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Could Mass Timber Construction Reshape Prince George's Skyline?

Ethan Ready TALL WOOD CONSTRUCTION

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PRINCE GEORGE BC– City council voted unanimously during Monday's (Sept. 14) regular meeting in being an early adopter of the Initiative for Tall Wood Mass Timber Construction, signing on with 12 other communities from across the province.

Mayor Lyn Hall believes this could help shape the downtown landscape into the future.

"It was important for us because forestry is a mainstay of our economic growth here and has been for 100+ years. The importance of it, and we've always been known as the Spruce Capital, but it's far more than that. It gives us the opportunity now to be a part of a group of communities across the province to look at Mass Timber construction. We may not see it immediately, but it may be something we see a few years down the road."

Mayor Hall added that he felt it was important that Prince George was among the municipalities signing onto the initiative.

The Province announced last year that it will provide opportunities to build taller buildings with engineered wood products ahead of the provincial adoption of the 2020 National Building Code. That code is targeted to contain provisions for the construction of mass timber buildings up to 12 stories high from the current six.

"It gives options to builders and investors when they're looking to do construction in Prince George."

The Mayor also believes it could lead to a potential shift in the landscape for downtown.

"It gives us the opportunity to do something different here in Prince George from a building perspective," said Hall, highlighting the already existing UNBC Wood Innovation and Design Centre and Park House Condominiums, as well as the student housing development next to the Prince George Public Library.

However, UNBC's Dr Guido Wimmers believes there's much to be done for the industry itself to be able to make use of the legal framework.

"We have had the problem that only one company in BC was able to produce these materials. Now, we're getting close to a second company online who can produce this. At least now there will be some competition with more variety of materials being made available," explained Wimmers, the former Chair



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for UNBC's Master of Engineering in Integrated Wood Design program, adding a competitive materials market is a good thing for the industry.

"The other thing is the industry itself, starting with architects and engineers, down to the construction site carpenters, etc., need to be trained properly in this kind of setting as well because it's all about pre-fabrication; you will not build these buildings on-site anymore, the traditional way. It's in a controlled environment and a different setting, and the skill set that we need, like with the carpenters, is very different from what we have done over the past 20-30 years."

Wimmers says the skills and techniques needed for Tall Wood Mass Timber Construction is needed to be vetted into the teaching and education of all of the professionals involved.

That being said, Wimmers truly believes the council is right in supporting this early adoption as a way to showcase the backbone of our region.

"The pure reason of existence for Prince George is the existence of the forest industry. It is the hub of the forest industry in Central BC. It would be a very important signal to basically stand up and say we believe in the product, we know we can do much more than the traditional single-family homes, or even up to six floors, we know we can do much more."

"We're starting to see taller buildings being built," says Mayor Hall. "By connecting and joining those other municipalities in this initiative, it just gives developers another option when they look at Prince George to invest."

This early adoption initiative will allow participating local governments to enable innovative tall wood buildings in their communities two to three years before adoption in the BC Building Code.

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