



ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
DESCRIPTIVE MATERIAL

Architects Regulation: Reserved Practice of Architecture

September 2023

This is an explanatory guide and does not take the place of the Architects Regulation itself, which prevails in all cases.



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*Note: Capitalized terms in this document are defined terms and have the same meaning as defined in the [AIBC Bylaws](#).

1.0 Buildings Requiring an Architect in British Columbia per the *Architects Regulation*

- 1.1 The *Architects Regulation*, as authorized by the *Professional Governance Act*, defines the practice of the profession of architecture and describes when and for which types of buildings an Architect must be retained.
- 1.2 The chart below illustrates the Reserved Practice for the profession of architecture taken from the *Architects Regulation*. It is intended as a convenient guide and does not take the place of the *Architects Regulation* itself, which prevails in all cases.

2.0 Background and Authority

- 2.1 The AIBC is mandated under the *Professional Governance Act* to administer the *Architects Regulation* and enforce compliance. Concern for the public interest (including public health and safety, protection of the environment, and accountability to a regulatory profession) is of primary importance. The *Architects Regulation* addresses the public interest, in part, by requiring that only qualified persons who have been issued a Certificate of Practice or Temporary Licence by the AIBC may be represented as an Architect or Architectural Firm and offer and provide architectural services in British Columbia. Persons or firms not registered with the AIBC must not be misrepresented as “architects” or offer architectural services.
- 2.2 An Architect’s services include the preparation of designs, plans, supporting documents and the provision of field services for the erection, addition or alteration to buildings. In addition, the practice of the profession of architecture does not commence at the stage of application for a Building Permit or when Letters of Assurance are required. An Architect must be engaged to provide architectural services for buildings requiring an Architect at any stage of a government’s approval process.

2.3 Buildings requiring an Architect by law should not be allowed to proceed through design panel applications, community engagement processes or permit applications – whether (re)zoning, development permit or building permit – without an Architect’s involvement. The *Architects Regulation* is provincial legislation that applies to all parties – Architects, non-Architect designers, Professional Engineers, developers, owners/tenants and local governments. The *B.C. Building Code, the Vancouver Building Bylaw* (building codes) and other regulations containing AIBC-endorsed letters of assurance and registered professional designation do not determine when an Architect must be retained.

3.0 Interaction Between the *Architects Regulation* and the *BC Building Code*

- 3.1 The Reserved Practice of architecture is, to a great extent, aligned with the BC Building Code in relation to terminology (e.g., major occupancy type is used to describe building types), and in most cases with the requirement for when an Architect is required. However, it is important to note that it is the *Architects Regulation*, not the *BC Building Code* nor the *Vancouver Building Bylaw*, that is the primary source for establishing when an Architect must be hired. While they are important documents for regulating the design and construction of buildings, they do not establish or limit which buildings require Architects nor the stage at which such services must be retained.
- 3.2 Under the *Architects Regulation* 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, including at rezoning and development permit application stages.
- 3.3 The *Architects Regulation* applies throughout the province regardless of a local government’s decision on enforcement of the *BC Building Code*, including land where the *BC Building Code* is not applicable, such as land under federal jurisdiction (e.g., ports, airports, national parks) and in the City of Vancouver. The application of the *Architects Regulation* (as with other provincial laws) in relation to Indigenous or Aboriginal Lands, including Indian Reserves, is a matter for review on a case-by-case basis.
- 3.4 It is important to note that the *B.C. Building Code* is of critical importance in defining the minimum acceptable standard for buildings in BC, but it is only the most basic minimum. In addition to the building code, an Architect must address many other requirements including other provincial regulations which guide facility design for buildings that shelter regulated activities; government policies and guidelines for buildings procured or funded by government; and community objectives that are implemented through bylaws by local governments. The process of compliance can be far more challenging than that of the building code, but for the public (the owners of buildings) compliance with any government mandated requirement is necessary to move forward.

4.0 Alterations to Buildings

- 4.1 Some minor alterations to existing buildings can be completed without an Architect pursuant to section 5(3) of the *Architects Regulation*. The need for an Architect arises when the building type requires the services of an Architect pursuant to 5(2) of the regulations, and the work involves one or more of the following:
- 4.1.1 change to the building's major occupancy;
 - 4.1.2 change to the building's structural integrity;
 - 4.1.3 alteration or penetration of a building's fire separations;
 - 4.1.4 alteration or penetration of a building's enclosure;
 - 4.1.5 alteration of a building's exiting;
 - 4.1.6 change to the building's energy utilization; or
 - 4.1.7 change to access to the building for persons with disabilities.

5.0 Architects and Professional Engineers

- 5.1 As regulated by the Engineers and Geoscientists BC, the *Engineers and Geoscientists Regulation* contains statutory requirements as to the engagement of individuals who are Professional Engineers and Professional Licensees Engineering to provide professional engineering services. Persons who are not licensed pursuant to the *Engineers and Geoscientists Regulation* are prohibited from providing such services.
- 5.2 A Professional Engineer or Professional Licensee Engineering may practice professional engineering as permitted by the *Engineers and Geoscientists Regulation*. Under the *Architects Regulation*, Schedule 1 lists building types that are within the Reserved Practice of architecture and the reserved practice of professional engineering, as such both professionals can provide services on those building types. Additional guidance in relation to the roles of engineering and architectural registrants on building types and areas of practice, including joint practice guidelines, advisories and bulletins, is published on the websites of the [Architectural Institute of British Columbia](#) and [Engineers and Geoscientists British Columbia](#).

Appendix A: Buildings Requiring the Services of an Architect

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC		BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
<p>Group A Assembly occupancy means the occupancy or the use of a building, or part thereof, by a gathering of persons for civic, political, travel, religious, social, educational, recreational or like purposes, or for the consumption of food or drink (BC Building Code Division A, 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p>			
A1	Assembly occupancies intended for the production and viewing of the performing arts (i.e., movie theatres, opera houses, television studios with viewing audiences)	Professional design and review (architect OR engineer), including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size. (BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)	Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance (LOA).
A2	Assembly occupancies not elsewhere classified in Group A, includes Child Care facilities. (i.e., restaurants, libraries, courtrooms, schools, daycare centres, gyms, community halls)	Professional design and review (architect OR engineer), including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size. (BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)	Architect required for a building of any size consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance. Except as permitted in 3.1.2.6 of Division B of the BC Building Code . (Small assembly occupancies can be considered business and personal services, and therefore require an architect when the gross area exceeds 470 sq m (5059 square feet)).
A3	Assembly occupancies of the arena type (i.e., arenas, indoor swimming pools, with or without seating; rinks)	Professional design and review (architect OR engineer), including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size. (BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)	Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance.
A4	Assembly occupancies in which the occupants are gathered in the open air (i.e., bleachers, grandstands, stadia, amusement park structures)	Professional design and review (architect OR engineer), including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size. (BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)	Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance. Except some A4 per Schedule 1, Architect or Professional Engineer required.

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC		BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
<p>Group B Detention occupancy means the occupancy by persons who are restrained from or are incapable of evacuating to a safe location without the assistance of another person because of security measures not under their control (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p> <p>Group B Treatment occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof for the provision of treatment, and where overnight accommodation is available to facilitate the treatment. (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p> <p>Group B Care occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof where care is provided to residents. (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p>			
B1	<p>Detention occupancies in which persons are under restraint or are incapable of self-preservation because of security measures not under their control</p>	<p>Professional design and review (architect OR engineer), including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance.</p>
B2	<p>Treatment occupancies.</p> <p>Treatment means the provision of medical or other health-related intervention to persons, where the administration or lack of administration of these interventions may render them incapable of evacuating to a safe location without the assistance of another person. (See Note A-1.4.1.2.(1).)</p> <p>(Defined term BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2.)</p>	<p>Professional design and review (architect OR engineer), including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance.</p>

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC		BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
B3	<p>Care occupancies.</p> <p>Care means the provision of services other than treatment by or through care facility management to residents who require these services because of cognitive, physical, or behavioural limitations.</p> <p>(Defined term BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2.)</p>	<p>Professional design and review, (architect OR engineer) including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance.</p>
B4	<p>2020 National Building Code (NBC) classification. It is applicable anywhere the NBC is used.</p>	<p>Currently not found in the BCBC.</p>	<p>Refer to B3 and 3.1.2.5 of the BCBC.</p>

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC	BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
<p>Group C Residential occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof by persons for whom sleeping accommodation is provided but who are not harboured for the purpose of receiving care or treatment and are not involuntarily detained (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p>		
<p>C</p>	<p>Residential occupancies</p>	<p>Professional design and review, including architectural Letters of Assurance, when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exceeding 600 m² in building area¹ (6458 square feet); or • exceeding 3 storeys in building height; or • buildings with a common egress system where the building area is reduced to less than 600 m² in building area by the use of firewalls.

1. Architect required for a building with a building area that exceeds 600 sq m (6458 square feet);
2. Architect required for a building that has a building height of four or more storeys;
3. Architect required on any residential building with five or more dwelling units;
4. Architect required on any mixed-use building that has a gross area that exceeds 470 sq m (5059 square feet) and contains one or more dwelling units;
5. Architect required on any mixed-use building of any size that contains one or more dwelling units in combination with assembly, detention, care, treatment occupancies; and
6. a hotel as defined in the Hotel Guest Registration Act that has a gross area that exceeds 470 sq m.

¹ **Building area**, per the BCBC, "means the greatest horizontal area of a building above grade within the outside surface of exterior walls or within the outside surface of exterior walls and the centreline of firewalls". In other words, it is the size of the building's "footprint" (between firewalls, if any), no matter how many floors are in the building. For example, a 10-storey building with each floor being 100 m² would have a building area of 100 m².

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC		BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
<p>Group D Business and personal services occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof for the transaction of business or the rendering or receiving of professional or personal service (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p>			
D	Business and personal services occupancies	<p>Professional design and review, including architectural Letters of Assurance, when exceeding 600 m² (6458 square feet) in building area or exceeding 3 storeys in building height.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building that has a gross area that exceeds 470 sq m (5059 square feet), being the aggregate area of all floors.</p>
<p>Group E Mercantile occupancy means the occupancy or use of a building or part thereof for the displaying or selling of retail goods, wares or merchandise (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p>			
E	Mercantile occupancies	<p>Professional design and review, including architectural Letters of Assurance, when exceeding 600 m² (6458 square feet) in building area or exceeding 3 storeys in building height.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building that has a gross area that exceeds 470 sq m (5059 square feet), being the aggregate area of all floors.</p>

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC		BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
<p>Group F High-hazard industrial occupancy means an industrial occupancy containing sufficient quantities of highly combustible and flammable or explosive materials which, because of their inherent characteristics, constitute a special fire hazard (BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms).</p>			
F1	High-hazard industrial occupancies	<p>Professional design and review, (architect OR engineer) including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance, except where a building is set out in Schedule 1 of the <i>Architects Regulation</i> which allows for professional design and review by a registrant in the reserved practice of professional engineering.</p>
F2 and F3	Medium-hazard & Low-Hazard industrial occupancies	<p>Professional design and review, including architectural Letters of Assurance, when exceeding 600 m² (6458 square feet) in building area² or exceeding 3 storeys in building height.</p> <p>(BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)</p>	<p>Architect required for a building that has a gross area that exceeds 470 sq m (5059 square feet), being the aggregate area of all floors, except where a building is set out in Schedule 1 of the <i>Architects Regulation</i> which allows for professional design and review by a registrant in the reserved practice of professional engineering.</p>

² **Building area**, per the BCBC, "means the greatest horizontal area of a building above grade within the outside surface of exterior walls or within the outside surface of exterior walls and the centreline of firewalls". In other words, it is the size of the building's "footprint" (between firewalls, if any), no matter how many floors are in the building. For example, a 10-storey building with each floor being 100 m² would have a building area of 100 m².

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC	BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
All	<p>Post-disaster buildings of any occupancy means a building that is essential to the provision of services in the event of a disaster, and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hospitals, emergency treatment facilities and blood banks, • telephone exchanges, • power generating stations and electrical substations, • control centres for air, land and marine transportation, • public water treatment and storage facilities, and pumping stations, • sewage treatment facilities, • buildings having critical national defence functions, and • buildings of the following types, except buildings exempted from this designation by the authority having jurisdiction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emergency response facilities, - fire, rescue and police stations and housing for vehicles, aircraft or boats used for such purposes, and - communications facilities, including radio and television stations. <p>(BC Building Code Division A 1.4.1.2 Defined Terms)</p>	
hospitals, emergency treatment facilities and blood banks	Professional design and review, including architectural Letters of Assurance, regardless of size. (BC Building Code Division C, 2.2.7 Professional Design and Review)	Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance.
telephone exchanges, power generating stations and electrical substation control centres for air, land and marine transportation		Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance, except where a building is set out in Schedule 1 of the <i>Architects Regulation</i> which allows for professional design and review by a registrant in the reserved practice of professional engineering.

Building Classification by Major Occupancy per BCBC	BC Building Code (BCBC) Requirements	AIBC's Reserved Practice per Section 5 of the <u>Architects Regulation</u>
control centres for air, land and marine transportation		Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance.
public water treatment and storage facilities, and pumping stations, sewage treatment facilities		Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance except where a building is set out in Schedule 1 of the <i>Architects Regulation</i> which allows for professional design and review by a registrant in the reserved practice of professional engineering.
buildings having critical national defence functions		Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance except where a building is set out in Schedule 1 of the <i>Architects Regulation</i> which allows for professional design and review by a registrant in the reserved practice of professional engineering.
buildings of the following types except buildings exempted by the AHJ: emergency response facilities, fire, rescue and police stations and housing for vehicles, aircraft of boats used for such purposes, and communications facilities, including radio and television stations.		Architect required for a building of any size, consistent with BCBC requirement for architectural Letter of Assurance, except where a building is set out in Schedule 1 of the <i>Architects Regulation</i> which allows for professional design and review by a registrant in the reserved practice of professional engineering.