

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR MARCH 23, 2016
HEADLINE: HOME INSPECTION LICENSING; THE SOLUTION

For the past two weeks I have been writing on the home inspection industry, some background and the main problem that is stopping proper licensing. This week, we will look at what I feel will provide the basis for a sound, fair, verifiable and responsible home inspection licensing format for Ontario. This licensing will not only set the bench mark for anyone who desires to become a home inspector, but it will provide a straight forward method of verification for every home buyer who wishes to use a home inspector as part of their home buying due diligence.

Recently, MPP Han Dong, Liberal member for Trinity-Spadina, tabled and was successful in getting his private members bill through second reading and into committee; the steps toward becoming law. MPP Dong is to be congratulated for his vision here. He had constituents who had issues with the home inspection industry as it now sits. While nice to see, this bill will take some effort and lacks a complete internal operational structure; something that the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services says will happen before the end of the year.

MPP Dong's bill outlines the use of Designated Administrative Authority (DAA) as the cover of the book, so to speak. The DAA, as proposed, needs some refinement and there is no reason that this cannot be done, since the DAA format is a good outline.

The largest single road block is, "who administers the process?" The current provincial home inspection associations will do their utmost to lobby the government and make their existing system the "chosen one." In fact, this is far from what is needed, no association, union or self-regulated authority should have anything to do with the actual licensing of the person performing the task required; in this case a home inspection. Any trade, no matter which, should be trained and educated by an independent body, be it the Ministry of Trades, Colleges and Universities or a governance body such as the DAA. Simply put, a carpenter, barber, plumber or an electrician does his apprenticeship and is licensed upon completion. He does not have to belong to a respective association or union to obtain or retain his license. This is the troubling issue that Alberta and British Columbia now face and, if asked, I suspect they would change their current process.

Educating a home inspector should be the first step in the process and a singular education program should be used. While there are many home

inspector education programs, most lack depth or third party verification. We are fortunate to have one in Ontario that is recognized in the colleges and this is the Carson & Dunlop Training Program. It is a good one, recognized in the industry as a comprehensive education process. Inside the proposed DAA, this should be step one.

Step two for building a DAA for home inspectors should be adopting the CAN/CSA-A-770-16 Standard for Home Inspection. This document, released on March 11th 2016, is the culmination of months of effort from a Canada wide group of professionals who are involved in the industry, including colleges, the National Research Council of Canada, 6 provincial governments and various provincial departments. This standard, now approved by the Standards Council of Canada, will likely be adopted in BC, Alberta and Quebec very shortly and it deserves to be the standard in Ontario for what a home inspector does as the standards of practice. This will provide for a singular standard for every home buyer to understand.

Step three is to introduce a transparent and fair process within the DAA to evaluate a prospective home inspector and, in this instance, there is an, off the shelf, document available; the CMHC program now administered by the National Home Inspection Certification Council (NHICC). This process will evaluate the inspector's background, previous relevant education, slot them into the program for test inspection, actual home inspection report review and guide them to obtaining their Ontario LHI (Licensed Home Inspector) status, which will be the recognized standard. The DAA will also maintain a data base for prospective home buyers to go to, to find the inspectors for their region that they can contact for a home inspection. The DAA will handle discipline; maintain individual inspector's records for annual licensing; confirmation of the required professional insurances; education upgrades, as required to maintain his or her license, and the ongoing process for training and evaluation.

It is estimated that it will take up to two years to have the DAA fully functional. This will give anyone currently in the home inspection business, who does not meet the new requirements, ample time to bring their education and training up to the Ontario Standards.

There will also be administrative systems to put in place and here again there are existing programs from the CMHC/NHICC and the existing Ontario Panel Document that could be used as a bench mark and then advanced to suit the Ontario DAA. We are fortunate to have a large number of professionals, some of whom sat on that initial board, who could be asked to sit on a new board for the

DAA-LHI program in Ontario to help develop the operational structure. The DAA will need an administrative executive with strong knowledge and an unbiased view of this industry to lead the DAA as it moves ahead, once the initial legislation becomes law. All of this is possible without breaking the bank and, once operational, there is no reason why this DAA-LHI could not be self-funding, so that it does not become another burden on the Ontario taxpayer.

So the question becomes, who does a buyer use until this process is completed? There are three certifications right now that are close to or within the suggested standards. These are the RHI, as issued by the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors; the NHI, as issued by the NHICC, and the CCHI, as issued by OntarioNACHI. Members of these associations will ensure there are enough home inspectors to carry the load as the new LHI inspectors come on stream.

As we move ahead on licensing home inspectors in Ontario I will be doing column updates on the progress, following the committee process and reporting back in this.