

November 14, 2025

Jessica Ruskin
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Ministry of Forests
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC
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Submitted via email to engagehca@gov.bc.ca.

Re: Heritage Conservation Act Transformation Project (Phase 3)

Dear Ms. Ruskin:

On behalf of the Canadian Home Builders' Association of British Columbia (CHBA BC), we would like to thank you for inviting us to participate in the stakeholder consultations on the Heritage Conservation Act Transformation Project on August 20 and September 17.

We understand that the Heritage Conservation Act Transformation Project (HCATP) aims to make permitting faster and easier, help communities rebuild quickly after disasters, protect heritage more effectively, strengthen the role of First Nations in decision-making about their own heritage, and increase transparency and access to information to support planning and development decisions. While we support these objectives, we are concerned that several proposals have not been fully assessed and could create unintended consequences for the homebuilding sector.

The Cost of Delivery Crisis

BC's residential building sector is facing a significant cost of delivery crisis that is making housing increasingly unaffordable. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) [estimates](#) that between 2022 and 2030, Canada will need about 3.5 million additional housing units to restore affordability but the country is projected to fall short of this target by 1.8 million homes due to the current shortfall in housing construction.

In BC, residential unit sales are down 16% compared to the 10-year average—not because of reduced demand, but because many British Columbians cannot afford to buy, even as prices soften and interest rates ease. At the same time, supply is being constrained as projects are delayed, cancelled, or pushed into receivership due to rising construction costs, labour shortages, high development fees/costs, and increasing regulatory complexity. These pressures limit industry's ability to deliver new housing, widening the supply gap and worsening affordability across the province.

At a time when housing supply and affordability is already constrained, the proposed changes under the HCATP could create additional regulatory burdens that place further pressures on the building sector's ability to deliver new housing.

Consultation and Phased Implementation

Given the scope of the proposed changes, CHBA BC strongly recommends the Province conduct a more robust consultation with industry and local governments, as well as conduct an economic assessment of potential impacts of the HCATP through a housing supply and affordability lens prior to moving forward with these changes. There are several areas of concern for the building sector that could lead to delays and added costs, which have not fully been considered due to the brief timeline for engagement and overall lack of meaningful consultation.

Further, any changes that proceed should be phased over multiple years with protections for in-stream projects to limit disruption. Clear guidance and standardized interpretation of new policies should also be provided to local governments, builders, and other stakeholders to ensure consistent interpretation, reduce disputes, and prevent unintended delays.

Recommendation(s):

1. Conduct a robust consultation process for industry and local governments to properly evaluate unintended consequences of the proposed changes.
2. Conduct an economic impact assessment of potential impacts of the HCATP on housing supply and affordability.
3. Phase proposed changes over multiple years with protections for in-stream projects.
4. Provide clear guidance and standardized interpretation documents for local governments, builders, and other stakeholders.

Single Project-Based Permit Model

We appreciate the proposal to “*reduce administrative burden and complexity of the permit process*” to make permitting faster and easier and are supportive of streamlining measures that can accelerate housing delivery. Increased efficiency benefits both proponents and provincial staff by easing workload to focus on other provincial priorities.

The current permitting regime is slow and inefficient. One member reported that replacing a house on nearly the same footprint required 10 months of waiting for the Province to process the Alteration Permit for the demolition, and a further 6 months for the amendment to the permit to start to rebuild.

However, streamlining efforts are only effective if processing timelines also improve. Based on the proposal, it is unclear whether streamlining efforts will yield the Province's desired outcome of making permitting faster as considerable staff time will be spent implementing new requirements rather than processing permits.

Recommendation(s):

1. Ensure staff resources are sufficient to achieve faster permitting outcomes.
2. Move towards increased reliance on qualified professionals to support permit approvals.

Mandatory Archaeological Data Checks

The proposal to require archaeological data checks at the sale of property may have significant impacts on the transaction of land purchases for development. While we support efforts to improve transparency and clarity for landowners, builders, and governments, several issues must be addressed if the Province moves forward with this proposal:

- **Data Availability:** The provincial archaeological data layer must be completed and publicly accessible before data checks become mandatory.
- **Response Timelines:** Provincial staff estimated approximately 6 business days to complete an archaeological data check based on a volume of 4,000 queries annually. If the Province proceeds with mandatory archaeological data checks at sale of property, response timelines will be significantly longer. During the consultation, the BC Real Estate Association noted that there were nearly 74,000 transactions annually in each of the past two years which suggests an alarming disparity in administrative preparedness for this change. If adopted, mandatory archaeological data checks would significantly delay land transactions for housing development.
- **Staff Capacity:** In a similar vein, significant provincial staff resources would be required to respond to the volume of data check requests in a timely manner. We are concerned this could necessitate that staff be diverted from processing permit applications, ultimately compounding the slowing down of housing delivery.
- **Clear Requirements for Local Governments:** Requirements for local governments and subdivision authorities to see proof of an archaeological data check prior to issuing development and building-related permits and authorizations as well as subdivision approvals should be clearly defined with timelines and responsibilities.
- **Municipal Implementation:** In areas where municipal mapping is sparse or incomplete, local governments may default to requiring full archaeological assessments for projects, creating unnecessary delays and added requirements. This is already standard practice in many municipalities like Kamloops, and may become standard practice for others as a result of this proposal.

Recommendation(s):

1. Create and publicly release the provincial archaeological data layer before mandatory checks are introduced.
2. Shorten response timelines significantly from the estimated 6 business days, recognizing that the volume of checks will also significantly increase if checks are required at sale of property.
3. Expand staff capacity to handle the increased volume of data check requests without further burdening the permitting process.
4. Define clear requirements for local governments and subdivision authorities, including timelines and responsibilities.
5. Prevent municipalities with incomplete mapping from defaulting to full archaeological assessments, which would create unnecessary delays.

Record of Engagement

The requirement for proponents to submit a record of engagement with permit applications is currently unclear. Without clear parameters local governments may interpret this differently, causing inconsistent implementation and delays due to confusion and uncertainty.

Recommendation(s):

1. Establish a standardized format for documenting engagement, setting clear timelines and expectations for what constitutes sufficient engagement, and providing guidance documents to support consistent local government interpretation.
2. Provide funding and increase capacity for First Nations to consult - currently many First Nations do not have the capacity to process the volume of referrals they receive.

Heritage Management Zones

The proposed creation of Heritage Management Zones (HMZs) raises several important questions about implementation and potential impacts on housing delivery. Based on the consultation sessions it remains unclear how HMZs will be established and what additional requirements would apply within these areas. Initial discussions suggested that HMZs would require the development of Heritage Management Plans in collaboration with local governments, First Nations, and proponents.

Depending on how HMZ boundaries are drawn and what requirements are introduced through these plans, additional archaeological work could be required even in areas that are not designated heritage sites. This would further strain an already limited pool of qualified archaeologists, leading to additional delays in project approvals. It would also place added pressure on local governments to prepare new plans at a time when municipal planning resources are already stretched thin and processing timelines for permits are a major concern.

Recommendation(s):

1. Reconsider the introduction of HMZs until an economic impact assessment is completed.
2. Provide further clarity on the requirements that may be introduced through this new designation.
3. If implemented, provide funding to local governments and First Nations to develop Heritage Management Plans.

Availability of Archaeologists

The number of qualified archaeologists in BC is limited. According to the BC Association of Professional Archaeologists, there are approximately [300 professional archaeologists](#) serving the entire province, a lack of availability which already contributes to delays in the housing development process.

In Kamloops, our members report that there are only 4 archaeologists available (only 2 of which were available for private sector work as they were already engaged in work with the Province). Expanding requirements for archaeological work through the HCATP without addressing the availability of qualified professionals could create bottlenecks that delay housing delivery.

We are supportive of the proposal to “*establish a registry of archaeologists*” as we have advocated for similar measures for permitting through the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. We are pleased to see this included as part of the proposal, however, this should be preempted by measures to expand availability of qualified archaeologists before introducing new requirements that would require more archaeological work.

Recommendation(s):

1. Expand the capacity and availability of archaeologists.
2. Pause the implementation of new requirements that could add archaeological work until more archaeologists are available to complete the work in a timely manner.

Expanded Definitions for ‘Intangible’ Heritage

The Province is considering expanding the definition of heritage to include intangible cultural heritage. Based on the Primer, intangible heritage may include “*oral histories, place names, language, knowledge, objects and places within Indigenous worldview*”. These could be non-place-based and place-based.

During the September 17th engagement session, staff clarified that intangible heritage sites would not be automatically protected. The Backgrounder states that the HCATP aims to “*create clearer and easier pathways for protecting sites that do not receive automatic protection,*

including sites of intangible heritage” by clarifying definitions and enabling the Minister to designate sites, rather than requiring Lieutenant Governor in Council approval through Cabinet.

We respect and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous heritage protection. The Provincial Heritage Register includes 64,000 protected sites and an expansion to include more designated sites through expanded definitions of intangible heritage will likely result in an increase in the number of sites which require permits through the *Heritage Conservation Act (HCA)*. In order to process these increases in applications, significant increases in staff capacity both within the provincial government and First Nations governments will be required.

Recommendation(s):

1. Increase provincial staff and First Nations capacity significantly as this expanded definition and the other proposals in the HCATP will place pressures on staff resources to process and consult on permit applications.

Conclusion

While the proposed HCATP changes aim to streamline permitting, other elements—such as the creation of HMZs, expanded definitions of intangible heritage, mandatory archaeological data checks, and record of engagement requirements—may introduce additional complexity. Many responsibilities for implementation would be left to local governments whose staff resources are already constrained, creating the potential for unintended consequences that could significantly and adversely impact housing delivery across BC.

We understand that the proposals presented during the engagement sessions will be further developed based on feedback provided during Phase 3 engagements. We hope these comments are taken into consideration to ensure the final proposal supports heritage conservation while avoiding unintended consequences on housing development. If you have any further questions, please feel free to reach out to Jenny Scott, Director of Policy and Government Relations at jenny@chbabc.org.

Sincerely,



Jenny Scott,
Director, Policy & Government Relations

cc: Hon. Ravi Parmar, Minister of Forests
Hon. Christine Boyle, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs