

TORONTO CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Secondary Suites & ADUs

Questions about secondary dwelling units, laneway
suites, garden suites, and rental conversions in
Toronto

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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What's the size limit for a Toronto garden suite?

Toronto garden suites can be up to 60 square metres (approximately 645 square feet) of gross floor area, though several factors can affect the maximum size permitted on your specific lot.

The City of Toronto approved garden suites in 2022, and the zoning bylaw sets out clear parameters. The **60 sq m gross floor area limit** applies to most residential zones, but your suite also cannot exceed **6 metres in height** (roughly two storeys). The footprint of the garden suite itself is further constrained by your lot's **maximum lot coverage rules** — meaning the combined coverage of your main house, any garage, the garden suite, and other structures must stay within the permitted coverage percentage for your zone, which is typically 33–40% depending on your neighbourhood.

Setbacks are another key constraint that can effectively limit your buildable area. Garden suites must generally sit **1.5 metres from rear and side lot lines**, and there are specific rules about proximity to the main dwelling as well. On a smaller or irregularly shaped lot, these setback requirements can reduce your practical building envelope significantly — sometimes well below the 60 sq m maximum.

Toronto-Specific Considerations

Your lot's specific zoning, any ravine overlay, tree protection bylaws, or heritage designations can all further restrict what's permitted. Toronto's ravine protection rules in particular can dramatically limit rear yard construction in affected neighbourhoods. Before designing anything, it's worth checking your property's zoning on the **City of Toronto's online zoning map** or calling Toronto Building at **416-397-5330**.

A building permit is required for any garden suite — there's no way around this, and it protects your investment significantly. Permit timelines for garden suites in Toronto are typically in the **6–12 week range**, so factor that into your project schedule.

Next Steps

Start by having a **registered architect or experienced designer** review your specific lot conditions — many Toronto firms now specialize in garden suites and laneway suites and can quickly tell you what's feasible. Costs for a finished garden suite in the GTA typically run **\$250,000–\$400,000+** depending on size, finishes, and site conditions (utility connections, grading, etc.).

You can browse architects, designers, and general contractors experienced with garden suites in the **Toronto Construction Network directory** to find the right professional for your project.

Front walkway is red brick next to downsloping driveway with stone retaining wall. Wall needs to be straightened and brick relaid . What contractor is best suited to do this work?

For this type of project, you're looking for a hardscape or masonry contractor — specifically one with experience in both retaining wall construction and brick/stone work. Some landscaping companies also handle this scope, but a dedicated masonry contractor is your strongest bet.

Your project has two distinct components that need to work together. The retaining wall repair is the more structurally critical piece — a downsloping driveway with a failing wall means soil pressure and drainage are likely factors in why it shifted in the first place. A good masonry contractor will assess the base, drainage, and backfill conditions before simply straightening and rebuilding. If the wall is just reset without addressing what caused the movement, you'll be back in the same situation within a few years.

The brick walkway relay is more straightforward but should be done by the same contractor or at minimum coordinated with the wall work. Brick needs a proper compacted granular base (typically 4–6 inches of crushed stone plus 1 inch of bedding sand), and the finished grade needs to slope away from your home — roughly **1/8 to 1/4 inch per foot** to manage water runoff properly. In Toronto's freeze-thaw climate, a poorly prepared base is the number one reason brick walkways heave and shift over time.

What to look for in a contractor:

- Experience with both retaining walls and unit/brick masonry (ask to see past projects)
- Knowledge of proper drainage solutions — weeping tile, gravel backfill, or drainage fabric behind the retaining wall
- Familiarity with Toronto's frost line (4 feet deep) for any new footings or base work
- References from similar residential hardscape projects in the GTA

Typical costs in the Toronto/GTA market will vary considerably based on wall length, height, and materials, but as a rough guide: retaining wall reconstruction runs **\$150–\$350+ per linear foot**, and brick walkway relaying typically runs **\$20–\$45 per square foot** depending on the pattern and existing brick condition. If new brick or stone is needed, material costs add to that.

A building permit is generally **not required** for retaining walls under 1 metre (roughly 3.3 feet) in height in Toronto, but if your wall exceeds that, check with Toronto Building at **416-397-5330** or **toronto.ca/building**. Even without a permit requirement, the work should be done to proper standards for drainage and structural integrity.

Your next step is to get 2–3 quotes from masonry or hardscape contractors who can assess the wall in person — the cause of the lean matters as much as the repair itself. Browse qualified local professionals in the **Toronto Construction Network directory** to find masonry contractors serving your area of the GTA.

Q3

How much does a Toronto ADU lift my home appraisal value?

Adding an ADU in Toronto can increase your home's appraised value by \$150,000–\$350,000+, depending on the type, size, quality, and location — though the relationship between ADU cost and added value isn't always dollar-for-dollar.

The appraisal lift from an ADU comes from two angles: **comparable sales** (what similar homes with ADUs sell for nearby) and **income capitalization** (the rental income the unit can generate). In Toronto's market, appraisers increasingly use both methods, especially as secondary suites, laneway houses, and garden suites have become more common and better documented in MLS data.

Basement Apartments (Secondary Suites)

A legal, permitted basement apartment typically adds **\$80,000–\$200,000** to appraised value in the GTA. The word "legal" matters enormously here — an unpermitted suite adds little to no appraised value and can actually create liability. A finished, code-compliant unit with a separate entrance, proper egress windows, fire separation, and its own laundry will appraise significantly higher than a rough conversion. In high-demand neighbourhoods like Leslieville, The Annex, or Leaside, you're looking at the upper end of that range.

Laneway and Garden Suites

These are where the numbers get more exciting. **Laneway suites** — Toronto has permitted these since 2018 — typically cost \$250,000–\$450,000 to build and can add **\$200,000–\$400,000** in appraised value, sometimes more in premium neighbourhoods. **Garden suites**, approved in 2022, are showing similar value trajectories as the market matures. Because these are fully detached structures with their own address potential, appraisers treat them closer to a separate dwelling, and the income approach carries more weight.

Toronto-specific factors that affect your appraisal lift include neighbourhood rental demand (Midtown and East End outperform outer Scarborough or Brampton), lot size and suite square footage, quality of finishes, and whether the unit has been rented with documented income history. An appraiser will look at what comparable properties with ADUs actually sold for — and Toronto's resale data for laneway homes is still relatively thin, which can sometimes

cause appraisers to be conservative.

From a **return-on-investment** standpoint, basement suites tend to offer the best ratio — spending \$80,000–\$150,000 to add \$150,000–\$200,000 in value is realistic. Laneway and garden suites are higher risk/reward: the build cost is steep, but rental income of \$2,500–\$3,500/month in Toronto makes the income capitalization approach very favourable.

One important note: appraised value and market value aren't always identical. Buyers in Toronto's market often pay a premium for income-generating properties beyond what a conservative appraisal reflects — so your real-world sale price may exceed the appraised number.

Your next steps would be to consult with a Toronto-area real estate appraiser before committing to a build — some offer pre-development consultations for \$300–\$500 that can give you a realistic value projection for your specific address and neighbourhood. Then connect with a contractor experienced in Toronto ADU builds to align your budget with your expected return. You can find licensed professionals in our **Toronto Construction Network directory** who specialize in secondary suites, laneway, and garden suite construction across the GTA.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Toronto Construction Network. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of July 19, 2026 and may change. Visit torontoconstructionnetwork.com for the latest answers.