

Guide to 2025 Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) Updates



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About this guide

This guide explains the 2025 Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) changes, who they affect, and when they start.

It's for homeowners, property managers, small contractors, and other people who don't use building codes every day.

This guide **does not** replace the full by-law. For technical requirements, design questions, or permit applications, talk to a qualified professional like an architect, engineer, or code consultant.

If your permit was issued, or if your complete permit application was received **before** September 15, 2025, the new VBBL rules don't apply.

An in-stream project is one already designed under the 2019 Vancouver Building By-law and has an active rezoning or development permit submitted. It can keep using the old rules for some parts, even after the 2025 VBBL takes effect. This protection ends March 8, 2027.

What is the VBBL, and how does it fit with other codes?

The Vancouver Building By-law is the City's building code. It regulates how new buildings are designed and built, and how existing buildings are renovated. It is based on the **British Columbia Building Code**, which in turn is based on the **National Building Code of Canada**.

Vancouver follows the provincial code closely but makes changes to meet City goals—such as improving energy efficiency, accessibility, or housing options. This local version is called the Vancouver Building By-law, or **VBBL** for short.

Note: Most 2025 changes apply to **Book I (General)** of the VBBL. **Book II (Plumbing Systems)** continues to follow the National Plumbing Code, with a few minor updates specific to Vancouver.

Key dates for the 2025 VBBL

Date	What Happens
September 15, 2025	2025 Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) comes into effect
September 15, 2026	New seismic design requirements apply to new projects in Vancouver
March 8, 2027	In-stream permit protection ends. Projects with applications accepted before September 15, 2025, must have permits by March 8, 2027, to stay under the old rules.

What's changing in the 2025 VBBL

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) replaces the 2019 by-law and better aligns with the **2024 B.C. Building Code**, with some unique to Vancouver changes.

Need to know

- The new VBBL starts **September 15, 2025**
- It applies to new building permit applications only
- In-stream applications may be protected until **March 8, 2027**

Most VBBL updates are small, but they support big goals: making buildings safer, more energy efficient, and easier to upgrade. Most changes apply to new construction, with some affecting existing buildings and temporary uses.

This guide covers **eight key topics and updates**, including:

1. 2024 B.C. Building Code (BCBC) updates and harmonization
2. Phased seismic design and adaptability transition
3. Adaptable housing requirements
4. Energy efficiency and greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions
5. Mass timber and structural safety updates
6. Renovation projects and existing buildings
7. Plumbing and non-potable water updates
8. Temporary buildings and short-term uses

Each section explains what changed and how it might affect your project.

2024 B.C. Building Code (BCBC) updates and harmonization

The 2024 B.C. Building Code (BCBC) changes align with the 2020 National Code. These changes target heat, quake, and climate risks. The 2025 VBBL harmonizes with these updates while keeping unique Vancouver variations. Table 1 lists key changes to the 2024 B.C. Building Code:

2024 BCBC change	Description of BCBC change
Adaptable units	• Most new apartment buildings must include adaptable units. Includes wider doors, clear space, and reinforced walls for future grab bars.
Cool rooms	• One room must stay under 26 C in summer.
Seismic upgrades	• Wood-frame homes must have additional bracing (starting March 10, 2025).

2024 BCBC change	Description of BCBC change
Radon rough-ins	- All homes must include pre-piping for future radon systems. - Radon is an invisible gas from soil that raises the risk of lung cancer when it builds up indoors.
GHG reporting	Buildings must be designed and constructed to new emissions limits.
Mass timber	Buildings up to 18 storeys are now allowed.

Table 1: 2024 B.C. Building Code Changes

Harmonization with the 2024 B.C. Building Code

The VBBL is based on the **2024 B.C. Building Code** and includes many of its key changes, some shown in Table 1 above. This harmonization makes rules more consistent across B.C. and speeds up housing approvals.

Vancouver kept **limited local variations** to reflect City priorities. These support the construction of **safe, healthy, green, resilient, accessible, and affordable buildings**.

The changes aim to:

- Remove unnecessary barriers to compliance
- Reduce cost and complexity
- Support local needs such as multiplex housing, energy performance, and accessibility

Vancouver now follows the provincial code more closely while retaining key updates reflecting its leadership in areas like housing, sustainability, and safety.

Phased seismic design and adaptability transition

The 2024 B.C. Building Code introduced new rules for earthquake safety and adaptable housing. These are being phased into the VBBL to give builders more flexibility.

VBBL Transition Timelines:

Seismic design	- New rules apply from September 15, 2026 - In-stream projects submitted before March 8, 2027, can follow the old rules
Adaptability	- No changes yet — 2019 VBBL rules remain in place - New rules delayed until at least May 28, 2026 (date TBD)

Adaptable housing requirements

What's changing	What's staying the same
- New condo and apartment buildings will require adaptable units in the future. - Applies to all new apartment buildings. - Features include wider doors, level entries, and bathroom reinforcements.	- Vancouver will keep existing rules in place for all dwelling units. - No changes to current design expectations at this time.
Why it matters	When it starts
- Help people live independently as their needs change. - Reduces cost of future renovations.	New rules delayed until a future VBBL update.

See [VBBL Adaptable Housing Requirements](#)

Energy efficiency and greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions

What's changing	What's staying the same
- New buildings must meet GHG emission limits. - Systems to track and report GHG emissions are now required. - The VBBL introduces standards commissioning procedures.	Vancouver will align with the B.C. Energy Step Code performance targets.
Why it matters	When it starts
- Supports low-carbon construction. - Helps reduce carbon emissions. - Help owners confirm their energy systems work properly.	Applies to permits issued on or after September 15, 2025.

See [Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas \(GHG\) Reductions](#)

Structural safety updates – modernized structural rules

What's changing	What's staying the same
• New seismic design rules from 2024 B.C. Building Code. • Designs use new earthquake science and hazard maps. • Stronger earthquake safety goals apply to all building types.	• 2019 VBBL seismic rules stay in effect until September 15, 2026. • In-stream projects submitted before March 8, 2027, can follow the old rules.
Why it matters	When it starts
• It makes buildings safer during earthquakes. • It meets updated B.C. and national standards.	• Applies to complete permit applications submitted on or after September 15, 2025. • In-stream permit protection lasts until March 8, 2027.

See [Structural Safety Updates – Modernized Structural Rules](#)

Renovation projects and existing buildings

What's changing	What's staying the same
• Renovations under \$255,000 no longer need structural or non-structural upgrades. • Structural and non-structural upgrades for tenant renovations are limited to the tenant space. • Existing building rules are reorganized to make compliance options clearer.	• The general approach to existing buildings remains the same. • New options added to improve flexibility.
Why it matters	When it starts
• Reduces unexpected costs for low-value tenant improvements. • Makes it easier to renovate older buildings. • Responds to industry feedback about unexpected extra work.	• Applies to complete permit applications submitted on or after September 15, 2025.

See [Renovation Projects and Existing Buildings](#)

Plumbing and non-potable water updates

What's changing	What's staying the same
• Small-scale greywater reuse systems now allowed. • A new testing option for Legionella pneumophila is available. • More options for grease interceptors. • Several outdated Vancouver-only plumbing rules were removed.	• The voluntary use of non-potable water remains allowed. • Existing non-potable plumbing options are still supported.

Why it matters	When it starts
• Promotes simpler, cost-effective plumbing design. • Further aligns plumbing rules across B.C.	• Applies to complete permit applications submitted on or after September 15, 2025.

See [Plumbing Non-Potable Water Updates](#)

Temporary buildings and short-term use

What's changing	What's staying the same
• Clearer rules and more options for temporary buildings and for temporary uses in existing buildings, even with different occupancies. • Temporary retail spaces now allowed (e.g., show suites, pop-ups.)	• General permitting and safety oversight remains in place. • Temporary uses still require City approval and must meet basic safety standards.

Why it matters	When it starts
• Reduces delays and costs for short-term projects. • Helps community groups, events, and builders use space more flexibly. • Easier to approve minor permits.	• Applies to complete permit applications submitted on or after September 15, 2025.

See [Temporary Buildings and Short-Term Use](#)

Adaptable housing

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law includes new rules to make more homes adaptable and accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

What is adaptable housing?

Adaptable homes are easier to live in as people age or face mobility challenges. Common features:

- Wider doors and hallways
- Level (no-step) entries
- Bathroom walls reinforced for grab bars
- Easy access to switches and controls

These changes help more people stay in their homes longer — including seniors, people recovering from injury, or families with strollers.

What's changing in 2026?

Under the new B.C. Building By-law, Vancouver will require:

- All new private homes and apartments must be designed to be adaptable.
- Hotels, motels, and other multi-unit commercial hospitality buildings are exempt.

What's staying the same?

Vancouver will keep its existing adaptability rules for lower-density homes, such as duplexes, townhouses, and laneway houses. These rules were established in earlier by-laws and remain in effect under the 2025 update.

Timeline

Milestone	Date
VBBL 2025 in effect	September 15, 2025

Note: Projects submitted before the new rules may qualify for in-stream protection.

Example

A new apartment, duplex, laneway house, or townhouse will follow the **2019 rules**, which still apply to lower-density homes.

Energy efficiency and greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law introduces new rules to improve building energy performance and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These updates apply to all new construction.

What are GHG and commissioning?

GHG emissions come from energy systems burning fuel, such as gas boilers or furnaces. Cutting these emissions supports climate goals and lowers operating costs.

Commissioning checks energy systems are working as designed—for example, making sure heating and cooling systems run efficiently before occupancy.

What's changing in 2025?

Under the new by-law, Vancouver will require:

- **New buildings to meet GHG emission limits**
- **Commissioning and Tracking systems** to measure and report GHG emissions

These changes align with the **B.C. Energy Step Code** and Zero Carbon Step Code. Standards based commissioning procedures will help verify energy systems are working properly.

What's staying the same?

- Vancouver continues to align with the **B.C. Energy Step Code** performance targets.
- Projects with permits issued, or complete permit applications submitted, **before September 15, 2025** will follow the old by-law.

Timeline

Milestone	Date
VBBL 2025 in effect	September 15, 2025

Note: Projects submitted before the new rules may qualify for in-stream protection.

Example

A new six-unit apartment building applying for a permit after **September 15, 2025**, must:

- Include a GHG emissions tracking system (such as metering or sensors)
- Follow commissioning steps to confirm energy systems perform as expected

An office tower with a permit issued or complete permit application submitted, **before** the deadline can proceed under the current by-law until **March 8, 2027**.

Structural safety updates – modernized structural rules

Effective September 15, 2026 (not 2025)

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law includes upcoming changes to seismic design rules applying to permits issued starting in 2026. These changes are based on updated provincial standards and give builders early notice to plan ahead.

What are seismic design updates?

Seismic design rules set the standard for how buildings must resist earthquakes. The updated rules use new earthquake science to reduce the risk of injury, damage, or collapse.

What's changing in 2026?

Starting in 2026, Vancouver will require:

- **New buildings to follow updated seismic design rules**
- **Designs based on improved earthquake hazard data**
- **Stronger earthquake safety standards for all building types**

These updates align with the 2024 B.C. Building Code.

Note: These changes apply to permits issued **on or after September 15, 2026**. Current rules stay in effect until then.

What's staying the same?

- The 2019 VBBL seismic rules remain in place until **September 15, 2026**
- In-stream projects submitted before **March 8, 2027**, may follow the old rules
- Most Vancouver buildings are not expected to be significantly affected

Timeline

Milestone	Date
VBBL 2025 in effect	September 15, 2025
Seismic updates apply to permits	September 15, 2026
In-stream permit protection ends	March 8, 2027

Note: Complete permit applications submitted before the new rules may qualify for in-stream protection.

Example

Projects submitted before September 15, 2026, can use the current 2019 seismic rules. These projects are protected under the in-stream permit period, which lasts until March 8, 2027. Applications submitted before this date do not need to meet the new requirements.

Renovation projects and existing buildings

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law includes updates making it easier to renovate existing buildings. The changes reduce costs, cut red tape, and clarify what's required—especially for older buildings.

What are existing building updates?

In older buildings, even small renovations used to trigger costly structural or life safety upgrades outside the scope of the project. The new rules simplify requirements and keep the work focused on the tenant space.

What's changing in 2025?

The City will:

- Not require structural or non-structural upgrades for renovation projects under \$255,000.
- Limit upgrade requirements in larger projects to the tenant suite only.
- Reorganize existing building rules to clarify multiple compliance options are available.

What's staying the same?

- The by-law continues to allow flexibility for existing buildings.
- Lower-cost and low-impact projects remain a priority.

Timeline

Milestone	Date
VBBL 2025 in effect with new renovation rules	September 15, 2025
In-stream permit protection	Does not apply to this topic

Note: Projects with permits issued before the effective date follow the 2019 VBBL. These renovation rule changes apply only to permits issued on or after **September 15, 2025**

Example

A commercial tenant plans \$180,000 in interior improvements to their unit.

Before: The old by-law might have required structural and non-structural upgrades building-wide.

Under the new rules: No structural or non-structural upgrades are required outside the suite. This keeps the work focused and more affordable.

Plumbing and non-potable water updates

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) adopts the National Plumbing Code as its base, aligning with the 2024 B.C. Building Code. It removes several older plumbing rules unique to Vancouver. These changes aim to reduce water use, improve clarity for industry, and protect public health.

What are greywater, non-potable water, and Legionella testing?

Greywater is gently used water from showers or bathroom sinks that is reused, for example, to flush toilets.

Non-potable water is not safe for drinking but is safe for approved uses like irrigation or flushing

Legionella pneumophila is a bacteria found in plumbing systems, which can cause serious lung infections (Legionnaires' disease). Testing is done to ensure safety.

What's changing in 2025?

Under the new by-law, Vancouver will:

- Allow small-scale greywater reuse systems, such as for toilet flushing
- Add a new option for Legionella testing in plumbing systems
- Expand acceptable types of grease interceptors, aligning with Metro Vancouver
- Retire several unique-to-Vancouver plumbing rules to improve consistency

What's staying the same?

- Using non-potable water is still voluntary
- Existing plumbing reuse options remain supported
- The National Plumbing Code will serve as the base, consistent with the B.C. Building Code

Timeline

Milestone	Date
VBBL 2025 in effect	September 15, 2025

Example

A new duplex submitted for permit after September 15, 2025, could:

- Install a greywater system to reuse shower water for flushing toilets
- Use an approved Legionella testing method to confirm water safety
- Choose from more types of grease interceptors for a home-based business or kitchen

Temporary buildings and short-term use

The 2025 Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) reduces delays and simplifies permit approvals for temporary buildings and short-term uses like tents, pop-ups, and show suites.

What are temporary buildings and short-term use?

Temporary buildings are tents, demo suites, seasonal kiosks and portable structures for events or sales.

Short-term use means using a building for a limited time for a purpose it wasn't designed for.

Examples include:

- A **vacant storefront** used as a short-term **pop-up shop**
- A **modular sales office or show suite** used during pre-construction

These uses are common for community events, housing pre-sales, and cultural programs, but previously faced complicated permit requirements or long review times.

What's changing in 2025?

Under the new by-law, Vancouver will:

- Allow certain temporary uses even if the occupancy type differs from the original
- Introduce a new “temporary retail” use (e.g. show suites, pop-up shops)
- Avoid major upgrades for short-term uses

What's staying the same?

- A permit is still required for any temporary building or use
- Basic safety standards must still be met (for example exits, fire access)
- Temporary uses must be approved by the City

Timeline

Milestone	Date
VBBL 2025 in effect with temporary buildings and short-term use	September 15, 2025

Example

A developer opens a show suite in a partly finished building for a two-month presale. With a temporary retail use permit, they:

- Skip major upgrades
- Get faster approval

A community group hosts a weekend arts market in a vacant storefront. A short-term use permit lets them operate safely, without long delays.