

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR NOVEMBER 9, 2016

HEADLINE: HOME INSPECTION LICENSING-ONTARIO IS GETTING IT RIGHT

This week I am dispensing with the usual format of answering readers' questions, in favour of updating on an investigative subject that I have been working on - specifically the licensing of home inspectors in our province, with a concentrated effort over the past year.

On Thursday, November 3, 2016, a major first step in home licensing was brought forward when Minister Marie-France Lalonde announced that legislation was to be tabled in the legislature to begin this licensing process. Later in the day, it passed first reading. At the morning ceremony, I spoke with a number of interested parties who have a vested interest in seeing this become law in Ontario.

The legislation, once passed, will establish a self-funded Designated Administrative Authority that will oversee the licensing, administration and discipline of home inspectors. The licensing standards will set a base line for education, experience and it will require all home inspectors to be examined. As well, it includes the adoption of a standardized reporting method, suspected to be the CSA A-770 document that was released in March of this year. Further, it will require all home inspectors to carry sufficient errors and omissions insurance, as required by the act. Finally, it will establish a code of ethics that inspectors must function within, including a standardized service contract that is "consumer friendly" before they sign this agreement ahead of completing a home inspection.

One could say this was long overdue, as I've noted in previous columns. This industry is not large and self-governance, by way of volunteer home inspection associations, did offer some basic standards. Unfortunately, these associations failed to bind together and provide a balanced oversight on the industry in general, hence the need for Ontario to step in.

Home inspection has been around for well over 25 years, only rising to popularity in the late 90's. There are literally hundreds of volunteers who have donated thousands upon thousands of hours, mostly within associations to promote their agendas. Outside the associations, in the 90's, CMHC stepped up and developed a national home inspection program, to which the associations took considerable objection and, unfortunately, CMHC closed the book. A small group of volunteers, the NHICC (National Home Inspection Certification Council) took over the effort. They streamlined the CMHC program and offered an independent, third party certification. This certification, called the NHI (National

Home Inspector) is now used in both British Columbia and Alberta as an accepted standard for licensing. There are two gentlemen, in particular, within this group who revived the CMHC program and have lived through the hills and valleys of home inspection development and should be recognized for their life-long dedication to qualified, educated, independent third party home inspection certification. Claude Lawrenson, from Windsor, Ontario, is one of them. He was also a member of the expert panel that provided the 35 recommendations to the Ministry. The other is Bill Mullen, from Sarnia, Ontario. As well as his efforts with NHICC, Bill was a contributor to the CSA A-770 Home Inspection document. While many have served, for well over 25 years these two dedicated gents have fought the good fight, fairly and with honor.

The accolades should not stop there. Taking up this cause is not simple and I have watched others try and fail in their attempt to effect both change and provincial legislation. It's a well-known fact that the media, in general, directs a high percentage of their efforts toward drawing attention to injustice in our society and rightfully so. There must be checks and balances and our government has to be held accountable for their actions. That said, I sometimes feel that the positive efforts that help our lives are often overlooked. Personally, I have supported, both directly and indirectly, attempts to legislate this fractured industry and have, fortunately, been able to get an insight into the development of the home inspection legislation and the effort that has gone into this. In this case, there are some more recent accolades due here. MPP Han Dong, the liberal member for Trinity Spadina, took this issue into his own hands and tabled a private members bill to address licensing, even though I suspect he knew this was on his own government agenda. His action brought the need for licensing to even greater attention, though private members bills are rarely effective, he made the effort.

Marie-France Lalonde, who stepped into the position of Minister of Consumer and Government Services this past summer, pressed the licensing issue. Her staff did a lot of the heavy lifting, so to speak, on a difficult subject. I received replies to inquiries and correspondence late at night and on weekends. While the public impression of public service staff is often discounted, the ladies I was in contact with, especially Veronique Dault, went the "extra mile" as is often said. At the announcement last Thursday, the overall opinion, when I spoke to these ladies, was that they were proud of their efforts here, and rightfully so.

We often forget the human side of issues and, yes, this is their job; we expect "instant" service today. That said, development of difficult legislation, such as

this, and trying to get it right is an arduous task to which I now have a small insight.

This new home inspection legislation is a “feel good” story and those that have made this happen deserve a big “Thank You” from the public, who will benefit from their, over and above, efforts.

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