

CANADIAN
HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION
VANCOUVER ISLAND



Step Code Policy Review

August 2020



The recommendations and positions in this document are a direct result of consultations with municipalities and the monitoring and evaluation as the market transitions to net-zero energy ready buildings. CHBA VI is working to ensure a smooth transition to higher performance codes so the industry can continue to provide consumers with affordable, high quality, sustainable housing.

Key Takeaways from Consultations

1. Speed of Step Code Adoption

-  adoption that follows a steady implementation plan is the best way to ensure the broadest understanding and acceptance of the changes by industry, government, and consumers
-  offering educational opportunities and support throughout implementation is key to achieve consistency for the industry and to avoid unintended building defects, costs and will result in better outcomes

2. Cost of Building to Higher Steps

-  Data made available to CHBA VI comprised of over 150 builders and about 12 owner builders that hit step 3 with no changes at all to design. None of the projects required any changes that would exceed \$5000 to achieve their targeted step.
-  Working with an energy advisor many clients have found that their heating systems were too large and that they could qualify for rebates thus making step 3 cheaper than doing regular min code.

Policy Recommendation

CHBA VI continues to recommend the support of educational offerings and increasing the compulsory steps incrementally.

3. Regional Consistency at Step 1

While some municipalities have proceeded with Step Code adoption, others have taken no action. Builders who work in these areas may miss the opportunity to use Step 1, which is a critical training step for builders to learn the new process and how to work with an Energy Advisor.

Policy Recommendation

CHBA VI recommends that all municipalities move to Step 1 as soon as possible. With the province indicating a mandatory move to Step 3 in 2022, municipalities that do not adopt in the interim will miss a foundational step and will incur more costs as a result.



3. Design and Zoning have Performance Impacts

Setback encroachment for insulation: Certain municipalities measure setbacks and building height in ways that penalize projects for using the insulation needed to meet higher levels of the Step Code. This results in higher costs of construction and a direct loss of saleable square footage.

Additionally, there are some municipalities that also have bylaws that require certain design trends that inadvertently can result in lower building performance. An example being the requirement of dormers and articulation in the envelope. Other requirements or regulation may limit solar gain or prevent structures for shading where needed.

Policy Recommendation

CHBA VI recommends that municipalities move quickly to change bylaws to accommodate buildings with extra insulation. This may include measuring from the structure of the building rather than the siding or including useable interior square footage but not exterior walls in the calculation. Many municipalities already allow protrusions into setbacks and above height restrictions such as eaves and chimneys. Exterior insulation and siding could be considered in a similar fashion.

CHBA VI also recommends municipalities move quickly to change bylaws to allow compact building types and encourage or allow consideration for solar management in shading and gain. Municipalities can also ensure members of advisory design panels have a thorough understanding of the relationship between building form, orientation, and energy efficiency.

4. Consistency of Enforcement

Municipalities have different interpretations of submission requirements, standards and processes. For example, some areas require an Energuide P file number at permit while others do not. Different policies can make it difficult for industry to plan and set up for. This leads to delay and extra costs added to the project.

Policy Recommendation

CHBA VI recommends that all municipalities meet at the regional district level and form a permitting and enforcement committee. This committee should include representatives from industry and should be given the mandate to increase intermunicipal cooperation, consistency of enforcement and solve permitting issues.

Conclusion

CHBA VI is committed to the continuing education of home builders and those who work in the industry. CHBA VI is providing Step Code education opportunities across the Island and encourages the municipalities to support these initiatives. Not taking prudent steps to ensure capacity, training, and costing considerations can lead to challenges for both local governments and builders.

Resources

There are several resources available on the B.C. Energy Step Code website to assist with consultations. For more information on the Canadian Home Builders Association Vancouver island or further clarification, please email Executive Office Kerriann Coady at kerriann@chbavi.com or Government Relations Chair Mark Bernhardt at mark@bernhardtcontracting.com