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Regulation

RCCAO urges co-operation to improve building-permits processes

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The need for improvements to the building permits process does not fall solely on municipalities, according to a report commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

“Blame can be spread around to a certain degree. There is a fairly balanced approach in place but improvements need to be made,” says Andy Manahan, executive director, RCCAO. “The question now is how are we (industry and municipalities) going to work together to make sure some of the implemented changes are put to use?”

“Examination of Recent Reforms to The Building Code Act and The Building Permit Process in the GTA” is a report conducted on behalf of the RCCAO by Hemson Consulting Ltd. which looked at the building permit process.

More efficient and transparent building and planning regulatory processes would help strengthen the construction industry’s economic performance, Manahan says. Rising building and housing costs could be balanced off by better processes. Changes to the Ontario Building Code (through Bill 124) were meant to increase efficiency.

“Key legislative changes introduced a few years ago were designed to streamline the building permit process and eliminate bottlenecks.” says Manahan.

“Yet, provisions to allow certain functions such as plans examinations to be done by Registered Code Agencies (RCA) have not been adopted by municipalities.

Mark Sraga, chairman of the Large Municipalities Chief Building Officials (LMCBO) organization says the report’s narrow focus does not capture all the challenges in the approval’s process. The LCMBO meets with industry stakeholders and municipal

representatives from across the province to see what improvements can be made to the entire development process, he says.

“Statistically, the report is correct but I think it missed the bigger picture,” says Sraga. “We want to have an efficient development system and we want to work together to improve things through open dialogue.”

The report concludes there generally has been no significant streamlining of the building permit process; legislative tools for mitigating high permit volumes are not being used; municipal practices are contributing to inefficiencies in permit processing, a significant portion of permit fee revenues are being placed in reserve funds, and some builder practices are contributing to permit processing inefficiencies.

Among the RCCAO report recommendations were:

- Municipalities should make use of RCAs to avoid permit bottlenecks.
- Municipalities need to adopt a co-ordinated and consistent approach to construction plans submitted by professional engineers and architects.
- Comprehensive municipal performance measures should be publicly available and data should be managed by an independent body, perhaps the Building Advisory Council.
- Builders need to increase efforts to understand permit applications and ensure they are complete.
- Builders need to ensure site supervisors are adequately trained in building code matters.