

VANCOUVER ELECTRICAL REPAIR

Panels & Service Upgrades

100A to 200A upgrades, Stab-Lok and fuse panel
replacement, sub-panels, load calculations and BC
Hydro coordination

4 Expert Answers from Electric IQ

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Can I keep my fuse box in a 1950s New Westminster house?

Fuse boxes themselves are not illegal in BC, and Technical Safety BC does not require you to replace one simply because it exists. That said, keeping a fuse panel in a 1950s New Westminster home comes with real practical pressures that push most owners toward replacement eventually, and the cost of a panel replacement in Metro Vancouver runs **\$1,800 to \$3,500 for a same-size swap, or \$3,500 to \$6,000 for a 100A-to-200A service upgrade.**

The honest picture on fuse panels

The BC Electrical Code does not prohibit fuse panels, and no Technical Safety BC rule mandates replacement on a timeline. However, three things tend to force the issue:

Home insurance is the biggest pressure. BC insurers routinely refuse to write or renew policies on homes with fuse panels, or they add a surcharge and require an inspection. Before you decide anything, call your insurer and ask directly whether your current policy covers the panel as-is, and what happens at renewal. That answer often makes the decision for you.

The second issue is capacity. A 1950s New Westminster house likely has a 60A service, which was adequate when the home was built but struggles with a modern load: induction range, dishwasher, washer-dryer, EV charger, heat pump. You cannot simply add circuits to a fuse panel the way you can a breaker panel, and overfusing (stuffing a 30A fuse into a 15A circuit) is a genuine fire risk that inspectors and insurers watch for.

The third issue is what else is in the walls. A 1950s New Westminster home may still have knob-and-tube wiring on some circuits. Knob-and-tube is not automatically illegal either, but BC insurers treat it almost as harshly as they treat fuse panels, and the two problems often travel together. An electrician doing a panel assessment will flag any live knob-and-tube they find.

If you are keeping the fuse panel for now, the things that are genuinely dangerous are not the fuses themselves but the workarounds people apply: pennies behind a blown fuse, oversized fuses on undersized wire, or double-tapping a fuse socket. Those create fire conditions. A fuse panel that is properly sized, not overfused, and in good physical condition is safer than a neglected breaker panel.

For the permit path: New Westminster gets its electrical permits from Technical Safety BC, not from the city's own building department. Any work beyond a like-for-like device swap, including a panel replacement or service upgrade, needs a permit and inspection through Technical Safety BC. If you hire a licensed electrical contractor, they pull the permit and coordinate the BC Hydro disconnect and reconnect, which adds roughly \$1,200 to the job when Hydro charges for it separately.

A realistic quote for a full 200A service upgrade in New Westminster should include the panel, breakers, permit and inspection fees, BC Hydro coordination, and any required changes to the meter base or service mast. Ask the electrician whether knob-and-tube remediation is in scope, because if they open the walls and find live knob-and-tube, that changes the price.

Want quotes on a panel assessment or upgrade? Vancouver Electrical Repair can match you with local electricians for free.

Q2

Why would my Delta electrician want to abandon the underground feed and go overhead?

An overhead service is almost always cheaper and faster to complete, and in Delta that difference can be significant. Expect the overhead option to come in roughly **\$1,500 to \$3,500 less** than restoring or replacing an underground feed, depending on run length and what the underground work involves.

Here is what is likely driving the recommendation.

Underground feeds fail in ways that are expensive to diagnose and fix. The conduit or direct-burial cable may have cracked from ground movement, root intrusion or corrosion, allowing moisture into the conductors. Finding the fault often means renting locating equipment and sometimes excavating, before a single wire is replaced. If the conduit run is long or passes under a driveway, patio or landscaping, the dig-up cost alone can exceed the entire overhead alternative.

In Delta specifically, the soil conditions in low-lying areas near the Fraser River and the Boundary Bay flats are clay-heavy and prone to settling. That movement stresses underground conduit joints over time, and it is one reason electricians in Delta and Richmond see more underground feed failures than in hillside municipalities. Corrosion at the meter base and at the point where the conduit enters the panel is also common in areas with high water tables.

The practical comparison looks like this. An overhead service drop from BC Hydro's pole to a new weatherhead and meter base typically costs \$2,500 to \$5,500 all in for a standard 200A service, including the permit and BC Hydro's disconnect and reconnect. Replacing or repairing a failed underground feed can run \$4,000 to \$9,000 or more once excavation, conduit, conductors, backfill and surface restoration are factored in, and that is before any panel work.

There are legitimate reasons to stay underground: strata or municipal rules that prohibit overhead drops, a lot layout where no pole is close enough, or a heritage streetscape covenant. Ask your electrician whether the overhead option is actually permitted by Delta's local requirements and whether BC Hydro's nearest pole is positioned to make a clean run.

Because Delta is outside the seven municipalities that run their own electrical permit programs, your permit comes from Technical Safety BC. The electrician pulls the permit, BC Hydro coordinates the disconnect and reconnect, and an inspection follows before the service is re-energised. Make sure the quote you have includes the Technical Safety BC permit fee, BC Hydro's reconnection charge (roughly \$1,200 when they have to send a crew), and any surface restoration if the overhead option still requires any trenching for the panel-side conduit.

Before you decide, ask the electrician to put both options in writing with itemised costs, and confirm their Technical Safety BC licence number before signing anything.

Want quotes from a second or third local electrician on this? Vancouver Electrical Repair can match you with Metro Vancouver electricians for free so you can compare the overhead versus underground numbers side by side.

Q3

My 1990s West End condo panel has no main breaker, is that normal?

For a high-rise strata suite in the West End, yes, that is completely normal and not a defect. Most Vancouver condo suites built in the 1980s and 1990s have no main breaker inside the suite panel because the main disconnect for your unit lives in the electrical room on your floor or in the parkade, controlled by the strata. Your in-suite panel is technically a sub-panel fed from that central point.

What This Means for Your Suite

The in-suite panel in a West End condo from that era is typically rated at 60 to 100 amps, sometimes as low as 40 amps in older concrete towers. It will have individual breakers for each circuit but no single breaker that shuts everything off at once from inside your unit. If you need to kill power to the whole suite, you or the strata's electrician would go to the electrical room. That is by design, not an oversight.

The practical concern is capacity, not the missing main breaker. A 60-amp in-suite panel was sized for the loads of the early 1990s: baseboard heat, a fridge, a dishwasher, lights and a few outlets. It was not sized for an induction range, an in-suite washer-dryer, a heat pump or an EV charger. If you are planning any of those upgrades, a licensed electrician needs to do a load calculation before anything is added. In many West End buildings, the electrical room panels are already at or near capacity, which means a circuit upgrade requires strata council

approval and possibly a building-wide electrical planning report before an individual suite can get more amperage.

One thing worth checking: the West End saw a lot of leaky-condo-era construction between roughly 1982 and 1998, and moisture damage from envelope failures can reach junction boxes and in-suite wiring over time. If you notice any discolouration around outlets, a burning smell, or a breaker that trips repeatedly, those are reasons to have a licensed electrician look at the wiring, not just the panel.

For permit purposes, the City of Vancouver runs its own electrical permit and inspection program, separate from Technical Safety BC. Any circuit work inside your suite, or any work touching strata common property wiring, needs a permit pulled through the City of Vancouver's building department, and strata council approval before work begins. Skipping that step can create problems at sale time or when an insurer asks for documentation.

A like-for-like breaker replacement or a fixture swap on an existing box generally does not need a permit, but adding circuits or upgrading capacity does. Confirm the Technical Safety BC licence and WorkSafeBC coverage of any electrician you hire, since we do not verify those ourselves.

Want quotes for in-suite electrical work in your building? Vancouver Electrical Repair can match you with local electricians for free.

Is an in-suite 60 amp panel in a Yaletown high-rise ever upgradeable?

In a Yaletown high-rise, upgrading an in-suite 60A panel is possible in some buildings, but the answer depends almost entirely on what the electrical room can supply, not what you want in your suite. The honest starting point is a load calculation and a conversation with your strata council before anyone touches a wire.

What actually limits your suite's capacity

Your in-suite panel is fed by a circuit breaker in the building's main electrical room, and that breaker is sized for what the original engineer allocated to your floor and suite. In many Yaletown concrete towers built through the 1980s and 1990s, each suite was designed around electric baseboard heat, a standard range and a washer-dryer, all within 60A. The conductors running from the electrical room to your suite were sized to match. To get more amperage at your panel, those conductors would need to be replaced all the way back to the electrical room, and the breaker feeding your suite would need to be upsized. Whether there is a spare slot and enough spare capacity in the electrical room is something only a load calculation on the whole building can answer.

Some buildings, particularly newer ones or those that have already done electrical room upgrades, have headroom for a 100A suite feed. Others are at or near capacity across all suites, and no amount of money spent inside your unit will change that.

The strata approval step is not optional. In-wall conductors and the electrical room are common property under the Strata Property Act. You need written council approval and almost certainly an alteration agreement before a licensed electrician can even assess the electrical room on your behalf. Some stratas have already commissioned an EV-ready electrical planning report, which maps available capacity suite by suite, and that document is the fastest way to find out where your building stands.

The permit path in the City of Vancouver runs through the City's own electrical inspection program, not Technical Safety BC. Your electrician will pull the permit with the City of Vancouver Building Department. Budget \$75-\$200 for the permit itself, typically included in a contractor's quote.

Cost-wise, if the upgrade is physically possible, you are looking at \$3,500-\$7,000 or more for a suite service upgrade in a high-rise, because the work involves the electrical room, new conductors through concrete or conduit, a new panel and coordination with BC Hydro if the building's main service is also affected. That range climbs if the building's electrical room needs any remediation or if load management equipment is required, which is increasingly common when multiple suites are adding EV chargers at the same time.

What to ask before hiring anyone: confirm the electrician holds a Technical Safety BC licence and that their company carries WorkSafeBC coverage. Ask specifically whether they have experience with high-rise strata electrical rooms in Vancouver, because the coordination with the strata, the electrical room work and the City permit process are all different from a single-family panel swap. Get the strata's written approval in hand before signing anything.

Want quotes for this? Vancouver Electrical Repair can match you with local electricians who work in Yaletown and Downtown Vancouver high-rises.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver Electrical Repair. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local electrical authority (your municipality or Technical Safety BC) before starting any electrical project. Information is current as of October 4, 2026 and may change. Visit vancouverelectricalrepair.com for the latest answers.