

DIGITIZE BINDING INTERPRETATIONS IN BC BUILDING CODE



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BC's Ministry of Housing recently announced plans to digitize the building permit process and code, which is currently only available in print or PDF format.

The Ministry says a digitized code will make it faster and easier for builders and building inspectors to understand and interpret the information. It will also allow for more automation during building permit reviews.

The key piece in the announcement involves "interpreting" the code. There needs to be significant change to the existing process that is bogged down in bureaucracy and higher housing costs.

Presently, more than 160 BC municipalities have too much latitude and freedom without consequences to interpret the code, causing housing projects to be slowed or halted.

Presently, there is a Building Code Interpretation Committee that offers only non-binding interpretations.

A member of the Ministry'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.

When a municipal inspector and builder disagree over an interpretation, the dispute may go

to the BC Building Code Appeal Board which can issue binding interpretations based on an appeal from the builder.

This stalls the project and adds more costs. Rather than engage in this bureaucracy, many builders just accede to municipal decisions. Therefore, a flawed municipal interpretation of the code may become part of the project.

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

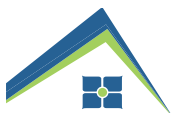
There are few financial consequences for the municipality, but this process costs time and money for the builder, even if the builder wins.

The solution is clear, this governance model needs to change. Digitizing the code must include binding interpretations by the province.

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 Ministry's Building and Safety Standards Branch in the interests of consumer protection, efficiency and housing affordability.

Now is the opportunity to make this happen when digitizing the code.



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