

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 13, 2015
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Mid-Rise Wood Frame Buildings (CES15048) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Rob Simonds 905-546-3343 Frank Biancucci 905-546-2424 Ext. 3377
SUBMITTED BY:	Joe-Anne Priel General Manager Community & Emergency Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

City Council at its meeting of May 28, 2014 approved the following recommendation with respect to correspondence from the Cement Association of Canada (attached as Appendix A to Report CES15048) respecting changes to the Ontario Building Code:

“Be received and referred to the Hamilton Fire Chief for a report back to Emergency and Community Services Committee.”

Information:

The Cement Association of Canada (CAC) outlined various concerns pertaining to proposed amendments of the Ontario Building Code to allow construction of six story wood frame buildings. More specifically, it cited an overall concern in extending the maximum height for wood frame buildings from four (4) stories to six (6) stories in height as part of the proposed amendment. A further concern noted the potential fire risk to mid-rise wood frame buildings during the construction phase.

During the intervening period between the submission of the Cement Association’s letter and Council’s direction to staff, a comprehensive stakeholder engagement initiative was undertaken. The engagement process was undertaken in 2014 and included the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) and the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management (OFMEM).

Subsequent to the completion of the analysis, amendments to the 2012 Ontario Building Code including mid-rise wood construction were filed on September 23, 2014 and subsequently adopted into the Ontario Building Code O.Reg., 191/14 effective January 2015.

The amendments to the Building Code included enhancements to fire and occupant safety in mid-rise wood frame buildings (up to six [6] stories) which included full sprinkler protection for buildings (including balconies and decks over 2' deep), non-combustible exit stairwells with a 1.5 hour fire-resistance rating, non-combustible or combustion resistant cladding, non-combustible or combustion resistant roofing, and a requirement to have a fire access route within 15 m of the building exterior for at least 10% of the building perimeter.

Given the adopted enhancements to the Ontario Building Code and the input of the OAFB and OFMEM, the Hamilton Fire Department is confident that the measures will enhance fire safety within six (6) story wood frame occupancies once constructed and address the concerns which were expressed by the CAC.

With respect to the concerns expressed by the CAC relative to the construction phase of mid-rise wood frame buildings, the Hamilton Fire Department acknowledges that the construction phase can present unique risks and hazards that differ from those in a completed mid-rise building. Considerations include: site security, partially completed fire extinguishing systems, hot work protocols and the potential for various ignition sources.

Given that these issues are broadly recognized within the construction industry, the Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Labour, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs and various other stakeholders are currently reviewing these issues to address additional safeguards during the construction phase. Once the review is completed and the recommendations adopted, the Hamilton Fire Department will work with other stakeholders to engage contractors and the construction industry on implementing the recommendations.

In summary, given the amended upgrades to the Ontario Building Code and the current review to address fire safety concerns during construction, the Hamilton Fire Department is confident the measures will enhance fire safety during construction and final occupancy in mid-rise wood frame buildings.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES15048: Correspondence from the Cement Association of Canada