



The Welcome Matt's Complete Guide to Multi-Generational Home Buying in Chilliwack

A Note From Matt

If you're reading this guide, chances are you can't fully square the circle of rising prices, changing family needs, and a market that doesn't always feel like it was built for real people. Maybe your young adults can't afford to move out. Maybe your parents would prefer to age in place with support. Maybe you're a sandwich-generation household trying to hold it all together; or it's all three at once.

Multi-generational living is one of the oldest housing arrangements in human history, and it's not just a trend. It's a structural response to affordability, aging, and community. It's pushing families to get creative, get strategic, and get serious about how they structure their housing decisions.

I've helped many families navigate this journey. Some came to me already sold on the idea and just needed help finding the right property. Others were skeptical and needed help thinking through whether it was right for them at all. And some were in the middle; excited about the financial upside but nervous about what happens when Grandma and your teenagers are sharing a backyard, a driveway, and a Netflix password.

This guide is written for all of them. It's written for you. We're going to cover everything: the financial case, the emotional reality, the legal and zoning landscape in Chilliwack, what to look for in a property, and how to set your family up for success before you ever sign on the dotted line. My goal is to give you an honest, practical, Chilliwack-specific look at multi-generational home buying without the sales pitch and without glossing over the hard parts. Let's get into it.

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What Is Multi-Generational Living and Why Is It Having a Moment?

Multi-generational living, at its simplest, means two or more generations of the same family sharing a home or property. This could mean: a single family home with a legal suite, where parents live upstairs and adult children (or the reverse) occupy the basement or secondary suite. A detached carriage house or laneway home on the same property. A duplex or side-by-side where two family households share a wall but have fully separate living spaces. A large single-family home where multiple generations share common spaces but have defined private areas. Or a strata unit or townhome purchased near (not on) a family member's property as a coordinated but not physically connected arrangement. There is no single template, and that flexibility is part of the appeal.

Why Is It Growing?

Statistics Canada data consistently shows that multi-generational households are on the rise across the country. Between 2001 and 2021, the number of multi-generational households in Canada grew by more than 45%, making it one of the fastest-growing household types in the country. In British Columbia, the numbers are even more pronounced, driven by a combination of high housing costs, an aging population, immigration patterns, and shifting attitudes about family and independence.

In the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley, affordability is the single biggest driver. When a detached home in Vancouver or Burnaby costs well over \$1.5 million, and even Mission and Abbotsford are regularly seeing benchmark prices above \$800,000, families are looking for ways to stretch their purchasing power. And increasingly, that means looking east — to Chilliwack.



Why Chilliwack? The Affordability Advantage That's Changing the Equation

The Price Differential

Chilliwack consistently offers some of the most accessible detached home prices in the entire Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley corridor. While benchmark prices fluctuate with market conditions, Chilliwack has historically offered detached homes at price points significantly below Abbotsford, Langley, Surrey, and especially the Tri-Cities and Burnaby. At the time this guide was written, a buyer could still find detached properties in Chilliwack with legal suites or substantial lot sizes capable of accommodating secondary structures in the \$700,000 to \$950,000 range; numbers that would be impossible to find in communities further west. For a multi-generational family that needs a property capable of housing two households, this is a game-changer. The type of property they need: larger lot, secondary suite, potential for a carriage house simply doesn't exist at an accessible price point in Langley or Surrey anymore. In Chilliwack, it still does.

What Families Are Finding Here

- Larger lots. Chilliwack has significantly more inventory of properties on larger lots; properties where a carriage house or garden suite is either already built or feasibly buildable under current zoning. In a more densely developed community, that land simply doesn't exist.
- Existing legal suites. A meaningful percentage of Chilliwack's housing stock includes suites; partly a reflection of demographics and partly a result of municipal policies that have encouraged suite development over the years. For a family that wants to move in quickly without a major renovation project, this is enormously valuable.
- Character homes with flexibility. Older Chilliwack neighbourhoods like Sardis, Promontory, and parts of downtown Chilliwack offer large, older character homes that can be converted or renovated to accommodate multi-generational living more easily than newer, open-concept builds.
- New construction with suites included. Chilliwack's new construction market has also responded to demand, with many new builds in areas like Promontory Heights, Garrison Crossing, and Sardis now offering builder-included legal suites as a standard option.

The True Cost Comparison

Imagine a family where aging parents want to move in with their adult child's family, and they need a property with space for two separate households. In Langley or Abbotsford, a detached home with a legal suite capable of comfortably housing two family groups might cost \$1.2 to \$1.4 million or more. In Chilliwack, a comparable property or better might be found for \$800,000 to \$950,000. That differential of \$200,000 to \$500,000 is not just money saved on the purchase price. It's additional capacity in the collective pocket for the inevitable renovations, updates, and life events that come with maintaining a family home over time. When you factor in that the multi-generational arrangement also allows the family to pool income and resources, the financial argument for Chilliwack becomes very difficult to argue against.

Chilliwack's Livability Factor

Chilliwack combines real affordability with real lifestyle. Access to the mountains and outdoor recreation. A growing commercial and restaurant scene. Excellent schools and family infrastructure. Proximity to Highway 1 for commuters. Access to the Vedder River. Cultus Lake in the summer. A strong sense of community identity. These are all quality-of-life factors that have drawn families to Chilliwack for decades and that have accelerated significantly as the community has grown and matured. For a multi-generational family where not everyone commutes to Vancouver every day; perhaps because retired parents don't, Chilliwack's relative distance from the city core is simply less of a factor than it once was.





The Financial Benefits of Multi-Generational Living: Making the Numbers Work

Shared Mortgage Qualification

One of the most powerful financial benefits of a multi-generational purchase is the ability to combine incomes for mortgage qualification purposes. Under current Canadian mortgage rules, when multiple parties are on title or co-signing a mortgage, lenders consider the combined qualifying income of all borrowers. This matters enormously in a market where stress-tested mortgage qualification has made it difficult for a single household to qualify for the type of property they actually need. A family where the adult children earn a combined \$120,000 per year might struggle to qualify for a home above \$650,000 on their own. But if their parents contribute \$60,000 in retirement income to the equation, the combined picture changes dramatically. It's a meaningful advantage.

The Rental Income Offset

For families where one generation occupies a legal suite while the other occupies the main home, the practical effect is that the family is generating rental income; even if technically no money changes hands, the reduction in overall housing costs functions the same way. If Grandma and Grandpa occupy the basement suite instead of paying \$1,800 a month to rent an apartment somewhere else, the family unit is collectively \$1,800 a month better off. That's \$21,600 a year; money that can go toward the mortgage, toward home improvements, toward retirement savings, or toward helping grandchildren with education costs. For families where the arrangement involves an actual legal tenancy with market rent, lenders may also consider that rental income when qualifying the mortgage.

Shared Operating Costs, Childcare, and Elder Care

Housing costs don't stop at the mortgage. Property taxes, utilities, internet, home insurance, lawn care, snow removal, and maintenance are ongoing costs that can be meaningfully reduced on a per-household basis when shared. Two families on one lot typically share one set of fixed costs, and the combined savings can easily reach \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year compared to two separate households. Add to that the potential savings from shared childcare; in the Fraser Valley, full-time care for a single child can cost \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year and the numbers improve further. On the other side of the lifecycle, the ability to keep aging parents at home can defer assisted-living expenses often ranging from \$4,000 to \$8,000 per month, preserving wealth and family stability.

Wealth Building and Equity Accumulation

When multiple generations invest in a single property together, the equity accumulated over time belongs in whole or in part to all of them. For parents who want to transfer wealth to their children without gifting cash, contributing to the purchase of a multi-generational property is a tax-efficient way to accomplish that. For adult children who would otherwise struggle to enter the housing market, a multi-generational purchase can be their path to ownership. Real estate in the Fraser Valley has historically appreciated. A multi-generational property purchased today in Chilliwack at \$850,000 may be worth significantly more in a decade and every generation with a stake benefits.



The Real Challenges of Multi-Generational Living: Being Honest About the Hard Parts

Privacy and Personal Space

Privacy is the number one concern I hear from families considering multi-generational living, and it's legitimate. When you've spent years building a home life with your spouse and kids; a routine, a rhythm, a sense of your own space, adding another household changes things. The degree to which privacy is preserved depends enormously on the physical layout of the property. A legal basement suite with its own entrance, kitchen, bathroom, laundry, and solid sound insulation is a very different arrangement than a large single-family home where two generations share common living spaces. Separate entrances, separate laundry, and clear yard zones are key design features that preserve autonomy and reduce daily friction.

Boundaries, Expectations, and Lifestyle Differences

Close behind privacy is the challenge of boundaries. This shows up in a thousand small ways: when is it okay to drop by; how shared spaces are used; who hosts holidays; what noise levels are acceptable at night; how parenting decisions are respected. These tensions are not unique to multi-generational homes (they exist in every extended family) but proximity turns them into daily realities unless expectations are established clearly and early. Families who do this well have frank conversations before moving in, write down agreements, and revisit them. Lifestyle differences, sleep schedules, tidiness standards, politics, and issues with hobbies will surface. Anticipate them and agree on a process for resolving issues.

Financial Tensions, Equity, and Exit Plans

Money can be a source of tension when contributions are unequal or when circumstances change. Before purchasing, discuss how ownership is structured, how costs are shared, what happens if one party needs to exit, and what occurs in an estate context. One of the most overlooked risks is the lack of a clear exit plan: What if parents need higher-level care? What if adult children separate? What if someone needs to move for work? A formal co-ownership agreement drafted by a real estate lawyer should define buyout provisions, dispute resolution, triggers for sale, and handling on death or incapacity. It's not pessimistic — it's responsible.



Zoning, Suites, and What's Legal in Chilliwack

Legal Suites vs. Unauthorized Suites

A legal suite is a secondary dwelling unit permitted in compliance with Chilliwack's building codes and zoning bylaws: proper egress windows, ceiling height, fire separation, separate entrance, and full safety compliance. It's recorded with the municipality, and you can legally rent it out and declare income. An unauthorized suite exists without permits and may not meet code. They are common and often livable, but they carry risk: potential closure orders, insurance gaps, and resale complications. If buying with an existing suite, verify its legal status with the City and through inspection. If unauthorized, get contractor quotes to legalize and include timelines and costs in your decision.

Chilliwack's Secondary Suite Policy

The City of Chilliwack is generally supportive of secondary suites across most single-family zones, subject to Building and Zoning Bylaw compliance and suite registration. Expect requirements for minimum suite size, separate private entrance, minimum ceiling heights, fire and sound separation, and BC Building Code standards for windows, ventilation, and electrical. If a suite doesn't already exist, consult the City's Building & Bylaw Services for feasibility and process; they're accessible and helpful for preliminary inquiries.

Garden Suites, Carriage Houses, ALR, and Leaseholds

Garden suites (detached secondary suites) offer maximum privacy for multi-gen families: separate four walls, their own front door, and yard space. Regulations depend on zoning and lot specifics: setbacks, parking, lot and suite size caps all apply. Engage a local realtor and building consultant early if this is part of your plan. Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) properties follow Agricultural Land Commission rules for principal residences and farm worker housing as additional dwellings require specific approvals. Finally, some nearby First Nations communities offer leasehold properties with unique financing and transfer rules; these can suit multi-gen needs but require specialized guidance. I'm happy to connect clients with the right professionals if you need help.



What to Look for in a Multi-Generational Property in Chilliwack

Separate Entrances are Non-Negotiable

A truly functional multi-gen home hinges on independent access. Separate exterior doors preserve privacy, dignity, and daily convenience. When the suite occupant can step out for a morning walk or attend an appointment without walking through another household's living room, autonomy is protected and micro-frictions fade.

Sound Insulation, Laundry, and Utilities

Sound transmission between levels is a top livability complaint. Ask about the floor/ceiling assembly and whether sound batts or resilient channels were used. Upgrading after the fact can be costly. Separate laundry removes a disproportionate source of frustration; properties with in-suite laundry command a premium for good reason. Separate metering for hydro and gas simplifies cost-sharing and preserves financial independence; if meters aren't separate, decide how you'll apportion costs.

Outdoor Space, Parking, and Neighbourhood Fit

Yard zones that naturally divide; by fencing, landscaping, or grade will reduce friction. Plan for two or more vehicles with accessible, reliable parking. As for neighbourhoods: Sardis is suburban, family-friendly, and convenient to services. Promontory offers newer construction, community feel, and many builder-included suites. Garrison Crossing provides walkability and design-forward newer stock. Downtown/Yale Road delivers older homes on larger lots with renovation potential. Greendale and rural surrounds offer land and separation in exchange for distance from services.



PRIVATE
RESIDENCE

TEXAS
RHB-1460

ROGUE



The Legal Framework: Ownership, Agreements, and Protecting Everyone

How to Hold Title

In BC, the two primary title structures are joint tenancy and tenancy in common. Joint tenancy means all owners hold equal, undivided interests, and on death an owner's share passes to the survivors (right of survivorship), bypassing probate. Simple, but it fixes equal shares regardless of differing contributions. Tenancy in common assigns defined shares to each owner; those shares pass through the estate on death, which provides flexibility but can add complexity. The right choice depends on contributions, estate plans, and family dynamics so get legal advice before signing.

Co-Ownership Agreements and Estate Planning

A co-ownership agreement is the operating manual for your shared property. It should define cost-sharing, decision-making thresholds, buyout formulas, triggers for sale, dispute resolution, and what happens on death, incapacity, or family breakdown. Have it drafted by a lawyer experienced in co-ownership. Estate planning must be coordinated: wills, powers of attorney, representation agreements, and tax planning for principal residence exemptions and any contribution structures (gift, loan, or investment). If parents contribute to a child's home without being on title, document intent clearly to avoid future disputes.



Financing a Multi-Generational Property: What You Need to Know

Multiple Borrowers and Rental Income

Combining incomes from multiple generations can significantly improve qualification, but all borrowers are jointly responsible for the debt. If one party's circumstances change, the others must carry the payment; plan for this in your agreement. If a legal suite is involved and rent is actually paid, many lenders will apply 50%–80% of market rent to qualification, subject to legality and appraisal confirmation. Legal suites aren't just better to live with, they're often better for financing.

Down Payment Sources and Specialized Brokers

Down payments in multi-gen purchases often combine parents' equity/savings with the younger generation's funds. Lenders accept gifted down payments with signed gift letters stating no expectation of repayment. If funds are a loan, disclosure changes the debt-service math. Work with a mortgage broker who has real multi-gen experience as nuances around co-borrowers, gifts, rental offsets, and title structures matter. I can introduce you to Fraser Valley mortgage professionals who specialize in these files.



Making the Relationship Work: Practical Advice for Multi-Generational Families

Have the Hard Conversations Early

Before you buy, gather all adults and discuss motivations, hopes, and non-negotiables. Cover privacy and independence, decision-making processes, involvement in each other's daily lives, conflict resolution, and contingency plans. Discomfort now prevents resentment later.

Boundaries, Rituals, and Time Apart

Define what's shared (yards, garage, tools) and what isn't. Agree on visiting etiquette; text first or drop-in? For grandparents and grandchildren, set expectations around childcare scope, discipline alignment, and daily routines. Protect time apart for each household and intentionally create shared rituals (Sunday dinners, birthdays, lake days) that make the arrangement joyful.

Maintain Financial Clarity and Plan for Change

Document expense-sharing, keep transparent records, and review annually. Assume circumstances will evolve: health, mobility, income, and schooling needs shift. Decide now how modifications (ramps, accessible bathrooms) will be funded, and what the exit looks like if someone must move. The families who thrive are proactive, not reactive.



A Chilliwack-Specific Checklist for Multi-Generational Buyers

Before You Start Looking

- Confirm all parties genuinely want to proceed; not just agree to “try.”
- Get a mortgage pre-approval that includes all borrowers and any rental income potential.
- Engage lawyer experienced in co-ownership.
- Discuss estate planning with a lawyer/accountant; align title structure (joint tenancy vs. tenancy in common).
- Define must-haves, nice-to-haves, and deal-breakers.

When Evaluating Properties

- Verify legal status of any suite; request permits/inspections.
- Confirm zoning for suites, garden suites, or carriage houses.
- Assess sound separation; check for separate entrance and laundry.
- Check metering for hydro/gas; price out separation if needed.
- Evaluate yard division, parking for both households, and neighbourhood fit.
- Order an inspection with suite-specific focus.

Before Finalizing and After Move-In

- Draft and sign a co-ownership agreement with buyout and dispute terms.
- Finalize down payment structure; document any gifts.
- Confirm insurance for both units.
- Write a family agreement on relational ground rules.
- Schedule a 90-day check-in; revisit finances annually; track municipal rule updates.

BUILDING INSPECTION REPORT



Inspector name/signature: _____
Date/time of inspection: _____
Construction start date: _____
Projected completion date: _____

Site location: _____
Name of Contractor: _____
Address: _____

The purpose of this checklist is to assess the compliance of construction practices in relation to the minimum standards of
INFORMATION ON REINFORCED CONCRETE SITE PRACTICES

a. Conc. design mix: _____ b. Method of casting: _____
Sources of: c. HCB: _____ d. Steel rebar: _____

Element Inspected	Compliant	Non-compliant	Comments
GENERAL SETBACKS			
1. Setbacks from boundaries			
2. Setbacks from roads			
3. Setbacks- special features			
FOUNDATIONS			
4. Foundation preparation			
5. Foundation depths			
6. Foundation dimensions			
7. Reinforcement type/sizes			
8. Reinforcement arrangement			
9. Cover to reinforcement			
10. Reinforcement lap/continuity			
COLUMNS			
11. Column size			
12. Column spacing			
13. Column bracing (not greater than 10x)			
14. Reinforcement type/sizes			
15. Reinforcement arrangement			
16. Cover to reinforcement			
17. Reinforcement lap/continuity			
18. Formwork			

Follow-up/Comments



Common Questions I Hear From Multi-Generational Buyers in Chilliwack

- 01 Can we buy a property together if one of us is a first-time buyer and the other isn't? Yes, but the first-time buyer exemptions; like the BC First Time Home Buyers' Program may only apply to the eligible party's share if you structure title as tenancy in common. Get tailored advice to maximize exemptions.**

- 02 If my parents contribute to the down payment but aren't on title, is that a problem? It depends on intent. If it's a true gift, a gift letter suffices for lenders. If there's any expectation of repayment or equity participation, not having parents on title leaves their interest unprotected. Discuss with a lawyer.**

- 03 How do we handle things if my parents need more care as they age? Plan now: will the home accommodate accessibility upgrades (no-step entries, grab bars, wider doors, accessible bathroom)? Is the suite ground-level? Are local care services available? Thinking this through before purchase helps you select the right property.**

- 04 What if the arrangement doesn't work and we need to sell? Your co-ownership agreement should define triggers for sale, buyout rights, and dispute resolution. Don't rely on goodwill alone as stress can strain even strong relationships.**

- 05 Is multi-gen living more common in certain neighbourhoods? Yes. Sardis and Promontory have the highest concentration of legal-suite homes and are popular with multi-gen buyers. Garrison Crossing offers newer, design-forward stock with many homes planned for suites. Rural Greendale and Rosedale suit families wanting more land.**

- 06 How do we know if a basement suite is legal? Ask for permits and inspection records, contact the City's Building Department, and have your inspector evaluate life-safety and code indicators. Are garage-to-suite conversions legal? Only if properly permitted and code-compliant; many are not, so verify before relying on rental income.**



Final Thoughts: Is Multi-Generational Living Right for Your Family?

Multi-generational living isn't for everyone but for many Fraser Valley families, it delivers financial resilience, practical support, and deeper relationships that few other arrangements can match. In Chilliwack, the opportunity is uniquely compelling: relative affordability, abundant suite-ready housing, flexible lots, and a community built around outdoor life, family infrastructure, and small-city warmth. The families who thrive in this model are honest with each other, plan for the hard parts as well as the good ones, and don't assume logistics or relationships will "work themselves out." They align on finances and title, draft real agreements, choose neighbourhoods that fit all generations, and talk (early and often) about boundaries and change.

If you're considering a multi-gen purchase, look beyond the listing photos. Assess suite legality, entrances, sound control, laundry, metering, outdoor zones, parking, and accessibility potential. Map your financing with a broker who understands multi-gen nuances. Sit down with a lawyer to structure title and a co-ownership agreement that anticipates exits and life events. And most importantly, keep the human factors front and center: communication, respect, flexibility, and the rituals that make a house feel like everyone's home.

This is complex work, and it benefits from local expertise. I've seen a lot of scenarios and I know how to navigate them; from what's legal to what's actually available and realistic at different price points. My name is Matt Paisley, (The Welcome Matt). I'd love to be the realtor who helps your family find its way home.

