

Priority for Housing Projects Which Utilize BC's Wood Products To Address Community Housing Shortages

Background

Communities across British Columbia face ongoing issues related to the supply and availability of affordable housing. These challenges range from housing for at-risk and low-income people, through to the affordability of housing for working families. The resulting impacts include social issues and community health crises, along with challenges for BC's businesses to attract and retain the workforce they need to sustain and grow.

At the same time, building with sustainably harvested wood products is emerging as a safe go-to solution in jurisdictions around the world looking to reduce their GHG footprint. That is because carbon remains in the wood not only for the life of the tree, but for decades after – in products such as lumber, millwork or furniture. Most recently, the City of Vancouver joined municipalities across BC that are embracing green building as a climate change solution by allowing mass timber construction up to 12 storeys. If Canada is to meet its net zero emissions by 2050 target enshrined in both policy and legislation, then wood products and sustainable forestry should be emphasized in government policies, including housing.

Not only is BC's forest sector poised to meet this growing demand for low-carbon building solutions in the long-term, in the immediate-term the industry has demonstrated the significant role it can play in economic recovery. The pandemic initially forced mill shutdowns, but operators were able to put safety plans in place and get back up and running much more quickly than consumer-facing industries. Strong demand fueled by home renovations and rising housing starts also helped -- allowing many families to get back on their feet and demonstrating how our sectors' deep roots and resilient supply chain are critical to our collective economic recovery.

Further, It makes good policy sense to align existing Federal and Provincial housing and building programs with green objectives. Opportunities for recovery exist through continued innovations and adoption of the greater use of wood in building design and construction, as acknowledged by the Government of BC's Wood First Program. Further, the Government of BC provides incentives for energy efficient construction and renewable energy use in buildings through the Clean BC program. The Better Buildings strategy states that by 2032, every new building in B.C. will have an ultra-efficient, net-zero energy ready design. There are real opportunities to enhance this program by integrating greater use of wood products, and extending incentives to residential buildings. Currently, the program only includes incentives for commercial retrofits and new construction. The Government of Canada via the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) supports sustainable affordable housing projects with the Green Municipal Fund, and there are similar opportunities to integrate wood products into building and housing grants and programs. Both levels of government have demonstrated a commitment to support for construction using renewable and environmentally-preferred materials and designs.

The Government of BC has already indicated that housing issues are a priority, including the 2018 “Homes for B.C.” plan for housing affordability, and accompanying pledges for investments in affordable and social housing, along with housing for individuals, working families and students.

An opportunity therefore exists to help resolve British Columbia’s housing crisis, to support net-zero emissions targets, while supporting the recovery of a critical industry through prioritizing and incentivising housing projects which utilize B.C. wood products.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS:

That the Provincial Government:

1. Provide Incentives for new affordable housing developments that receive BC Government funding, and which utilize sustainably produced B.C. wood products in their engineering, construction and energy systems.
2. Consider enhancements to the Clean BC Better Buildings strategy by adding incentives for use of wood products in commercial buildings, as well as adding new incentives for use of wood products in new mid-rise affordable housing of 5 to 12 storeys.
3. Advocate to FCM that they similarly determine a specific allocation of new housing construction capital project funding from their Green Municipal Fund for projects which utilize Canadian wood products
4. Partner with BC Housing to use B.C. wood to build new mid-rise affordable housing of 5 to 12 storeys.