

## Certified Professional Program – For Building Permit Approvals

### Recommendation:

- 1) THAT Council endorse the Certified Professional Program and direct staff to bring forward an amendment to Building Bylaw No.6925 -2021 to formalize the program in the City of Maple Ridge.

**Report Purpose and Summary Statement:** The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the Certified Professional Program, and to recommend that staff bring forward an amendment to Maple Ridge Building Bylaw No. 6925- 2012, to enable the program.

**Financial Impact:** The costs for implementing the program are minimal, primarily consisting of a one-time startup expense of \$15,000 to engage a consultant for the development of the Maple Ridge CP Manual, which can be accommodated within existing budget. All other service fees related to the program will be paid by applicants who choose to participate.

**Strategic Alignment:** Liveable Community;  
Diversified, Thriving Economy

**Communications:** Pending Council’s decision, a program marketing strategy will be developed.

**Applicable Legislation/ Bylaw/Policy:** Maple Ridge Building Bylaw No. 6925 – 2012; British Columbia Building Code; British Columbia Building Act.

## Certified Professional Program for Building Permit Approvals

### BACKGROUND:

The Certified Professional (CP) Program offers an alternative method for obtaining building and occupancy permits for large, complex projects regulated under Divisions A, B (Parts 1 and 3), and C of the British Columbia Building Code (the Code). First established in 1978, the Program allows applicants to hire a CP to assist with their municipal building permit approval process. CPs are experts in interpreting the Code's fire, life safety, and accessibility provisions and are trained to recommend effective strategies for achieving Code conformity. Although CPs are hired by the applicant, the Program supports both the applicant and City building officials impartially. As neutral parties, CPs can manage and coordinate the permit application process for the applicant's team and can also support in the review of plans and/or site visits for the City. Ultimately, City building officials retain final authority over all permit decisions.

Staff are proposing the implementation of the CP Program for the City of Maple Ridge as part of a suite of initiatives designed to accelerate the City's development approvals process in support of the achievement of the City's housing and broader development goals.

### ANALYSIS:

In July 2024, the City of Maple Ridge received notification of Provincial housing targets which outline annual cumulative and five-year housing targets to be met by June 30, 2029. These targets, along with the City's own strategic targets for overall housing, including multi-residential development, and affordable housing units, requires the City to implement a variety of initiatives designed to accelerate the development approvals process. Along with other initiatives, the implementation of a proposed CP Program, with the use of impartial, third-party professionals, can inject additional capacity into the building permit review phase of the development approvals process with minimal one-time incremental cost and manageable risk to the City.

The proposed CP Program is designed to complement the City's upcoming Development Approvals Concierge Service and the Development Approval Process Review (DAPR), along with other related regulatory process improvements. Together, these initiatives will help the City advance several of Council's housing-related OKR targets (Objectives and Key Results) and are identified as proposed policy in the City's current Draft Housing Strategy.

### Project Description:

The Association of Engineers and Geoscientist British Columbia (EGBC) and Architects Institute of British Columbia (AIBC) jointly administer the CP Framework, confer the CP credential/stamp, and maintain the official list of active CPs. To become a CP, registered architects and professional engineers must successfully complete the CP course that includes advanced Code knowledge, detailed application of relevant Code provisions as well as real-life case studies from across the province. Most CPs focus exclusively on Code compliance work, advising on a high volume of projects each year. This extensive

focus provides them with greater exposure to different building types and safety measures compared to their peers.

The Program was designed to support the review and approval of building permits for structures that present greater complexities and risks and require more stringent safety measures and design considerations. Program scope primarily includes new buildings exceeding 3 stories or 600 m<sup>2</sup>, including specific mixed-use, institutional or care facilities, and high-hazard structures. Cities that have implemented the Program may choose to further narrow its scope to only focus specific types of structures (e.g., only high-rises) based on their program goals and other relevant factors. The CP Program is optional; applicants can choose to opt into the program or follow the City's conventional building permit approval process. Developers and builders usually consult with the City to determine if their project meets the Program eligibility criteria. All CP service fees are covered by the applicant, with no cost incurred by the City.

### **Function of CP:**

Generally, the CP's two core functions include:

- a. **Code coordinator** - The CP is the main point of contact for the City with respect to coordination of the various building related permits that are required for building projects. This permit coordination duty includes communication with the applicant and the design team on specific building code issues and solutions and conveying any conditions or requirements of the building permit.
- b. **Plan and Site Review Support** - The CP provides an independent review of the design and field review process as a "check and balance" to the services provided by the Registered Professional of Record and the Coordinating Registered Professional (retained by the applicant), which is intended to augment the monitoring function that is traditionally carried out by the in-house City building approvals team. The CP can support the City with respect to plan review and site review services.

### **CP Program Benefits:**

The CP program has the potential to render various benefits to both the City and building permit applicants.

Specifically, CPs:

- possess advanced experience and training in the relevant Code provisions, making them more specialized and qualified than their sector peers who typically advise on and facilitate the submission of building permit application
- increase plan review and building inspection capacity
- are an additional resource on the applicant's team which can help speed up the building permit application process. The additional capacity can expedite approval timelines while also enhancing standards of due diligence and oversight
- have greater availability and flexibility and can conduct site visits more frequently than the standard monthly interval

### Additional Considerations:

The following are several additional considerations related to program implementation.

Consideration	Mitigation / Explanation
Since applicants hire the CP, they may expect that a CPs will favour their preferences in instances of misalignment with City staff.	Per the CP Framework, CPs have a professional duty to provide both the applicant and the City impartial code coordination, advice, and plan reviews services while adhering to City bylaws, provincial legislation and their profession's ethical standards.
Hiring a CP may not always expedite the building permit process; delays can occur due to factors beyond the CP's control, potentially causing frustration for applicants.	Establishing clear program objectives and discussing possible program constraints during initial discussions can help manage expectations.
There will be differences in CP professionalism, communication style and approach.	It is recommended that the proposed related amendment to the Building Bylaw include a provision enabling the City to terminate the services of a CP if they are deemed below standard by City building officials.
There may be public interest related to the involvement of third-party professionals in the City's regulatory process.	The use of independent, third-party professionals is a well-established standard in Canada. Currently, there are already certain instances where Maple Ridge Bylaws and provincial legislation direct and require third-party professional assurances in support of permit issuance. CPs are recognized as leading authorities on part 3 code compliance in the industry, and final permit decisions are made by the City.

### Accountability and Oversight:

Cities running CP programs have some latitude to tailor their program to support their unique development goals and address internal system and capacity challenges. The Program is designed to enhance collaboration, utilizing the CP's in-depth Code knowledge to assist both applicants and City staff. CPs are expected to communicate regularly with City staff and facilitate alignment when addressing Code discrepancies and compliance challenges. CPs typically oversee the preparation of the applicant's building permit application, ensuring that all required submission elements are provided by the applicant's team of professionals and meet high-quality standards. Depending on risk tolerance and other factors, some cities may limit the CP's involvement in certain tasks, such as plan reviews. The specific model for Maple Ridge will be developed by the City's building and development services departments.

### Cross Jurisdictional Analysis:

In 1978 the City of Vancouver was the first municipality in British Columbia to utilize CPs to supplement their conventional approval process for building permitting and field reviews. Since then, numerous

municipalities across the province have implemented their own CP Programs, including Surrey (1991), Abbotsford (2019), Burnaby (2023), District of West Vancouver (2021), District of Squamish (2021) Nanaimo (2024).

### **Program Implementation:**

Implementing the Certified Professional Program in the City of Maple Ridge will require minimal additional engagement with ECBC program staff, the development of a City of Maple Ridge Certified Professional Program Manual (which will cover both the provincial program scope and Maple Ridge-specific regulatory elements), and an update to the Building Bylaw No. 6925-2012 to formally enable the program in the City of Maple Ridge.

Pending Council's decision and approval, staff aim to complete the implementation by the end of the fourth quarter of 2024

### **Strategic Alignment:**

Liveable Community: Facilitate expanded housing diversity and supply, to promote attainability

The Certified Professional Program is one of several initiatives the City of Maple Ridge is advancing to improve the development approvals process, shorten timelines, and support expanded housing supply, diversity and attainability. It complements and enhances the Development Approvals Process Review (DARP), the City's Housing Strategy, and will enable the various targeted housing growth OKRs.

Diversified, Thriving Economy: Attract, retain, and expand business investment to diversify the tax base and increase local employment

Additionally, the Certified Professional program can be an effective tool in the attraction of new business investment to the community. By shortening timelines for building approvals, and thereby lowering carrying costs and accelerating production, the CP Program, alongside initiatives like the Maple Ridge Development Approval Concierge Service, can set Maple Ridge apart from other cities. The Program can help further building a reputation for efficient, competent, and seamless regulatory processes.

### **Financial Impact:**

The estimated costs for implementing the program consist primarily of a one-time startup expense of \$15,000 to engage a consultant for the development of the Maple Ridge CP Manual, which can be accommodated within existing budget. Any costs associated with retaining a CP will be the applicant's responsibility, similar to the service fees paid to other qualified professionals.

### **Options & Implications**

1) Recommended: That Council direct staff to bring forward the necessary bylaw amendment and manual to enable the Certified Professional Program that will provide developers an option to engage the services of a CP for their building permit applications, while potentially freeing up City resources for permit processing and inspections and helping the City realize it's housing targets.

2) Council could choose not to endorse the program and continue under the current building permit scheme.

### **Applicable Legislation/Bylaw/Policy:**

**Maple Ridge Building Bylaw No. 6925 – 2012:** Sets standards and requirements for building construction and renovations to ensure safety, health, and quality of life. Specifically, it establishes standards for structural integrity, fire safety, plumbing, and electrical systems and outlines the

processes for obtaining permits, including applications, fees, and documentation, and specifies inspection procedures.

**The BC Building Act:** establishes the legal framework and authority for the administration and enforcement of building regulations in British Columbia. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the building process.

**BC Building Code:** Provides detailed technical standards and regulations for the design, construction, and safety of buildings. It covers aspects like structural integrity, fire safety, accessibility, and energy efficiency.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Implementation of the Certified Professional Program for the City of Maple Ridge will enhance and support the building permit review and approval process and can assist the City in achieving its various development-related strategies goals.

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## Report Approval Details

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Attachments:	
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This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

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