



Future Enhancements to the Qualification Program for Ontario's Building Practitioners

Discussion Paper

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Fall 2022 Consultation

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About This Consultation

This discussion paper outlines opportunities for change and includes questions to obtain your input on potential new approaches to enhance the ministry's Qualification Program for building practitioners.

The Building Code, 2012 is a regulation under the Building Code Act, 1992, that is implemented and enforced by Ontario's municipalities and a variety of building industry stakeholders. Over the years, Ontario's Building Code has become an increasingly complex and sophisticated regulation. It is imperative that Building Code knowledge and how it is assessed keeps pace with these changes, to ensure that public safety in the design and construction of buildings is upheld.

Ontario's building officials and other stakeholders in the sector have raised the need for more support from the ministry to improve its ability to understand, implement, and enforce the Building Code. Understanding this and acknowledging the low exam pass rates experienced by candidates, the ministry recently retained a consultant to help examine the Qualification Program for building practitioners (which includes building officials, designers, septic installers and Registered Code Agencies). A broad spectrum of building industry stakeholders engaged in this review process and programs in other jurisdictions were assessed to identify potential changes for Ontario's current program model. The findings from this review suggest that changes to the program would support a fairer assessment of a candidates' knowledge, improve examination success, help maintain practitioners maintain knowledge of the Building Code, and build long-term capacity within the industry to further improve public safety.

Building on this review, we are interested in your thoughts on actions we can take on the following:

- **operational changes** within the current program framework; and
- **design changes** that could create a new framework for the Qualification Program.

Your input will help inform future enhancements to the program that could be

implemented both in the short- and longer-term.

Pressures on the Building Industry

Housing Crisis

People across the province are finding it increasingly difficult to find a home that meets their needs and budget. The cost of buying a home is out of reach for many and affordable rentals are too hard to find. The Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force's report in February 2022 underscored the need for urgent action to build more homes faster: 1.5 million new homes over the next 10 years. A 2021 Scotiabank study showed that Canada has the fewest housing units per population of any G7 country – and our per capita housing supply has dropped in the past five years. An update to that study released in January 2022 found that two thirds of Canada's housing shortage is in Ontario. Today, Ontario is 1.2 million homes – rental or owned – short of the G7 average. This is impacting Ontario's economy, making it harder to attract people, attract investment and create jobs for healthy communities.

Shortage of Building Practitioners

The building industry is a key driver of Ontario's economy and continues to grow rapidly, contributing \$80 billion annually. As Ontario's population continues to grow, the

What is a Qualified Building Practitioner?

The Building Code Act, 1992 requires the following building practitioners be qualified and registered:

- Chief Building Officials (CBO)
- Inspectors
- Designers (other than engineers and architects)
- Registered Code Agencies (RCA)
- Persons engaged in the business of constructing, installing, repairing, servicing, cleaning or emptying on-site sewage systems

building sector is working hard to get more homes built faster.

However, Ontario's building industry is experiencing substantial labour shortages, such as those impacting the skilled trades, which could delay and prolong construction timelines. These issues have also impacted building practitioners regulated by the ministry's Qualification Program. For example, the Ontario Building Officials Association has estimated that approximately half of its members will retire within the next five years.

Municipalities, boards of health and conservation authorities have also indicated that there are not enough building code professionals employed or entering the sector with the necessary technical knowledge and/or experience to enforce the Building Code. This is particularly evident in rural and northern Ontario.

Labour shortages among designers and building officials can delay the submission and issuance of building permits and slow down the construction of new homes. The building permit application submission, review, issuance and inspection process supports public safety and is a critical pre-requisite before Ontarians can take occupancy of their new homes. It is important therefore to ensure that any bottlenecks within the qualification process for new building practitioners are eliminated to help put people to work faster.

Pandemic Impacts

The various stages of the COVID-19 pandemic have fundamentally impacted many sectors economically. Sectors that were most severely impacted included high contact services such as skilled trades, hospitality, building trades, and municipal services across the province. Municipal building departments, for example, prioritized responding to the pandemic at the local level, including setting up emergency temporary health care facilities and establishing new processes and practices to meet permit issuance timelines, while closing municipal offices. Municipal Building departments have needed to perform with greater agility and, in many cases, switch to digital platforms to ensure that work continues, while maintaining the current standards of public health and safety.

The pandemic has also led to changes within the ministry and its outlook on the current qualification process to shift to more diverse qualification pathways to adapt to the continuously changing post-pandemic environment. For example, the ministry is

currently providing a free digital copy of the Building Code for personal use, non-commercial and commercial purposes. Ontario is committed to creating digital solutions and increasing qualification pathways to support existing building practitioners and welcome a new generation of building practitioners into the industry through a modernized system.

Recommended Enhancements

The province is looking for appropriate ways to enhance the Qualification Program that will support the government's work to increase the capacity of municipalities and the building sector to respond to the growing pressures to design, build and approve homes more quickly.

Stakeholders are looking for solutions that the ministry can implement that will provide them with opportunities to play an active role in meeting the government's housing attainability commitments.

The following represent six of the key potential operational and future design changes to the Qualification Program that are under consideration by the ministry.

Operational Changes - Actions Proposed

Action 1: Use of the Digital Building Code During Exams

The ministry has heard that modern tools are needed to improve the exam program experience for candidates, as the current program requirements impose unnecessary constraints that do not reflect the reality of how qualified building practitioners work with the Building Code in practice.

| Today | Future | Benefits |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates for BCIN exams are only allowed to use the 2,300-page hardcopy binder version of the Building Code Compendium. • Day-to-day reality shows that building practitioners are not under stringent time constraints to locate specific Code provisions within the Building Code (unlike conditions within exams). • Other jurisdictions allow candidates to write exams with digital versions of their building codes, such as Alberta and British Columbia. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ministry is considering allowing candidates to use the newly released Digital Building Code Compendium as an aid for reference purposes during BCIN exams. • Candidates would have the choice of continuing to use the hardcopy format Compendium or the Digital Building Code Compendium format. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would help candidates navigate the Code more efficiently and provide more opportunity for them to focus on demonstrating their understanding of the Code requirements being assessed in the exam questions. |

What do you think?

- 1.1 Would you support providing candidates with the option to use the new digital copy of the Building Code as an aid during their BCIN exams?
- 1.2 Do you have any concerns with this approach? For example, would this disadvantage those who are less technically inclined and use a hard copy paper version of the Building Code Compendium by providing them less time to locate specific Code provisions and less time to answer each question?
- 1.3 If the ministry chooses to proceed, what steps should it take to ensure that this initiative is successfully implemented?

Action 2: Allow Candidates More Time per Question During Exams

We have heard from stakeholders that there is not enough time to answer the technical questions currently asked within the three-hour time limit for each BCIN exam, which is contributing to low pass rates. There are a wide variety of questions within each BCIN exam, both in terms of content and format, and stakeholders contend that candidates need more time per question to provide informed, well considered responses that better showcase their Code knowledge.

| Today | Future | Benefits |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A number of technical questions in the BCIN exams are considered to be ambiguously worded and represent an unnecessary barrier to entry for candidates seeking to become building practitioners. Given the complex nature of the Building Code, Code users are not under stringent time constraints to demonstrate their Code knowledge in the field and have suggested that more opportunity should be provided for them to do so during the BCIN exam process. Other jurisdictions in Canada offer building code exams that provide more time per question, relative to the current structure within Ontario. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ministry is considering allowing more time per question within each BCIN exam. This change would revise the number of questions from 75 to 60 within the 3-hour exam timeframe. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would allow candidates to better showcase their Code knowledge and more accurately reflect time pressures faced by building practitioners in reality. ✓ Would provide more opportunity for candidates to respond to the different types of questions in each of the BCIN exams i.e. direct response, calculation-based and scenario-related. |

What do you think?

- 2.1 What is your response to reducing the number of questions from 75 to 60 questions within the current BCIN exam format of 3-hours for each exam – would you support this change?
- 2.2 Are there any other ways in which the ministry can make operational changes to the current exam process that results in a fairer experience for candidates seeking to obtain BCIN qualifications?

Design Changes – Potential Solutions for a Future Program

The following four potential solutions could be considered for inclusion within a future program. We would appreciate your feedback as the ministry considers ways to improve the current Qualification Program.

Action 3: Mandatory Training

Some stakeholders have suggested that training courses that provide Building Code foundation knowledge for new entrants to the field (current courses provided by industry associations or other), should be considered a pre-requisite to writing the BCIN exams. It is thought that this would better support exam success, improve pass rates and encourage more people, including school leavers, to consider the building industry as a suitable career choice.

| Today | Future | Benefits |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Anyone may take BCIN exams in an attempt to become qualified as a building practitioner, there is no training or educational pre- | <ul style="list-style-type: none">The ministry is considering mandated completion of a training program as a condition to writing a BCIN exams | <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Would better prepare all new BCIN holders for success in writing their exams and improve BCIN exam pass rates. |

| | | |
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| <p>requisites for new entrants to the field.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some industry associations within the sector offer training to their members, both pre-qualification and ongoing once qualified, but not all regulated practitioners are members of such associations. • Exam pass rates remain low as many candidates decide to self-study or not take training offered through post-secondary institutions (at an additional cost) prior to writing their BCIN exams. • Other Canadian jurisdictions require mandatory pre-qualification training. | <p>for all new entrants to the field.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ministry could work with post-secondary institutions and industry associations to leverage their current learning resources to make use of existing best practices and avoid "reinventing the wheel". | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would potentially help build industry capacity faster, relative to current model where candidates may re-take same BCIN exams a number of times before potentially deciding to pursue a different career path. |
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What do you think?

3.1 What are your thoughts on the pre-qualification training approach outlined above? Do you see this as being beneficial or problematic for new building practitioners looking to enter the field?

3.2 Are there any barriers that you might foresee with the potential implementation of pre-qualification training? Is there anything you think the province should consider to minimize any barriers to entry regarding this action?

Action 4: Provide Alternative Ways to Enter the Sector

The ministry is considering alternative ways for candidates to enter the sector, including recognition of existing credentials (qualifications and field experience).

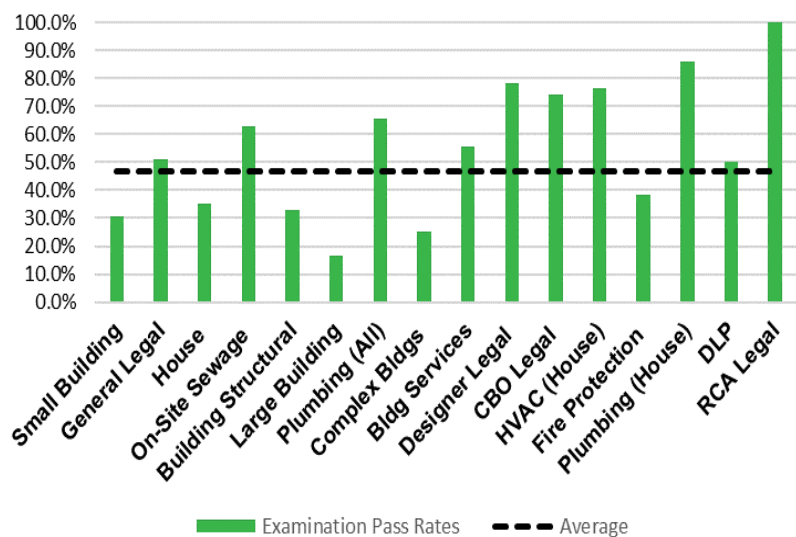
| Today | Future | Benefits |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The only path to demonstrate Code knowledge and become qualified is by taking BCIN exams in one's desired area/s of practice. In reality, a large portion of Code knowledge is gradually developed working in the field, or through other training and educational experiences. Other Canadian jurisdictions allow certain exemptions based on these areas of pre-existing credentials. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ministry is considering providing BCIN qualification exemptions on the basis of equivalent credentials (qualifications and field experience). The ministry is also considering reviewing Building Code training programs with a view to providing accreditation that would provide exemptions from BCIN exams. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would avoid duplicating the qualification process for people with a demonstrated technical understanding of the Building Code. ✓ Would help build more capacity within the sector in a shorter period of time, given the number of retirees and upturn in construction activity. |

What do you think?

- 4.1 The ministry's qualification program does not currently provide for BCIN exemptions, what is your perspective on doing so in the future?
- 4.2 If the ministry proceeds to adopt this approach, what mechanisms should it put in place to assess "equivalency" as a basis for providing BCIN exemptions?
- 4.3 Are you aware of any of any successful models that the ministry can consider and also any pitfalls to avoid?

Action 5: Restructure Exams to Become a Qualified Building Practitioner

The current qualification system requires individuals to prove their technical knowledge in all relevant areas prior to engaging in work. According to some stakeholders, the time and money it takes to successfully complete all required exams is a barrier to enter the field – the number of "required" exams is determined by each building department and how they organize their operations.



However, there may be opportunities for the ministry to consolidate certain BCIN exams to expedite the qualification process.

| Today | Future | Benefits |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current Qualification Program includes 12 technical and four legal exams, that may take two-three years for candidates to pass and discourage candidates from the building practitioner career path (based on the number of exams they are required to pass). A protracted qualification process can reduce industry's capacity to submit and approve building permits at the rate needed to build homes faster in a manner that maintains public safety. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ministry may consolidate certain exams for a more effective qualification process. This could involve developing two core exam areas of the Building Code for Part 9 (Small Buildings) and Part 3 (Buildings). Questions from the legal exams could be incorporated into these two core exams to reduce the number of exams required. Remaining Code areas would continue to represent specialist exams, including HVAC, Plumbing, and Onsite Sewage Systems. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would reduce the number of exams required for building practitioners to become qualified, while continuing to test all essential Code knowledge. ✓ Would support capacity building within the sector and ensure a sufficient number of people with Code knowledge are available to support housing starts across the province. |

What do you think?

- 5.1 Do you have any concerns with restructuring some of the ministry's BCIN exams and, if so, what are they?
- 5.2 Are there other ways you can think of to restructure the BCIN exams for all building practitioners that also uphold public safety and the integrity of the ministry's Qualification Program?

Action 6: Knowledge Maintenance Requirements

The ministry is considering a requirement for building practitioners to attest to their understanding of recent Building Code amendments to ensure they are able to accurately implement and enforce these new requirements by the time they become effective. This would represent a new ministry-specific knowledge maintenance requirement.

| Today | Future | Benefits |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some industry associations within the sector, have mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements for their members which include learning Code updates. However, many who are not members of such associations are not subject to these requirements and need to seek and learn new requirements of Code amendments on their own. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ministry is thinking about requiring building practitioners (including industry association members), to attest to their knowledge of any new Code amendments during their annual renewal as qualified building practitioners with the ministry. The ministry could work with industry associations to leverage pre-existing learning tools to standardize information sharing among all practitioner types. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Would support accurate implementation and enforcement of new Code requirements. ✓ Would improve the quality of building permit applications, help resolve areas of disagreement between parties, and expedite the permit review and approval process. ✓ Would complement CPD requirements that building practitioners must satisfy to maintain membership with industry associations. |

What do you think?

6.1 What are your thoughts on the approach outlined above? Do you see this as beneficial to you or do you have any concerns?

- 6.2 In your opinion, should the scope of learning attestations for building practitioners be limited to only Building Code amendments? If not, what other learning topics should be included?
- 6.3 How do you think the ministry should share information on new Code amendments with you so that you can review in an appropriate level of detail that adds to your Code knowledge?

Seeking Your Input

Public consultation is an important part of developing legislation, regulations and policy in Ontario. By providing your feedback on this consultation paper, you can help the ministry with its next steps to enhance its Qualification Program; a program that currently includes over 7,000 building practitioners across the province.

You can send comments in writing to:

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Building Services Transformation Branch
12th Floor - 777 Bay St.
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

Or by email to:

buildingtransformation@ontario.ca

The ministry requires your feedback by February 3rd, 2022.

Governments Recent Response to Pressures & the Need for More Housing

Stakeholder Collaboration to Address the Need for More Housing

In May 2019, the government released the first Housing Supply Action Plan to address the housing supply crisis and implement solutions to build more homes faster. Since the launch of the first Housing Supply Action Plan, housing starts have hit record levels, but more work needs to be done.

Between September 2020 and December 2021, the ministry convened nine stakeholder engagement sessions to identify ways to modernize and transform the delivery of building regulatory services in Ontario, while supporting the government's commitment to address the housing supply crisis. Making enhancements to the Qualification Program was identified as one of the key priorities for stakeholders. In addition, the ministry has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, other initiatives that will also help build capacity within the industry to perform its primary function of implementing and enforcing Ontario's Building Code – which has become increasingly significant to fulfilling the government's commitment to build an additional 1.5 million homes within 10 years. These initiatives include the following:

Ontario's Digital Building Code

The ministry launched [a free digital Building Code Compendium](#) in March 2022 to expand access to Code knowledge and increase the sector's capacity to deliver services quickly. Since the inception of the Building Code in 1975, the Code has only been available in hardcopy binders with an increasing cost over the years, which is currently \$175.

Visit the ministry website to request a free copy of the digital Building Code Compendium: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/request-digital-copy-2012-building-code-compendium>.

The ministry enhanced the digital Building Code Compendium in September 2022 to include additional features and functionality requested by users, including the ability to bookmark, use hyperlinks, highlight and add notes throughout the document.

Providing free of charge access to a digital version of Ontario's Building Code Compendium will improve knowledge of the Code, extend Code access to professionals working on-site and encourage the next generation of digitally oriented graduates to consider the building industry as a potential career choice by providing a digital resource that is consistent with the format of other modern learning tools.

Internships

Effective July 1, 2022, municipal Chief Building Officials can choose to design and administer their own local programs for intern building inspectors.

This new option expands the capacity and provides flexibility for municipal building departments to recruit and retain building officials while maintaining public safety under the supervision of a qualified inspector.

To support public safety, the new internship model continues to require a qualified building inspector or Chief Building Official to supervise the work of interns, and for interns to pass ministry technical and legal exams before being able to practice independently as building inspectors.

Digital First Approach

- ✓ Since its launch, the ministry has responded to more than 5,000 requests for the digital Building Code including, members of the public, engineers, architects, building inspectors, designers and a variety of other building professionals.
- ✓ This initiative was in response to sector requests, as well as the release of the government's Digital and Data Strategy in April 2021 to provide Ontarians with access to data and services in a safe and accessible fashion.

This new internship model supports municipal building departments in their efforts to hire and retain new staff. Small and rural municipalities have historically found it difficult to recruit building officials, so this new internship model can be of particular help to them.

The ministry is developing guidance materials and working with municipalities to support the launch of additional programs in the near future.

QuARTS Enhancements

The ministry is working to modernize the Qualification Activity Tracking System (QuARTS) public registry.

In April 2022, the ministry conducted a survey of building practitioners to identify priority system improvements and identify particular solutions that would lead to a more efficient and user-friendly experience.

Preparatory work is already underway to improve the functionality and user interface for building practitioners to reduce administrative burden.

Modernizing QuARTS will create a more efficient system for all users, allowing building practitioners to focus on the important task of submitting and reviewing permits and to assist with government's key priority to increase housing stock.

A new cloud-based solution is anticipated for release in 2023/2024 to further update the online system.

What is QuARTS?

- QuARTS holds the qualification and registration status of over 7,000 building practitioners (2,100 building officials, 3,100 designers and 1,800 septic installers).
- The online system is used by all building practitioners to update their information and renew their registration annually.
- It is also available to the public to identify practitioners in their area or to see the qualification status of practitioners.
- QuARTS can be accessed [here](https://www.quarts.mah.gov.on.ca/): (https://www.quarts.mah.gov.on.ca/)

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

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