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Does that project need an architect?

Special information for AIBC members and associates, planners, building officials, owners, developers, engineers and anyone interested in hiring an architect.

Do you know when and on what projects an architect must be retained in British Columbia?

The *Architects Act* is provincial legislation that does more than provide a right to title and right to practice for architects. The *Act* also defines architecture and designates which buildings require an architect by law — all in the public interest.

The *Architects Act*, not the BC Building Code, is the primary source for establishing when an architect must be hired. While the Building Code is an important document, (particularly at the building permit stage, where it calls for an architect or engineer to provide letters of assurance on certain projects), the Code does not establish or limit which buildings require architects nor the stage at which such services must be retained.

Under the *Act*, an architect must be retained any time architectural services are provided on a building requiring an architect. As soon as planning and design begins on such buildings, an architect is required, however conceptual or schematic the services may be.

In terms of applications to authorities having jurisdiction (local governments, regional districts, etc.) the legal requirement generally begins with zoning and development permit applications where such applications include one or more buildings requiring the services of an architect. Authorities having jurisdiction must also comply with this provincial law, which means not processing applications for buildings requiring an architect until an architect has been retained. Such compliance with the law does not constitute 'enforcement' of the *Act*, which is the AIBC's sole responsibility.

The AIBC works regularly with architects, engineers, planners, building officials and owners to assist in determining whether a particular project — or project stage, such as formal application to a local government — must have an architect on the job.

Not every building or application requires an architect. The *Architects Act* includes a number of "exemptions" by which certain building types and sizes are exempted from the general requirement for architects or by which certain persons (for example, designated government or armed forces personnel, or supervised employees of architects) may be permitted to practise architecture.

The *Architects Act* also establishes legal liability for those who misrepresent themselves as architects, or who practise architecture or enable the practice of architecture by non-architects. This liability extends to authorities having jurisdiction who elect to process applications in contravention of the *Act*.

When in doubt, or to resolve disputes over the application of the *Architects Act*, applicants, municipal officials and others should contact the AIBC without hesitation. We commit to responding promptly to help ensure all parties understand and comply with the legal requirements.

For further information, consult one of the AIBC Bulletins linked below or contact an AIBC staff member directly:

- [AIBC Bulletin 30: The Architects Act of British Columbia-Enforcement Procedures](#) – a basic overview of the AIBC's illegal practice responsibilities, procedures and the penalties that may be imposed under the *Act*.
- [AIBC Bulletin 31: Buildings Requiring the Services of an Architect](#) – the guiding document for understanding the thresholds in the *Architects Act* that trigger the requirements for hiring an architect. For those working with the Building Code, this bulletin provides a convenient table that ties Building Code occupancies with the language used in the *Architects Act* where possible.
- [AIBC Bulletin 32: "Architect" and Derivative Titles](#) – a guide to acceptable terminology including use of "architect", "architecture" as well as related descriptions and designations.

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