

Strategy 6

B.C.'S HOUSING AND BUILDING REGULATORY SYSTEM
IS SAFE, STABLE AND EFFICIENT



Housing Fact

Building permits valued at \$10.2 billion were issued in B.C. in 2005. Of this number, \$7 billion, or two-thirds, were for residential construction activity.

The government provides legislation and regulation that helps ensure British Columbians enjoy safe and stable housing. By maintaining up-to-date and responsive regulatory frameworks, the Province helps ensure an efficient housing system.

This strategy will deal with two parts of the housing regulatory system: regulations governing the construction of buildings including housing, and regulations governing the landlord/tenant relationship.

A MODERNIZED BUILDING SAFETY REGULATORY SYSTEM

British Columbia's system for achieving building safety provides the regulatory framework for the construction sector, including residential construction. The current system is complex and poorly coordinated. It has not responded effectively to the pressures of rapid changes in technology, a major construction boom and skilled trades shortage, and increased liability exposure. Change is needed to improve how building safety is achieved.

Government's Modernization Strategy responds to the need for change. The Strategy is based on a common vision of an ideal system, created through consultation with other provincial ministries and agencies, local governments, industry and consumers.

The Strategy will be implemented through interdependent projects in six areas:

- Information management – to create and share information that measures how well the system is performing and that provides a basis for decision making.
- Coordinated participation – to create new ways for people in the system to share information and ideas.
- Liability and risk mitigation – to balance risk by ensuring that all parties in building projects are accountable for what they do.
- Competency assurance – to ensure that designers, builders, and building and fire officials understand codes and regulations and how to apply them to achieve building safety.
- Consistent code application – to provide interpretations of code provisions and clarify how they are applied to new and existing buildings.
- Consistent enforcement of code compliance – to establish more efficient, predictable regulatory processes, including permitting and building inspections; and ensure that minimum standards for health and safety are enforced.

By implementing the Modernization Strategy, the Province will provide leadership in creating a more effective regulatory system that is better equipped to address emerging issues and meet its participants' needs.

CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The Homeowner Protection Office (HPO) requires residential builders to be licensed and monitors the performance of the mandatory third-party home warranty insurance system for new home construction and building envelope renovations.

To improve the quality of residential construction and enhance consumer protection, the HPO is working with industry partners to propose new licensing and professional development requirements.

Through this collaborative process, the HPO and industry will determine the need for different categories of licenses and registrations, core competencies for those engaged in residential construction, minimum standards of education and training, and the expansion of the public registry to provide consumers with the information they need to make better decisions about the largest investment they're likely to make in their lifetime – their home.

Finally, to promote greater protection for homeowners, the HPO is working to strengthen the compliance mechanisms that govern owner-builder exemptions.

BALANCING THE LANDLORD AND TENANT RELATIONSHIP IN ASSISTED LIVING

Approximately 36 per cent of households in B.C. rent their homes. The Residential Tenancy Branch works to promote a positive relationship between landlords and tenants by providing both groups with information on their rights and responsibilities under the *Residential Tenancy Act* and the *Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act*. The Branch also assists landlords and tenants to resolve concerns by providing dispute resolution services, including arbitrations.

Improved dispute resolution mechanisms for tenants and landlords in supportive and assisted living accommodation have been identified as needed. Many seniors live in rental accommodation where the landlord provides hospitality and personal care services.

Because the only process for dispute resolution for residents and operators of assisted living rental accommodations is through the courts, the Residential Tenancy Branch is developing a dispute resolution mechanism for these residents.

HOUSING MATTERS – TODAY AND TOMORROW

Change brings challenge. Changes in the demographics, the economy and the housing environment present challenges that must be met with solutions that work for today and tomorrow.

This Provincial Housing Strategy for British Columbia addresses these challenges with the six specific strategic directions explained in this report. Working with partners in housing, the Province is already embarking on many of these new directions, providing greater stability and equity in housing throughout the province.