VANCOUVER HVAC PRO

Air Conditioning & Cooling

Central AC, heat pumps as cooling, portable versus installed units, and keeping Metro Vancouver homes and condos cool in heat waves

4 Expert Answers from HVAC IQ

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Table of Contents

1. My strata says no outdoor units, how else can I cool my Metrotown condo?
2. Hot third floor in a Kerrisdale character home, what cooling options work?
3. Are Port Coquitlam AC installers booked out in summer, and for how long?
4. Can a portable AC vent through a sliding window in my Brentwood condo?

Q1

My strata says no outdoor units, how else can I cool my Metrotown condo?

Cooling a condo without an outdoor unit is genuinely possible, though each option involves a trade-off between comfort, cost and what your strata will actually approve.

Cooling Options Without an Outdoor Unit

Portable air conditioners are the most common workaround. A single-hose or dual-hose portable unit sits inside the suite, vents through a window or sliding door kit, and needs no strata approval because nothing penetrates the building envelope permanently. Expect to pay $400 to $800 for a decent unit. The downside is noise, reduced efficiency compared to a split system, and the fact that a single-hose model pulls conditioned air out of the room as exhaust, making it work harder than it should. A dual-hose model is meaningfully more efficient.

Window air conditioners cost $300 to $700 and cool well for a single room, but most Metrotown strata buildings have fixed windows or sliding doors that make installation awkward, and the unit is visible from outside, which many stratas prohibit even without a formal outdoor-unit rule. Check your strata's bylaws specifically on window-mounted equipment before buying.

Ceiling fans and ventilation improvements will not cool the air, but moving air feels several degrees cooler on skin, which matters during a heat wave. If your suite has an HRV or ERV, running it on high overnight to flush in cooler outside air can reduce the next day's peak temperature noticeably. Burnaby's wet, mild climate means overnight temperatures drop enough in most summers to make this worthwhile, though the 2021 heat dome showed the limits of that strategy.

In-suite fan coil systems are worth investigating if your building already has a central chilled-water or four-pipe system. Some Metrotown towers built in the 1990s and 2000s have fan coils that are wired for both heating and cooling but were never connected to a chilled-water loop, or the loop exists and a valve just needs to be opened. Your property manager or building engineer can tell you whether the infrastructure is there. If it is, adding cooling may be a matter of a mechanical contractor connecting the existing coil, which is far less disruptive than any new equipment.

Ductless mini-splits with a shared or rooftop condenser are sometimes permitted in buildings where individual balcony or ground-mounted units are banned. A few strata councils will approve a connection to a shared commercial-style condenser on the roof, or a unit mounted in a mechanical room, if a resident proposes and funds it. This is a longer conversation with strata council and requires a licensed contractor to assess feasibility, but it is the only path to a true inverter-driven split system if individual outdoor units are off the table.

Before spending anything, pull your strata's current bylaws and ask the property manager in writing exactly what is and is not permitted. "No outdoor units" sometimes means no balcony-mounted units but says nothing about window units or portable equipment. Getting that clarity in writing protects you if a neighbour or council member later objects.

For any electrical work inside the suite, Burnaby issues its own electrical permits, so the contractor you hire needs to pull a Burnaby permit for any new dedicated circuit.

The key decision here is whether a portable unit gets you through summer well enough, or whether it is worth pursuing the shared-condenser conversation with your strata council. If you want to explore the mini-split route or get quotes on any of these options, Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with a local contractor who knows Burnaby strata work.

Q2

Hot third floor in a Kerrisdale character home, what cooling options work?

Third-floor heat in a Kerrisdale character home is one of the trickiest cooling problems in Vancouver, and the right fix depends heavily on whether the house has ducts, how the electrical panel sits and where an outdoor unit can go. Budget roughly **$4,500 to $18,000** depending on the approach, with single-zone ductless at the lower end and a ducted system at the higher.

Why the top floor bakes

Older Kerrisdale houses, typically built between the 1920s and 1950s, were designed for gravity heat, not forced air. Hot air rises and pools under the roof, insulation in the attic floor is often thin, and west-facing dormers or a low-pitched roof turn the third floor into a solar oven by mid-afternoon. The 2021 heat dome made this a real safety issue, not just a comfort one.

City of Vancouver rule to know first: since January 1, 2023, any new permanently installed air conditioning in a detached house or duplex must be a heat pump, one that heats and cooling-only central AC is no longer an option for this type of home. That actually works in your favour because a heat pump also replaces or supplements your heating upstairs.

Ductless mini-split, single zone. This is the most practical starting point. One outdoor unit, one wall-mounted head on the third floor, no ductwork needed. Installed cost in Metro Vancouver runs $4,500 to $8,000. A cold-climate inverter model handles Vancouver's occasional dips below -5°C without drama. The outdoor unit needs to sit on a raised pad, at least 90 cm from the property line, and the City recommends units rated 55 dBA sound power

or less. In a narrow Kerrisdale lot, placement takes some planning.

Multi-zone mini-split. If the second floor also runs warm, a two- or three-head system covers both levels from one outdoor unit. Expect $9,000 to $14,000 for that scope. Line sets run through the wall or a chase, which in a character home sometimes means a bit of interior finishing work afterward.

Ducted system on existing ductwork. If the house already has a forced-air furnace with ducts reaching the upper floors, a ducted heat pump can use that infrastructure. Realistically, many Kerrisdale character homes have ducts only on the main floor or basement, so extending to the third floor adds cost and complexity, pushing the total toward $15,000 to $22,000 or more.

Permits in the City of Vancouver. The electrical circuit for the heat pump needs an electrical permit, which the City of Vancouver issues itself. The City has also required a mechanical permit for any new heating or cooling system installation since July 2022; the fee runs roughly $432 plus a per-kilowatt charge. If you are removing a gas appliance as part of this project, a gas permit is also required, issued by the City of Vancouver. Your contractor pulls all of these and should include them in the quote.

Rebates. If the house currently heats with electric baseboards, a BC Hydro rebate of up to $4,000 may apply for a whole-home heat pump replacing all-electric heat. If you heat with gas, there is currently no general fuel-switching rebate available for Metro Vancouver households outside the income-qualified CleanBC program. Confirm eligibility with BC Hydro or Better Homes BC before purchasing.

Before a contractor visits, note where an outdoor unit could realistically go on the lot; Vancouver HVAC Pro can then send your details to local contractors for quotes on the third-floor cooling.

Q3

Are Port Coquitlam AC installers booked out in summer, and for how long?

Summer is the busiest season for AC and heat pump installers across Metro Vancouver, and Port Coquitlam is no exception. By late May, many contractors are booking four to eight weeks out, and after a heat event that number can stretch to ten or twelve weeks for the most in-demand companies.

Why the Wait Gets Long

The 2021 heat dome changed buyer behaviour permanently. A lot of homeowners who had never thought about cooling now treat it as essential, and that demand spike repeats every spring. Port Coquitlam's housing stock, largely 1970s to 1990s forced-air houses in Citadel, Lincoln Park and Mary Hill, is well suited to adding a central

heat pump or ductless mini-split, so the local backlog tends to be real rather than manufactured.

Ductless single-zone installs are quicker to schedule because they take one to two days and need less pre-work. A ducted central system on existing furnace ductwork takes longer to plan and install, and if your electrical panel needs a service upgrade from 100A to 200A, that adds another scheduling dependency since an electrician has to complete that work first. In Port Coquitlam, both the gas permit (if you are removing a gas furnace) and the electrical permit for the new heat pump circuit come from Technical Safety BC, so the contractor pulls both through the same authority, which keeps the paperwork straightforward.

The single most useful thing you can do is book before the heat arrives. Reaching out in February or March typically means you get a May or June install date rather than waiting until August. Contractors who are not yet swamped in spring are also more likely to spend time on a proper heat loss calculation rather than rushing the sizing, which matters for how well the system performs on the hottest days.

A fair quote for a Port Coquitlam AC or heat pump install should include the heat loss and cooling load calculation, the specific model and capacity, all electrical work (circuit, disconnect, and any panel work), the line set, a raised outdoor pad, removal of old equipment if applicable, and permits. For a ductless single-zone system, budget roughly $4,500 to $8,000 installed; a multi-zone setup with two to four heads runs $9,000 to $18,000; a ducted central heat pump on existing ducts is typically $10,000 to $18,000, more if the ductwork needs work or the panel needs upgrading.

Before hiring, ask the contractor for their Technical Safety BC gas contractor licence number if any gas equipment is being disconnected or capped, and confirm they hold refrigerant certification for the heat pump work. Ask whether WorkSafeBC coverage is current and whether permits are included in the quoted price.

If cooling is your only goal and the property is a detached house in the City of Vancouver, note that since January 1, 2023 any new permanently installed AC must be a heat pump. That City of Vancouver rule does not cover Port Coquitlam, but ask your contractor to confirm what is allowed there; a heat pump often makes more sense anyway, and BC Hydro rebates apply if the home is currently on all-electric heat.

Lock in your quotes early this season through Vancouver HVAC Pro and avoid the mid-summer scramble for a Port Coquitlam installer.

Q4

Can a portable AC vent through a sliding window in my Brentwood condo?

Venting a portable AC through a sliding window is the standard approach and it works fine in most Brentwood condos, but there are a few layers to think through before you set it up.

The short answer is yes, with a kit and your strata's blessing.

Most portable AC units come with a sliding window kit that fits a horizontal slider, which is exactly what most Brentwood towers and low-rise strata buildings have. The kit seals around the exhaust hose so hot air exits and outside air does not pour back in. A vertical slider needs a different adapter, but those are widely available at hardware stores for around $20 to $40.

What actually matters here

Portable AC units are not permanently installed, so they do not trigger Burnaby's building permit process or an electrical permit. You plug them into a standard 15A or 20A outlet. That said, Burnaby's noise bylaw sets a limit of 55 dBA by day and 45 dBA at night, and a portable unit running near an open balcony or thin wall can be noticeable to neighbours, so it is worth checking the unit's rated sound level before you buy.

The bigger question in a strata is whether your bylaws or rules restrict window modifications, even temporary ones. Many Brentwood strata corporations have rules about what can be placed in or against windows, especially on upper floors where appearance standards apply. Check your strata's bylaws and, if there is any doubt, send a quick note to strata council before setting it up. You do not need a formal council vote for a portable unit in most cases, but getting written confirmation protects you.

A few practical points for a condo specifically: make sure the condensate drain or collection tank is managed, because in Metro Vancouver's humid summers a portable unit can fill a tank surprisingly fast. Keep the exhaust hose as short and straight as possible; a kinked or long hose reduces efficiency noticeably. And if your suite faces west or southwest, which is common in the Brentwood towers along Lougheed and Willingdon, a portable unit will work harder during afternoon heat waves.

On cost, a portable AC runs roughly $400 to $800 depending on capacity, and a window unit (if your strata allows it) runs $300 to $700. Neither requires a contractor. If you find that a portable unit cannot keep up with a west-facing top-floor suite, a ductless mini-split is the more effective long-term solution, though that does require strata approval, a wall penetration, and a licensed refrigerant technician for installation.

If a portable unit is not enough by next July, a ductless system is the next step, and local contractors can quote it once your strata has signed off.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver HVAC Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local permit authority (your municipality or Technical Safety BC) before starting any heating, cooling or gas project. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **vancouverhvacpro.com** for the latest answers.