



November 25, 2019

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Building Services Transformation Branch
777 Bay Street, 16th floor
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

buildingtransformation@ontario.ca

**Re: Transforming and modernizing the delivery of Ontario's Building Code services
(Proposal # 019-0422)**

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA) is writing with respect to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) consultation on the Ontario Building Code services. We appreciate that the ministry is taking a proactive look at this important piece of legislation. The following are some factors the OFVGA wishes MMAH considers as it finalizes its path forward.

Consistent Application of the Code

The OFVGA is pleased to see emphasis and effort being placed on ensuring the building code is applied consistently between regions and sectors. This issue has been an ongoing for farmers in relation to farm buildings for storage, packing, production, as well as for bunk housing, which is required for seasonal agricultural workers.

We support all efforts that work towards ensuring consistent application of the code, including technical bulletins, and tailored training. The OFVGA feels that it is important that officials inspecting agricultural buildings and bunk housing should understand the unique factors faced by the sector. Specialized training for agricultural building inspectors could be the solution to ensuring fair and supportive building code interpretation for farm operations.

Building Permit Levy

The consultation materials outline that a building permit levy is being proposed in addition to the existing municipal permit fees. Recognizing that an approximate additional \$80 charge on a \$500,000 building project seems minor, the impact of this additional fee may be significant.

Although the OFVGA supports improved service delivery for the application of building code services, we suggest that MMAH look for other solutions that do not increase the burden on the builder. Adding additional fees to building projects increases the overall building cost, administrative burden, and red tape for the project. From an economic development perspective, the increased burden could dissuade potential building projects or expansions that lead to additional jobs, tax revenue, or business efficiencies.



If supported, the Ontario fruit and vegetable sector has the potential to grow significantly, through expanding production, packing, storage and the development of value-added products and activities. It is important to maintain a regulatory environment that enables, rather than hinders the growth and competitiveness of the sector.

A potential solution would be to conduct a thorough review of the existing fees and levies collected and remitted to the province for various building code services and identify areas where savings can be found. These funds could then be redirected to cover the revenue proposed to be generated by this new levy.

Worker Bunkhouses

Many of OFVGA's members use bunkhouses as residences for foreign seasonal agricultural workers. These foreign workers are necessary for Ontario to produce fruits and vegetables as the domestic labour force is not sufficient. As part of the requirements for hiring seasonal workers, farmers must provide housing for them. The experience of growers with the building code and housing for workers is varied, depending on the municipality.

Although not specifically part of this consultation, the OFVGA would like to convey a couple of opportunities for improvement:

- Bunkhouses are being treated as rooming houses or hotels, which understandably have high standards because they are in use year-round. However, bunkhouses for seasonal workers are only used in the warm months of the year, meaning the same requirements for drinking water and wastewater apply, despite the need not being there.

There is an opportunity to review the code to identify ways to reduce bunkhouse requirements, without decreasing the quality of the living space for workers.

- Some farmers have access to additional family dwellings, resulting from acquiring neighbouring farms to expand their business. These surplus dwellings can be transformed into seasonal worker housing, avoiding the cost for a new building. However, some farmers have had poor experiences when working with building inspectors to get approval for that use, despite all other requirements being met.

With the proper application of the code, there is the opportunity to reduce waste and building costs by retrofitting an otherwise unused dwelling.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback as the province works to transform and modernize the delivery of Ontario's Building Code services. We would be pleased to discuss our comments further and participate in future consultation as the opportunity arises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bill George Jr.", written in black ink.

Bill George Jr.
Chair, OFVGA Board

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brian Gilroy", written in black ink.

Brian Gilroy
Chair, OFVGA Energy, Property & Infrastructure Section



About the OFVGA:

The OFVGA is the leading voice for Ontario's fruit, vegetable and greenhouse vegetable farmers. Our sector includes more than 3,500 family run farms that employ over 30,000 people directly on-farm. For every on-farm job, it is estimated there are 2.2 jobs created downstream, or approximately 96,000 jobs combined. Fruit and vegetable production drives Ontario's rural and urban economies by generating more than \$4.2 billion in economic activity annually, along with \$600 million in combined tax revenues for all levels of government. Ontario fruit and vegetable farmers compete with global producers for domestic and export markets that demand low cost quality produce. Fruit and vegetable exports from Ontario total over \$1.5 billion, almost half of which originates from the greenhouse vegetable sector.