Saanich
LEGISLATIVE AND
PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Notice of Motion

Monday, May 12, 2025

From: Councillor Phelps Bondaroff

"That the Union of British Columbia Municipalities advocate to the Province to adopt European codes and standards for elevator construction and maintenance, reducing building costs and encouraging more elevators to be installed in new buildings."

Draft UBCM Resolution

Adopting European Elevator Standards to Improve Accessibility and Affordability

Whereas European elevator codes and standards permit elevators with smaller cabin sizes, and the European standard for elevator parts have become the global standard, creating a large market for affordable, standardized elevators and replacement parts;

And whereas a recent report from the *Centre for Building* has found that the US and Canada have some of the most expensive elevator costs in the world, and that adopting European elevator codes standards would reduce costs and improve accessibility, particularly in low- and mid-rise buildings:

Therefore, be it resolved that the UBCM advocate to the Province to adopt European codes and standards for elevator construction and maintenance, reducing building costs and encouraging more elevators to be installed in new buildings.

Background

Why does Canada have some of the most expensive elevators in the world? A new report from the *Centre for Building*[1] lays out how North American installation and parts are up to three times more expensive as comparable projects in Europe. This gap in costs is the result of Canada following United States elevator standards rather than globally adopted European standards.

In the context of tariffs and rising construction costs, BC should adopt European elevator standards. This will provide a number of benefits, including increasing accessibility and housing affordability, particularly in townhouses, multiplexes, and mid-rise apartment buildings.

Current Standards

Currently, elevators in buildings are governed by two key documents:

1. The *2024 BC Building Code*, which now requires elevators in all residential buildings, except for large buildings with 2 stories or fewer, and small buildings with 3 stories or fewer. Walk-up townhouses, low-rise apartments, and SSMU housing are examples of housing typically built without no elevators.[2]
2. CSA B44, published by the Canadian Standards Association, sets standards for elevator size, construction standards, and maintenance. CSA B44 is referenced by the *BC Building Code* as well as the *Technical Standards Act*.

The current code and standards have been criticized for requiring large elevators in low-rise construction if they are to be installed, and as a result, developers are not incentivized to install any elevators due to high costs. In mid-rise construction, where elevators are installed, the large size of elevators encourages developers to install the fewest possible elevators required.

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[1] Summary: admin.centerforbuilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Elevatorsexecutivesummary.pdf
Full report: admin.centerforbuilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Elevators.pdf

[2] See this FAQ from the Province on current accessibility (inc. elevator) standards.

Proposed Standards

The report from the Centre for Building makes a number of recommendations, including:

1. **For low-rise buildings (3 stories or fewer):** Modify the building code to permit small elevators in buildings where, currently, no elevators would be installed at all.
2. **For mid-rise buildings (up to 6 stories)**: Permit builders to install smaller elevators in exchange for providing more elevators, improving redundancy and convenience. Do not require an elevator that accommodates a stretcher, reducing costs.
3. **For high-buildings (7+ stories):** Continue to require an elevator that accommodates stretchers.
4. Legalize elevators certified under the global EU standard (ISO 8100), rather than CSA B44, allowing us to access the global market for elevators and parts.

Technical Standards and Codes

Canada is one of the only countries in the world that has not harmonized with European technical codes and standards regarding elevators, walling us off from the global market for parts, and further driving up building costs. North American elevator safety codes[3] differ from Europe's family of codes[4] in such a way that many parts, even if they would comply with both standards need to be separately certified for the North American market. And yet, unique North American elevator standards have led to no discernible improvement in safety outcomes compared to those in Europe.[5]

Many foreign manufacturers simply choose not to spend the money to certify their parts under CSA B44 for the small and isolated North American market, resulting in far less availability of elevator components in the U.S. and Canada. This in turn means a less competitive, concentrated, and fragile market, where elevator components are both more expensive and more susceptible to supply chain disruptions.

Cost and Access

The United States and Canada have the most expensive elevators in the world.[6] Prices charged in North America for elevators are at least three times those charged by the same manufacturers in comparable mid-rise buildings in high-income countries in Western Europe. As a result, **the U.S. and Canada have fewer elevators per capita than any other high-income country, often by an order of magnitude.** Even the Netherlands, which has far fewer apartments as a share of the housing stock than Canada or the US[7], has more elevators than North America.[8]

What drives these costs? Elevator cabins are required to be much larger in BC than abroad. When elevators are provided, they must accommodate a wheelchair turning radius, and at

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[3] ASME A17.1/CSA B44
[4] EN 81, now adopted into the ISO 8100 global standard
[5] The report cites statistics from the European Lift Association and the Bureau of Labour Statistics and found that American elevator mechanics appear to have a higher occupational fatality rate than their European counterparts. Canada has a higher fire death rate than many similarly-developed western European countries and North America has worse out-of-hospital cardiac survival rates than Europe, suggesting that it is possible to build safe buildings using EU/international standards.
[6] Center for Building Report
[7] See Eurostat and Statistics Canada.
[8] See data for Netherlands, US. Canada estimate extrapolated from Ontario, BC, and Saskatchewan.

least one elevator per building must fit a 2.05m long stretcher. **These requirements apply even if the building code does not require an elevator in the first place**.[9] In Europe, elevators in mid-rise multi-family buildings are generally required to accomodate a wheelchair plus one person. **Accordingly, while European elevators are smaller, they are more affordable to install.** This explains why in Europe, elevators are installed in virtually all new multi-family buildings, and why, in any given building, far more elevators are installed than in North America, where developers typically seek to install the minimum required. This significantly improves mobility and redundancy.

The report from the Centre for Building claims that allowing these smaller European-sized elevators in new low- or mid-rise buildings, including SSMU housing, could lower elevator costs between 13-44%, with savings from both the lower construction cost and more square footage available for residential uses. Smaller and inexpensive elevators would permit developers to install more elevators in a given building without compromising safety.

Key Benefits

1. Remove the disincentive to installing elevators in low-rise buildings.
2. Encourage more elevators to be installed in a given single building.
3. Harmonize standards with the global market, improving availability of parts.

The high cost of elevators in North America negatively affects accessibility in our cities. New walk-up townhouses and small apartment buildings in Canada can reach three stories in height without elevators, meaning that many homes billed as “family-friendly” are inaccessible. Many new apartments only have one or two elevators. The high cost of elevators also encourages developers to build inaccessible townhouses instead of multi-family apartments. When elevators break down, users are forced to wait weeks or months for parts to arrive and for specialized contractors to repair the elevator. The low number of elevators installed in buildings ensures that an out of order elevator can render an entire building inaccessible.

Moreover, the high cost and size of elevators in North America precludes building owners from retrofitting older, occupied walk-up apartment buildings for accessibility by adding elevators, as is increasingly common in Europe and Asia. This makes it harder for Canadian seniors to age in place, and, as older buildings are more likely to be more affordable, disproportionately affects people who both have a disability and lower incomes..

Conclusion

European elevators are smaller, but are cheaper, more abundant, and just as safe as North American elevators. Particularly in low-rise buildings where elevators are currently not required, the Province should legalize small elevators sized for a single wheelchair user. In taller buildings, the Province should allow smaller elevators in exchange for providing more elevators, improving accessibility, convenience, and redundancy. Moreover, the Province should legalize elevators certified under the EU standard, ISO 8100. This would provide access to the global market for elevators and parts, reducing costs.

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[9] 2024 BC Building Code

Past Resolutions

BC Building Code
Year: 2012
Number: B52
Sponsor(s): Victoria

WHEREAS entrances to common areas hallways, common rooms, lobbies, etc. of multi-unit residential buildings not equipped with automatic door openers present a barrier to access by residents with mobility issues;

AND WHEREAS under the current BC Building Code, access to the main entrance and parking areas is currently considered for those using a wheelchair, but does not require electric door openers that are crucial to people using walkers, scooters, or with other health concerns that restrict accessibility:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Division B-Part 3 of the BC Building Code be amended to include a minimum standard of accessibility in all entranceways and shared spaces for all new multi-unit development which includes electronic door openers that allow elevator access to all building levels, including parking areas.

Provincial Response

Ministry of Energy, Mines and Natural Gas and Minister Responsible for Housing
The BC Building Code sets the minimum standard for new construction and is based on the model National Building Code of Canada. While Section 3.8 Building Requirements for Persons with Disabilities is unique to British Columbia, the language that determines which types of buildings must provide automatic doors is developed at the national level. Suggestions for changes to the minimum acceptable level of accessibility in all Division B - Part 3 buildings are most appropriately submitted to the National Research Council.

Convention Decision: Endorsed