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Change BC Building Code Governance

The BC Building Code requires a new governance and enforcement structure that is more focused on efficiency and clarity than bureaucratic process.

Presently, 162 BC municipalities have too much latitude and freedom without consequences to interpret the code, causing housing projects to be slowed or halted and costs increased.

The BC government has a Building Code Interpretation Committee that offers only non-binding interpretations of the code. Committee members include:

- Architectural Institute of BC
- Engineers and Geoscientists of BC
- Building Officials' Association of BC
- Plumbing Officials' Association of BC
- The City of Vancouver

A representative from the provincial government's Building and Safety Standards Branch, which is responsible for writing and updating the BC Building Code, participates as a non-voting member.

In other words, the provincial representative, that should best know the code, does not get a vote.

Another organization called the BC Building Code Appeal Board may issue binding interpretations based on appeals from builders, developers, etc. According to the BC government website, the "Board members include subject-matter experts from outside government."

These appeals challenging municipal officials' decisions include "roof space ventilation;" "deck surface material,"

"permitted use of a storage garage" etc. They are issues that should not be holding up housing projects and adding to costs.

There is too much bureaucracy interpreting a building code that has already been passed into regulation.

Rather than engage in this bureaucracy, many builders just accede to municipal decisions. Therefore, an incorrect municipal interpretation of the code may become part of the project.

In fact, municipalities may ignore advice from BC's Building and Safety Standards Branch, and proceed with enforcing their own interpretation, including going to the Building Code Appeal Board at taxpayers' expense.

There are few financial consequences for the municipality, but this process still costs time and money for the builder, even if the builder wins.

The solution is clear, this governance needs to change.

The province's Building and Safety Standards Branch must provide binding interpretations for its own Building Code.

If a municipality wants to suggest a different interpretation, they should do so through the provincial Interpretation committee for future code changes.

Day-to-day interpretation/enforcement must come from the Building and Safety Standards Branch in the interests of consumer protection, efficiency and housing affordability.



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