

A photograph of a modern, dark grey laneway house with white trim. The house features a central glass door, a mailbox, and a house number '3930'. A large tree trunk is visible in the foreground, and a pine tree branch hangs over the roofline. A text overlay is positioned across the middle of the image.

Thinking About Building a Laneway House?

**Kerr**  
DESIGN · BUILD

# Thinking About Building a Laneway House?

**B**ack in 2009, the City of Vancouver approved the concept of laneway houses to replace a garage on a homeowner's property.

The City simplified the regulations in late 2018 to make it "easier and more cost effective to build laneway houses."

## **A laneway house is what exactly?**

The City of Vancouver<sup>1</sup> defines them as a "small house at the rear of a lot near the lane. It is intended for a single household, and may or may not include an attached garage."

When they say small, they mean small. The average laneway home is between 600 and 900 square feet.<sup>2</sup>

The houses are "only allowed in conjunction with a one family dwelling, not a duplex." They "can be a rental suite, or can be for family use." They "can be permitted in addition to a secondary suite in the main house." And they "cannot be strata-titled."

Lastly, homeowners "may add a laneway house while keeping their existing home, or build a laneway house along with a new main house."

## **Why build a laneway house?**

There are two very good reasons. One, if



you have an extended family, you can bring aging parents or relatives to live with you on your property, giving them their own home.

But this is not the main reason for homeowners to build a laneway house, according to a 2018 survey conducted by the City.<sup>3</sup>

The main reason is the lack of available detached housing in the City and the need to fulfill this demand.

### Excellent long-term investment

Homeowners with eligible properties can charge rents up to \$2,500 a month, with the majority being between \$1,500 and \$2,000.

It is an excellent investment and the demand will not go down.

### The market is right

The housing supply for the rental market is tight. The cost of renting a one-bedroom apartment is roughly \$2,100 a month and vacancy rates are near the one percent mark. The market is so tough for the average-income Vancouverite that Mayor

Kennedy Stewart has said that "every day, renters approach me with heartbreaking stories of how close they are to being pushed out of Vancouver."

Laneway homes are a solution to this problem. So far, over 4,000 building permits have been issued for their construction and almost 50% have been built since 2015.



## They are in demand

Per that City survey on laneway homes, one of the conclusions is that “residents are choosing to live in laneway houses because they are a more affordable detached housing option in the neighbourhoods they want to live in, and they offer housing options in locations that are near their families and friends, jobs, schools, transit and other urban amenities.”<sup>4</sup>



Master bedroom with balcony

## We build laneway houses

Kerr Design Build completed a fantastic two bedroom laneway house in the westside of Vancouver. The design has subtle features which maximize the feeling of roominess of the house despite building restrictions on the size of the footprint, which is around 750 square feet.

## Exterior touches

On the exterior, the design and construction was done to preserve the trees around the property. Rather than using concrete footings to anchor the foundation wall on one side of the structure, screw piles were used instead. This saved several beloved trees which would have had their roots destroyed due to the installation process of normal concrete footings.

Due to the close proximity of the property line, regular gutters could not be used on one side of the house. So a soffit with



Second bedroom in bedroom mode

built-in gutters was installed.

Another thoughtful feature was the placement of the electrical panel. BC Hydro had installed the electrical meter on the wall just outside the kitchen. Rather than having the electrical panel in the kitchen, we placed it in the garage by running

a cable from the meter, down along the foundation wall to the garage.

### Interior refinements

On the interior, to make the most of the limited floor area, we created multi functional spaces. The sleek, modern kitchen dovetails beautifully into the downstairs living space with a place to put coats and boots beside the nearby powder room. One of the two upstairs bedrooms has a murphy bed, which folds up against the wall and looks like a cabinet when not in use. This room which also has a fold down desk can then function as an office. It's a bedroom then voila, it's an office.

To make the space feel larger than it is, we used a light wall colour in every room as well as light, bright flooring. This colour scheme allows the space to flow as well as coordinate with any furniture or items the occupant will bring in.

Creative lighting was used to create a feeling of more space too. Pot lights with dimmers were used throughout the house to give a bright and



“We are extremely pleased with the quality of the work performed by the Kerr crew on our renovation. They were onsite, ready to work everyday from day one and were a pleasure to work with. It was clear to us that they considered the job incomplete until we were completely satisfied. As we were overseas for the first third of the project, communication was key for us and we weren't disappointed.”

Dale T., New Westminster

consistent light. We also added lamps in various rooms to create a layered look for feeling and mood. Lastly, we installed single-panel frosted glass into the two exterior doors to bring in a maximum amount of light while maintaining a level of privacy.

These are just a few examples of the thought and care our company puts into the design and construction of such projects. We can do the same for you.

### Is a laneway house right for you?

If you think a laneway house might be something you are considering for your property, we would be happy to sit down with you and discuss the project, its costs and possible construction timeline.

Our project consultants have years of experience and there is absolutely no obligation or cost involved to you. Our purpose is to empower you with information so you can make the best decision for you, your family and property.

At the end of the session, you should have a firm idea of



“When you invite somebody in your home to do a renovation whether its big or small you want to make sure that you have somebody that you can trust, that you can work with and you can get along with because you know they are going to be in your space for quite a while.

We definitely we hit it off right away with Doug and Derek when they came in to meet with us. We knew we can trust them because they followed up when they said that they were going to.”

Kirk & Ellie, Vancouver

what building a laneway house on your property entails. You can then go home, mull it over, take your time, discuss it with family members, and decide if it's a good decision for you or not.

**If you decide to move forward, we hope you will choose Kerr Design Build for your contractor.**

To arrange a consultation,  
call us at 604-263-0343  
or visit <https://kerrdesign.build/schedule-consultation/>

“We totally renovated our 100 year old Kitsilano Craftsman home. We had to fire the first contractor as he was charging by the hour and would never had got the job done.

Then Kerr came to the rescue with the job not even half finished. We had a written contract, pay by the job, not the hour. They were on time and on budget. . You get what you pay for, my initial "bargain" contractor cost us a lot and the job was unacceptable.

I am so happy with the results, Kerr won an award for the renovation and I could not be more pleased with the results.“

D.S., Kitsilano



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<sup>1</sup> Laneway Housing How-to Guide, City of Vancouver

<sup>2</sup> Growing demand for Vancouver laneway homes, Vancouver Sun, April 30, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Laneway Housing Survey Summary, City of Vancouver

<sup>4</sup> Rental woes are pushing people out of Vancouver. Here's how we reverse the trend, Toronto Star, July 22, 2019