



BRIEFING NOTE FOR INFORMATION

Date: August 18, 2020
Prepared For: Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Title: 12-Storey Encapsulated Mass Timber Construction
Issue: Additional communities opting in to BC Building Code (the Code) provisions

SUMMARY:

- **5 new Lower Mainland communities have met eligibility criteria for early adoption of Code provisions for 12-storey mass timber buildings construction: Port Moody, Coquitlam, West Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and the University Endowment Lands (UEL).**
- **2 additional communities have recently expressed interest (Delta and Prince George) and Ministry staff are working with the communities to confirm eligibility.**
- **A Minister's Order amending the Code to include 7 new communities is planned for early Fall in advance of the virtual Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) Convention in September. The Minister's speech may provide an opportunity to highlight this expansion.**
- **City of Vancouver also followed the Province's lead and amended their building bylaw to include the new provisions in late May 2020, with some modifications.**
- **If approved, the total number of early adopter communities will be 21. Together they represented 62 percent of 2019 housing starts and 56 percent of BC's estimated population in 2019.**

BACKGROUND:

In December 2019, the BC Building and Fire Codes were amended to include new provisions that authorize 12-storey encapsulated mass timber construction in select BC jurisdictions. The provisions are based on national code requirements which are informed by extensive testing and research, and technical review by industry experts, such as fire safety specialists, building designers, builders and staff of the Canadian Commission on Fire and Building Codes.

All local governments were invited to express interest in adopting these provisions two to three years before they are implemented for the whole Province, likely in late 2022. Eligibility criteria were established by policy to encourage preparation for the new requirements. To be eligible, communities had to (1) demonstrate support from their Council, (2) through the City Manager, confirm organizational alignment amongst their planning, building and fire departments, (3) have a level 3 certified building official, and (4) have land use bylaws in place that allow buildings higher than six storeys.

The City of Vancouver followed suit and early adopted the pending National Building Code provisions for Encapsulated Mass Timber Construction. However, they modified the requirements to make them more restrictive. Rather than allowing a specific percentage of unencapsulated mass timber per suite, they prohibit exposed or partially exposed mass timber in residential suites. An excerpt of the City of Vancouver staff report is attached containing their rationale for the more restrictive provisions.



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DISCUSSION:

An initial call for expressions of interest was conducted by the Building and Safety Standards Branch (BSSB) in early 2019. 13 communities responded and met the eligibility criteria prior to the closing date for submissions. Communities were advised that there would be further opportunities for other interested communities to get onboard, and BSSB staff followed up with those that enquired.

UBCM is the annual anniversary of the program launch and provides an opportunity to announce the new early adopter communities. Staff are preparing a Minister's Order for approval to add up to 7 additional communities that have expressed interest and confirmed they met the eligibility criteria or an acceptable equivalent. The full roster of communities is attached. The new Office of Mass Timber Implementation is working closely with BSSB to prepare for this. It is proposed that the Order be signed on or before September 22, 2020 so that this news can be incorporated into communications associated with the virtual convention. Government Communication and Public Engagement have been made aware of this and will advise what may be the best medium to convey this information.

s.13; s.16

The UEL is unique as an unincorporated community administered by Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MAH). UEL staff confirmed organizational alignment with their planning and building department. MAH contracts with the Vancouver Fire Department (VFD) to provide fire services for UEL and neighbouring University of British Columbia (UBC). UBC already adopted the new Code provisions in December 2019. In correspondence with UEL staff, the VFD stated they support the early adoption of mass timber but they also recommended that UEL follow the more restrictive provisions within the City of Vancouver's Building Bylaw, which do not permit any exposed timber. However, as the BC Building Code applies in the UEL, not the Vancouver Building Bylaw, VFD is obliged to use provincial Code provisions when operating under contract in the UEL. The UEL uses the BC Building Code, and as a program of MAH, could not reasonably adopt a provision that is not in the provincial Code (which is approved by MAH).^{s.13}

s.13

Organizational alignment was established as a policy requirement to preclude mixed messages about the advantages and trade offs associated with Encapsulated Mass Timber Construction. This strategy was based on experience when BC increased the allowable height of wood construction from 4 to 6 stories in 2009. In that case, media coverage featured some conflicting opinions about wood, perhaps even from staff within the same jurisdiction, with planning department staff welcoming a more affordable means of urban densification whereas fire departments were sharing concerns about fire risk. The risk of this kind of mixed messaging in the UEL is low, given VFD has been continuing to provide fire services to UBC without issue since the Code provisions were adopted there 8 months ago. UEL can work directly with VFD in the unlikely event that concerns arise.

Attachments:

1. List of the 13 early adopter communities and the additional proposed communities.
2. City of Vancouver Staff Report Excerpt



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