

BC's Incredible Shrinking Home



The public, media, elected officials are often unaware of the challenges experienced by builders in the world of home construction.

The process of home design, changing building codes, rezonings, permit approvals, project management and sales is understood only by those engaged in the business.

That's why regulation changes often have unintended consequences overlooked by policy-makers.

For example, asbestos and urea formaldehyde insulation, leaky condo, and more recently BC Step Code's radon ingress, were the unintended consequences of fast-tracking energy efficiency without adequate research nor appreciation for proven practice.

The latest unintended consequence is the disconnect between the province and municipalities on how to calculate floor space in new homes.

This is an issue as the Ministry of Housing increases accessibility regulations for homes which requires more space for wider doors, accessible bathrooms, kitchens, etc.

As the province expands floor space, some municipalities are shrinking it.

The BC Building Code calculates floor space "between exterior walls" meaning the interior of the home.

However, some municipalities calculate floor space from the outside face of exterior walls.

Including cladding as floor space significantly shrinks living space, and especially impacts more affordable homes on small lots.

The challenges and costs increase with thicker insulation and cladding now required for more energy efficient Step Code homes.

In addition, because floor space is calculated differently by municipalities, home designers must change their designs according to local jurisdictions.

The solution is simple. All municipalities should be required to calculate floor space between the walls, excluding the cladding.

Yet, simplicity and affordability continue to elude British Columbians, due to the province's policy of sharing authority with municipalities - a failed governance model resulting in disputes, high costs and multiple standards undermining consumer protection.

This is only one of the many issues challenging housing supply and affordability in BC.

It's not complicated, but it does take political will to fix.

Otherwise BC's incredible shrinking home will only boost unaffordability.



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