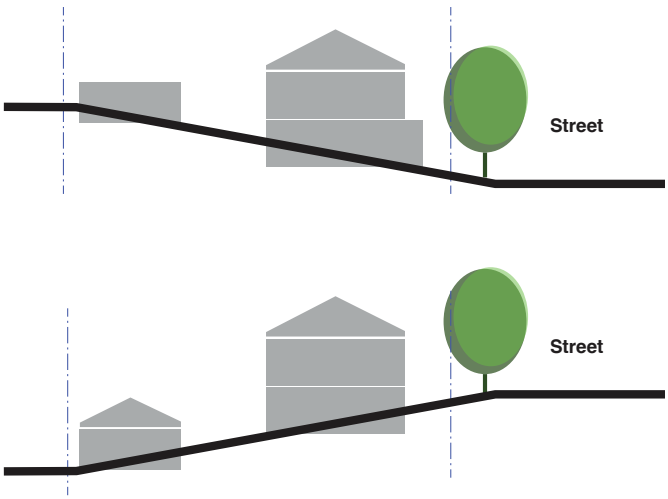


Fig 2.5: *On both uphill and downhill lots, coach houses need to consider massing implications from the fronting street and the lane, and seek to minimize excavation and exposed foundation walls.*

2.4 LANDSCAPING

The retention of existing mature trees, vegetation, and natural landscape features should inform early siting and landscape design concepts.

Access to outdoor space, such as to a yard or patio, is an important consideration for the livability of coach houses and dedicated space for the coach house residents - distinct from the principal dwelling's open space - needs to be accommodated.

All areas adjacent to the coach house should be landscaped and designed to:

- reflect the principles of sustainability and include permeable paving materials for outdoor patios, walkways, and driveways;
- incorporate established vegetation and rock outcrops into the design;
- incorporate rainwater collection systems (rain barrels) where irrigation is required and utilize rain gardens or bioswales to facilitate natural filtration of rainwater into the ground;
- strategically provide screening or definition between different outdoor spaces and between neighbouring properties; and
- reflect best practices regarding low-irrigation to limit maintenance and to support sustainable landscapes.

2.4.1 Plant Selection

Low maintenance landscapes should be incorporated wherever possible to minimize the use of potable water for irrigation purposes.

Yards should be landscaped with a variety of species including trees, shrubs, and grasses. Sufficient planting medium and irrigation are essential to the long-term health of the landscape and should be considered in the selection of landscapes.

- Include indigenous and native plant species.
- Include a diverse selection of plants to improve the biodiversity of residential landscapes.
- Encourage edible landscapes.

2.4.2 Private Open Space

Private outdoor space for the coach house should be provided and should be:

- located directly adjacent to the coach house and be at-grade and accessible;
  - where lot configuration or natural grade make this challenging, a combination of at-grade, on structure (deck) and ground floor open space may be combined to achieve the minimum space requirement, as long as both are accessible from the ground floor.
- separate from the open space for the principal dwelling through vegetative screening or other means;
- designed to maintain the privacy of each unit and minimize overlook onto adjacent properties; and
- designed to maximize access to a natural environment and should include a mixture of hard space for exterior passive enjoyment and soft landscaping.

Planting, architectural elements such as low ornamental fencing, and changes in grade should be used whenever possible for natural screening of outdoor space.

Where walls or fences are required, they should be combined with soft landscaping to provide visual depth and layering.

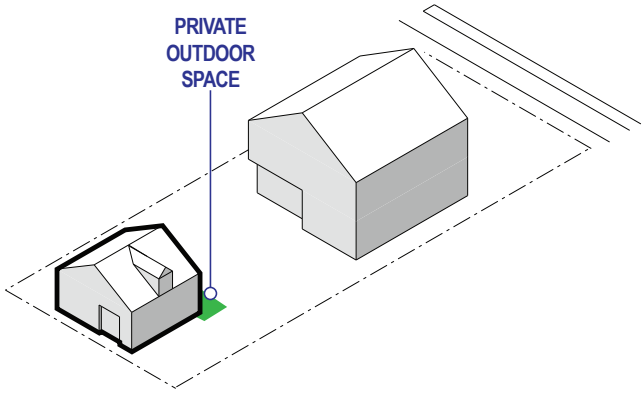


Fig 2.6: *Private outdoor space that respects the privacy of neighbouring houses is to be provided and should demonstrate a commitment to biodiversity and sustainable landscapes.*

2.4.3 Lane Treatment

Landscaping within the lane setback is required to enhance the quality of the lane environment. Where the coach house is set back sufficiently from a rear lane, consideration should be given to more extensive landscaping adjacent to the lane, including shrubbery and modest-size trees. It should be designed with CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) principles.

Other elements to improve the quality of the pedestrian environment should be included, such as:

- lighting that illuminates the entry;
- bollard lighting that adheres to dark sky compliant guidelines; and
- planting to transition between grades where necessary.

Areas for waste and recycling containers should be provided on the lot with convenient access, shared with the principal dwelling, and should be located away from outdoor space and the lane.

External mechanical equipment and utility meters should be located on a side or back wall of the coach house, not facing the street or the principal dwelling on the lot.

- Any visual or noise impacts on adjacent properties should be avoided where possible, and otherwise mitigated.

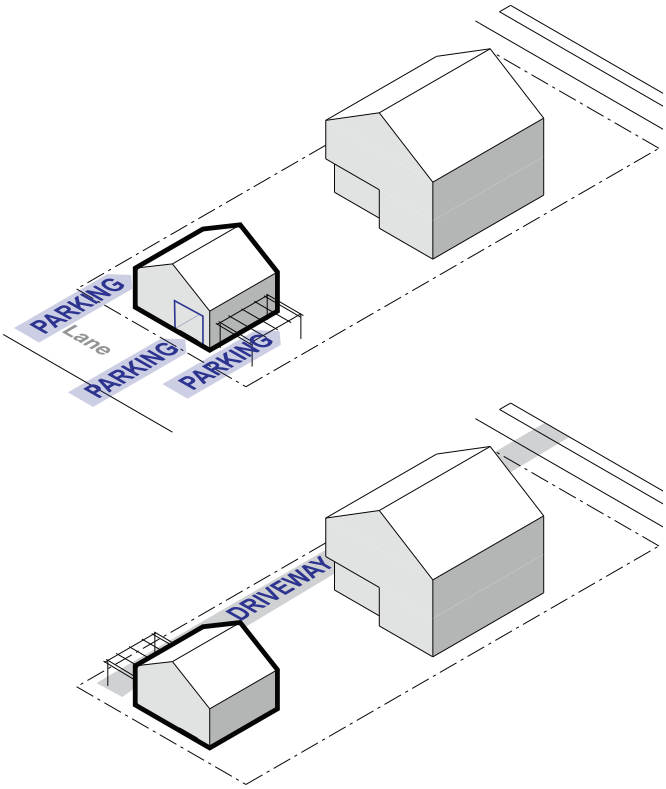


Fig 2.7: *Parking should be provide in a surface space or in an enclosed garage in the coach house provided at least 30% of the gross floor area is located on the ground floor.*

Fig 2.8: *Where driveways are required, consider alternative paving materials that reduce runoff.*

2.5 PARKING + DRIVEWAYS

To optimize open space, minimize unnecessary bulk facing the lane, and to retain sufficient ground level habitable floor area and residential character, parking should be managed appropriately:

- only one driveway access should be provided on each lot;
- for lots within 400m of a bus stop, no off-street parking is required;
- off-street coach house parking may be:
  - a surface parking space, unenclosed but may be covered;
  - enclosed in a garage integrated with the coach house; or
  - a dedicated space within the principal dwelling's attached garage.
- for corner sites, exterior surface parking should be located at the interior side yard;
- parking pads must consist of permeable materials such as pavers, gravel, grass-crete or landscape strips;
  - the requirement for a fully permeable space may be waived to enable full accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- for sites with a rear lane, parking should be accessed via the lane, however, if no lane exists, parking may be accessed via a shared driveway from the street provided:
  - there is access to an existing garage; and
  - the driveway does not require excessive excavation or retaining walls through the property.

2.5.1 Garage Expression

Garages integrated into a couch house should be designed to minimize their visual presence by emphasizing residential living space and designing the garage door to be a secondary element on the facade.

2.6 PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

On lots without a lane, coach houses should be directly accessible from a street via a pathway for emergency responders and visitors.

› Access should be clearly provided by a pathway and integrated with the side yard. It should be well-lit and as direct as possible given the dimensions of the lot, location of the coach house, and site grading.

› Avoid stairs that limit accessibility to the coach house.

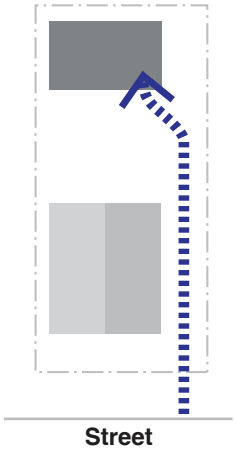


Fig 2.9: *On lots without a lane, a clear pedestrian path should be provided from the fronting street to the coach house. For lots with a lane, access should be from the lane.*

2.7 ENVIRONMENTAL

A coach house should be sited and designed to preserve existing trees, including those on neighbouring properties and District property. Variances to zoning, setbacks and parking requirements may be considered in order to retain significant trees or natural features (i.e. water courses).

› Tree retention should be maximized including trees covered by the District's Tree Bylaw as well as trees that are smaller than the minimum size protected but still contribute to the health and biodiversity of the neighbourhood.

Natural features (e.g. creeks) should be incorporated into a project's site planning stage to minimize the impact on natural water courses consistent with the District's policy. Landscape design should incorporate stormwater management features and mitigation strategies.

Fig 3.0: *Single-storey coach house with high quality materials and functional outdoor space allows for aging in place.*

/ photo + design: **studionorth.ca**

3.0 The Coach House

This section encourages the applicant to think about the design of the coach house itself, its architectural expression, scale, and materiality to address the design principles.

3.1 ARCHITECTURAL EXPRESSION

Coach houses are ground-oriented dwellings that should express a residential use. Building massing and composition should respond to the scale of the lane or street on which they face, or where none exists, to the neighbouring properties and principal dwelling. Single storey coach houses may be more compatible in urban neighbourhoods by limiting overlook onto adjacent properties.

- A minimum of 30% of the frontage facing the lane should communicate the residential uses within, such as in the use of windows and doors.
  - At least one window no smaller than 1.1m^2 must face the lane.
- Garage doors should be designed to minimize their visual appearance on the lane through sensitive detailing and appropriate sizing to emphasize the living space within.

Coach houses should be designed to complement and respect the architecture of the principal dwelling where appropriate, however, in certain circumstances it might be preferable to depart from the style of the principal dwelling.

Regardless of the architectural expression pursued, a clear and demonstrable adherence to a single design philosophy should guide the design, from conception to execution. The coach house should respond to its context and take advantage of a lot's natural environment, sun access, and relationship to adjacent properties.

The guidelines will help to ensure a consistent and harmonious project is realized, one that suits the site and neighbourhood.

3.1.1 Massing

Massing should minimize shadowing onto adjacent properties especially onto outdoor social space such as seating areas.

For lots with a lane, coach houses should be articulated to reduce the scale on the lane by using stepbacks and recesses.

- Roof design and orientation should be considered to minimize apparent scale.

For sites without a lane, the massing should be sensitive to the appearance and scale as seen from the street as well as surrounding properties.

On sloping sites, the building form should follow the natural slope of the lot.

3.1.2 Composition

Coach houses should express a one storey or one-and-a-half storey form to minimize the impact of the upper storey. As such:

- the upper storey shall be limited to no more than 60% of the main floor area for sloped roofs, and limited to 50% of the main floor area for flat roofs.

Building elements should be well-considered and coordinated to present an appropriate scale to one another and to the whole. The scale should be mindful of the surrounding context, including streets and lanes, natural features, and adjacencies.

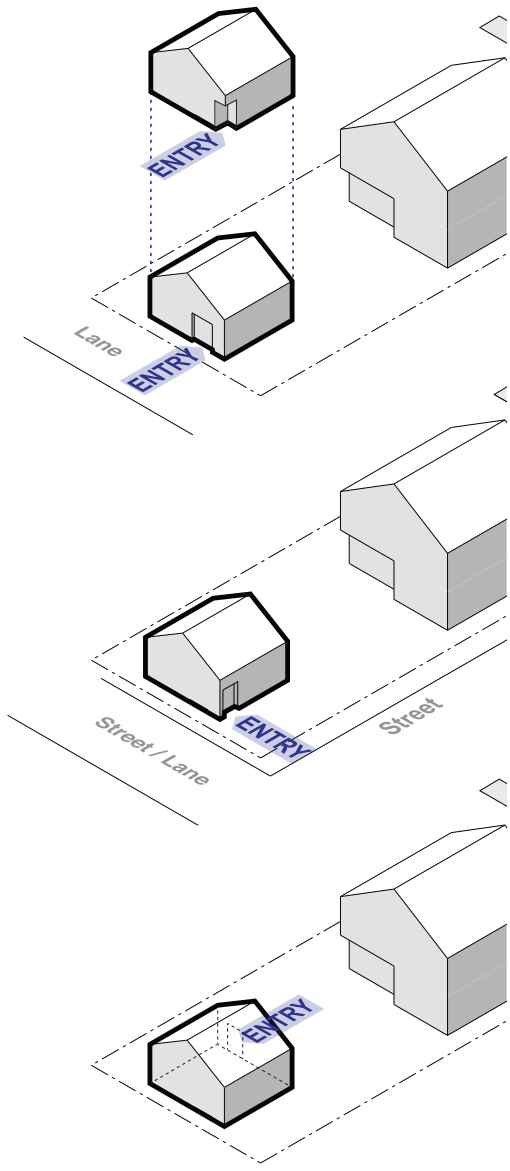


Fig 3.1: *For lots with a lane or street, the entry should be oriented towards, or be visible from, the lane or street. For lots without a lane, the entry should be located on the side or interior yard.*

3.2 DESIGN ELEMENTS

Coach houses should be well considered and designed in a thoughtful manner.

3.2.1 Entry

To reinforce ground-oriented housing, the entry and face of the coach house should be oriented towards the rear lane, the exterior side yard on corner lots, or interior lot where no lane exists. The entry may be oriented towards the side yard if it is:

› at least 3m from the side yard property line, and;

› within 1m of the street- or lane-facing wall of the coach house to ensure the visibility of the entry.

The entry should be set back from the rear property line to allow safe access and to provide a recess. Minor grade changes to the entry are permitted to help with a sense of privacy, however, accessibility should be a key design objective of the entry (i.e. minimize stairs and grade transitions).

The entry should be identified in some way such as with an awning, focused lighting, or similar entry feature.

Weather protection should be designed for functionality and comfort, and to emphasize entry to the building.

› Overhangs should be no more than 1.8m from the coach house.

› Entries should be expressed with a recess of at least 0.5m and/or a canopy integrated with the design.

› Where a street exists, entries may be located along the interior yard to maintain comfortable access.

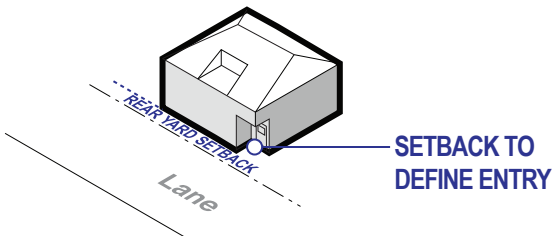


Fig 3.2: *An entry facing the lane should be set back from the rear property line to allow for safe access.*

3.2.2 Roof Massing and Expression

Roofs should be part of a single architectural expression (avoid multiple or overly complex roof lines) and should generally be simple in nature.

Roofs should complement the principal dwelling and should be expressed as a secondary building element to the main coach house to convey a pedestrian scale and reduce the overall height of the coach house. As such:

- the spring height (intersection of wall plane and roof plane) for sloped roofs should be no more than 4m;
- upper floor areas are required to be integrated into the roof form on gabled roofs;
- the roof should not visually dominate the coach house massing, but should be scaled appropriately for the size of building; and
- roof designs that accentuates the upper massing should be avoided.

Where dormers are used to provide interior room height:

- the exterior face of the dormer may be flush with the exterior wall edge;
- they should be designed to maintain appropriate building and roof proportions; and
- they should be sloped and must be set back from the end elevation by a minimum of 1.5m.

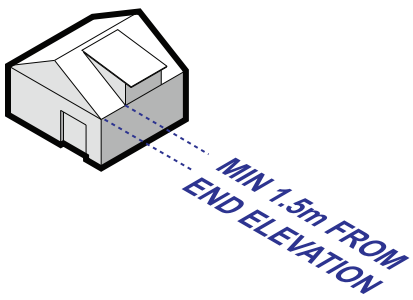


Fig 3.3: *To manage scale, dormers should be sloped and be set back from the end elevation.*

3.2.3 Privacy and Overlook

Second storey balconies are permitted to face the lane or the street on corner lots. Where no lane exists, they may face the interior yard if privacy impacts on neighbouring properties can be mitigated.

- To reduce overlook, upper balconies are not permitted within 4.9m of a side yard property line where a lane exists, or rear property line if there is no lane.
- They should have a minimum dimension of 1.5m.
- They should be screened to prevent overlook onto adjacent properties.

Upper decks must be contained within the footprint of the coach house to avoid adding bulk to the building. They should read as secondary elements to the building form and not overwhelm the massing.

Rooftop outdoor space is not permitted in order to mitigate privacy concerns.

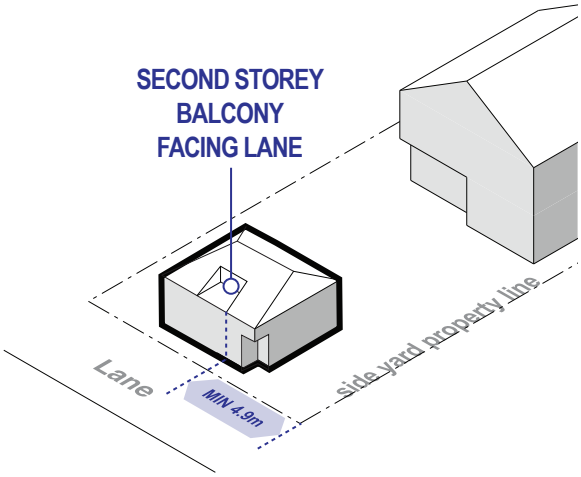


Fig 3.4: *Upper decks should be oriented towards the lane where applicable and set back from side yards to avoid overlook onto adjacent properties.*

Fig 3.5: *High quality materials can be used across a variety of architectural styles.*

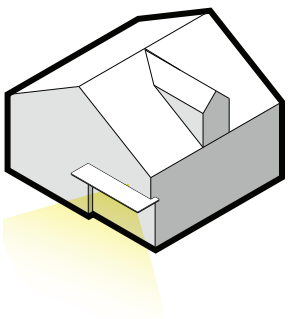


Fig 3.6: *Lighting should be strategically located to minimize light pollution and impact on adjacent properties.*

3.2.5 Materiality

High-quality materials will ensure a sense of timelessness and fit with the neighbourhood. Cladding materials should be durable and robust, and consistently applied across the coach house. Vinyl siding should be avoided.

Transitions in materials should only occur on inside corners.

- Outside transitions or transitions across flush faces should be avoided.
- Materials should extend to all sides of the coach house to provide a balanced and logical application of materials.

Materials as thin veneer should be avoided.

3.2.6 Exterior Lighting

Exterior lighting should be used to enhance outdoor space, improve wayfinding and safety along pathways, and contribute to the pedestrian experience.

Soffit lighting or uplighting of the coach house is not permitted so as to avoid glare into neighbouring properties, reduce light pollution, and allow the building massing to retreat against the night sky.

Modest, downcast lighting is permitted on pathways and entries to ensure safe access. For coach houses with lane access:

- focused lighting should be directed on the entry but scaled to minimize light pollution and light spillage onto adjacent properties; and
- minor, architectural landscape feature lighting is permitted if it complies with the guideline above.

3.2.7 Windows

The general orientation of windows should be away from neighbouring properties. Windows on upper storeys should also respect the privacy of adjacent properties.

For coach houses on a lane:

› windows from living spaces towards the lane should be provided to support animation of the lane;

› secondary windows may face the side yard to enhance livability, however, they should be designed to minimize overlook onto neighbouring properties.

For sites without a lane:

› the primary windows should face the interior of the property, or the flanking street where available;

› secondary windows may face the side yard and rear yard to enhance livability, however, they should be designed to minimize overlook onto adjacent properties.

Skylights and clerestory windows should be considered to provide natural light to living areas.

All dormers are required to have windows.

3.2.8 Other Design Considerations

Adequate space for bicycle parking and storage should be considered in the design of a coach house.

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