

# LEGISLATIVE REDESIGN

THE ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MERGES MEMBERSHIPS WITH DESIGNERS AND OTHER ARCHITECTURAL PRACTITIONERS



ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

**S**OARING WATERFRONT TOWERS OF GLASS AND STEEL. Expansive libraries, community centres and university research centres. Island retreats for millionaires and movie stars. These images are the recognizable face of architecture in British Columbia and around the world. >

**toby**

**dgbk**

**omicron arch**

## ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

In contrast, much of the bottom-line business of architecture takes place away from the public eye. Large-scale commercial offices, accessible retail, multi-family residential complexes and flexible light industrial space are some of the many designs that often go unnoticed except for recognition of their functionality. Perhaps even more important, and even less well-known, is the work of architectural practitioners in coordinating construction, adhering to building and development codes, maintaining community design guidelines and protecting public health and safety. All of this activity is a critical under-pinning of the current construction and development boom in British Columbia.

In the 80-plus years that architects have been licensed in B.C., design styles have changed constantly, training and education options have expanded significantly, construction techniques and technologies have become ever more complex, and the sheer scale of development has grown exponentially. Unfortunately, the one thing that hasn't changed is the provincial law that determines who can – and can't – practice architecture around the province.

In 1920, the MLAs of the day passed the Architects Act to create a class of professionals that would take responsibility for most of the buildings that were designed and built. Like lawyers, engineers and others, architecture was, and still is, a self-regulated profession in B.C. The organization charged with maintaining this self-regulating system is the Architectural Institute of B.C. (AIBC), which represents 1,400 architects, technicians, interns and students.

The challenge facing the profession today involves the outdated Act: the legislators of 1920 could not have envisioned the incredible advances in building forms, nor could they have envisioned the level of specialization that would occur within the industry. While the process for becoming an architect remains recognizable, there are no provisions to license, for example: a building sciences specialist from BCIT, an interior design professional with a degree from Kwantlen College, architects trained outside North America, a specialized home designer, or

a host of other modern architectural practitioners.

Virtually everyone agrees that this antiquated law needs to be changed. The challenge the AIBC faces involves determining which industry professionals will fall under the new legislation and what their professional responsibilities will be.

An important first step was recognizing that many members of the industry are currently not recognized under the traditional definition of “architect.” In response, the AIBC joined forces with the members of the Interior Design Institute of B.C. (IDIBC) and the technicians and technologists of the Building Designers Institute of B.C. (BDIBC) to ask the B.C. government to revisit the definition of architectural practice and expand the membership of the AIBC. This group feels very strongly that the public interest is better served by having all design professionals accountable under the same law, including those competently trained in jurisdictions outside Canada and the United States.

This unique coalition also proposes to change the current exemptions in the Architects Act. For example, these exemptions currently allow someone with no training whatsoever to design a small community hospital or hundreds of townhouse units – situations that are clearly not in the public interest. This is just one of the anachronisms in the outmoded Act. The sophistication of building design, construction techniques and code requirements means any project bigger than a small, uncomplicated single-family home on a single site likely requires some professional input.

There is positive feedback from the provincial government regarding making significant changes or rewriting the Architects Act. These and other recommendations appear to be consistent with the B.C. government’s overall Modernization Strategy (developed to improve effectiveness in the building regulatory system); the Trade, Industry and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) recently signed with Alberta; and the federal government’s push for recognition of more foreign-trained professionals.

**cannon**

**merrick architects**

**morrison**



**From top: The AIBC signs a memorandum of understanding with the Building Designers Institute of B.C.; the AIBC signs a memorandum of understanding with the Interior Designers Institute of B.C.**



**wensley**

**urban design**

Non-urgent legislative reform does take time, though. While the look of the expanded convention centre and Olympic venues grabs the public “architecture” focus, the day-to-day business of architecture is challenged to become front-page news. Yet, it is just this kind of streamlining and modernization that can help the provincial economy maintain its high level of activity and enthusiasm. ■

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**bunting**

**via architect**