

Established in 1889, the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) is the self-regulating body for the province's architecture profession. It governs the practice of architecture and administers the Architects Act in order to serve and protect the public interest.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Building Services Transformation Branch
College Park
12th Floor, 777 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2J3

February 6, 2023

Re: Future Enhancements to the Qualifications Program for Ontario's Building Practitioners

To Whom It May Concern:

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (the Ministry) consultation, "Future Enhancements to the Qualifications Program for Ontario's Building Practitioners." As the regulator entrusted with a clear mandate to serve and protect the public interest, the OAA shares a common interest with government to ensure that Building Code knowledge, and how it is assessed, keeps pace with the Code's increasingly complex and sophisticated regulations.

In July 2022, the OAA had the opportunity to meet with Michael Lio and Associates to discuss enhancements to the qualifications program for the province's building practitioners. At that meeting, the OAA shared its longstanding concern over the apparent lack of enforcement of the Building Code Identification Number (BCIN) system. As far as the Association is aware, there has been little focus on monitoring and enforcement measures in regard to BCIN holders for non-compliance. A system with such significant public safety implications ought to have more teeth.

Since its inception, the BCIN system has been characterized as an opportunity to level the playing field and hold accountable those permitted to work in an unregulated area of design. While the OAA applauds government's initiative to review the Qualifications Program with a view to enhancing it, the Association urges you to ensure there is appropriate oversight, monitoring, and focus on the enforcement of the BCIN system in Ontario.

On a related note, the OAA often receives concerns regarding the currency of the qualified designer registry and its maintenance. Again, a system with this importance should be grounded in principles of ongoing maintenance and evaluation.

Along with enforcement measures that the Association believes are required for public safety, the OAA has the following additional comments:

1. “Qualified designers” should be required to have some design training, or the title should be changed to better reflect what these individuals are actually qualified to do. Based on calls received by the OAA’s Practice Advisory Services, there is confusion among the public about the roles and responsibilities of BCIN holders versus other design professionals, including architects. In short, there is nothing to back up the qualifications of BCIN holders in the area of design. At the very least, qualification requirements for BCIN holders should be maintained, but would benefit greatly from being strengthened. The proposal to reduce qualification requirements is concerning and appears to be contrary to the Ministry’s goal of using this program to ensure public safety and the competency of those using and applying the Code on a daily basis.

2. The OAA is not aware of any evidence to support claims about labour shortages with respect to qualified designers. Regardless, reduced qualification requirements should not be used to justify a streamlined or simplified exam.

3. The exam for building practitioners should assess not only the ability to navigate through the Code, but also candidates’ understanding of the Code and ability to apply it.

4. BCIN holders and all building professionals should have a mandate to participate in continuing education to increase their knowledge, proficiency, and skills in their application of the Building Code. This best protects and promotes the public interest.

5. The OAA urges government to reinstate Ministry Building Code Advisors to ensure there is consistent interpretation of the Code across jurisdictions in Ontario.

6. The OAA does not have a position on the format or administration of the Ministry’s examination. However, the Association cautions against changes that would appear to render the exam less credible or lack rigour when the ultimate objective is protecting public safety.

The OAA enjoys a longstanding, collaborative relationship with government, and looks forward to continued work with the Ministry to protect and promote the public interest. If you have any questions or wish to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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President