



February 2, 2024

To: Hon. Ric McIver, Minister for Municipal Affairs
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Cc: Hon. Nathan Neudorf, Minister of Affordability and Utilities
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From: Southern Alberta Group for the Environment
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Re: Building Performance and the Municipal Charter

The Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE) *opposes* the proposed changes to the Municipal Charter regulation for the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, specifically the proposed removal of *Section 7(2) of the Safety Code Act Amendments* which currently reads:

- (2) In the Safety Codes Act, in section 66, the following is added after subsection (3):
- (4) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the City may make bylaws relating to environmental matters, including, without limitation, matters relating to energy consumption and heat retention, but only to the extent those bylaws are consistent with all regulations made under this section and section 65.01 and all codes declared in force by those regulations.

Canada has joined 120 nations in committing to net-zero emissions by 2050, including all G7 countries. Many responsible provinces and cities in Canada have also made net-zero commitments by supporting innovation designed to transform the energy-performance of the built environment, including residential homes.

Removing the 'building code bylaw authority', which allows a municipality to make bylaws regarding energy consumption and heat reduction, restricts the sort of innovation and technological progress required to reduce emissions related to the built environment. Innovations in reducing the embodied energy of construction materials, reducing building heat loss and transitioning to low-emission heating and cooling technologies are best supported by city-specific environmental standards above those regulated more generally by the National Building Code and the National Energy Code of Canada. More to the point, allowing *all* municipalities to address specific, local climate realities is a path to optimization, innovation and affordability.

SAGE suggests that removing the ‘building code bylaw authority’ limits performance expectations in new building stock and makes housing *less* affordable in the future.

New buildings today are expected to be operating for the next 80+ years. Based solely on the current National Building Code, these buildings will not meet heating and cooling energy reduction requirements to achieve emission targets over the next 30 years. Higher operating costs and significant and costly retrofits will necessarily be borne by home owners, likely borrowing by means of second mortgages.

New affordable housing should be supported by the following government initiatives, with appropriate municipal authority enshrined in the *Municipal Government Act*:

- Net-zero-ready construction, including optimizing opportunities for passive heat, cooling, and solar PV exposure. Homes should include combined heat pump & air conditioning units (in addition to natural gas furnaces) for heating and air conditioning flexibility during the energy transition.
- Requirements for developers and builders to enhance customer awareness by providing detailed full-cost/benefit details for net-zero upgrades.
- Government support for innovation in durable construction materials, with low embodied energy, and opportunities for reuse and recycling at the end of the life-cycle.
- Municipalities to provide market certainty by supporting long-term investments in solar PV and other net-zero upgrades in the property tax structure.
- Partnerships with banking institutions and utilities to provide affordable long-term lending rates and energy pricing for net-zero upgrades.
- Continue to advocate for higher standards in the National Building Code so as to meet national commitments for net-zero by 2050.

Future homes, built to higher standards, will be safer, healthier and more climate resilient. Built to higher standards, new homes will be more affordable in the long-term. Providing affordable and environmentally-responsible housing requires clear government policy and regulation. Removing opportunities for municipalities to innovate and set building standards undermines their ability to position the economy and enhance social well-being for a challenging future.

The Southern Alberta Group for the Environment has been a leading voice for a health and environmentally sustainable community in southern Alberta for the past 40 years. We encourage Government of Alberta to reconsider the proposed changes to the Municipal Charter regulation for the cities of Calgary and Edmonton and, rather, to actively engage in meeting climate commitments through higher building performance standards.