

April 22, 2026

The Honourable Ravi Parmar  
Minister of Forests  
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Victoria BC V8W 9E2  
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Dear Minister Parmar,

I am writing on behalf of the membership of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) in response to the Province's Technical Policy Paper on proposed legislative amendments to the *Heritage Conservation Act* (HCA).

While UBCM acknowledges the steps the Province has taken to address some of the concerns identified by local governments in our submission last fall, the Technical Policy Paper (Paper) lacks clarity and detail on key permitting elements that are at the root of construction delays, costs to landowners, and administrative burden. Given the significance of these considerations for housing construction, industrial development and major infrastructure projects, it would be a mistake for the Province to introduce legislation this fall based on the approach outlined in the Paper.

UBCM believes that changes are needed to the current HCA and that identifying the necessary changes requires the Province to work with local governments and private interests alongside First Nations leaders to develop an approach that is workable, effective and reflects a balance of public interests, including reconciliation.

### **Positive policy changes**

UBCM's preliminary [analysis](#) of the Paper noted several policy changes made by the Ministry of Forests in response to local government feedback provided to the Ministry last fall. In addition, UBCM recognizes that section 2.1 of the Paper also proposes greater permitting flexibility to support emergency management.

Despite these positive steps to address local government feedback, they are outweighed by elements in the Paper that remain unanswered, unclear or unworkable. These concerns are outlined below.

### **Permitting implementation**

#### a) Continued uncertainty about the functionality of the proposed changes

The Technical Policy Paper proposes simplifying heritage permit processes in sections 1.2 (multi-project permit framework) and 1.3 (modified (reduced) permitting requirements). However, the paper does not provide testing or data to support the claims that merging distinct permit processes will reduce processing times or otherwise ease administrative burdens in local governments, First Nations, or the provincial government. While clarifying

details are to come through future policy and regulatory development, it is unclear whether local governments – who will be central to implementation – will be part of this development process.

b) Heritage information checks lack clarity

Section 4.8 of the Technical Policy Paper is unclear and unworkable. While it prohibits the issuance of development or building permits without a proponent-provided heritage information check, it does not specify whether this requirement is intended as a simple screening standard for all applications. The Paper further identifies local governments as entities that may conduct heritage information checks, without defining whether they are expected to do so for applications where they are not the proponent, or at the request of the public.

Section 4.8 also requires critical infrastructure operators to complete heritage information checks prior to ground-altering works but fails to clarify whether local governments are captured by this definition. If they are, nearly all local government maintenance and construction activities could trigger this requirement. This lack of clarity risks imposing a significant and ongoing administrative burden on local governments for basic operations.

c) Heritage Management Plans are onerous and unworkable

The Paper presents Heritage Management Plans (HMPs) as a foundation for streamlined heritage permitting. The Paper, however, fundamentally underestimates the complexity of developing HMPs by failing to account for limited capacity and the challenging, often multi-party relationships between local governments and neighbouring First Nations. Many local governments engage with multiple First Nations, which could require several HMPs, despite the reality that negotiating such agreements routinely takes years.

By treating HMPs as a prerequisite for effective permitting reform, the Paper risks delaying projects and penalizing communities unable to establish them. It further ignores the implications of overlapping traditional territories, where differing perspectives among First Nations with regards to the boundaries of traditional territories and other matters could delay or derail HMP development altogether.

d) Duty to report regulation remains undefined

Section 4.12 proposes a new regulation to establish a legal duty to report archaeological and significant heritage finds, replacing the existing chance-finds protocol. However, the proposal provides minimal detail and defers key elements to future regulation and policy development. No clear role is defined for local governments, and unlike legislative development, there is no requirement for provincial engagement with local governments in regulatory design. This approach creates a risk that local governments will be excluded from shaping requirements that will directly affect their responsibilities and operations.

## Resourcing & Capacity

a) Archaeological professionals

Local governments across the province report a shortage of qualified archaeological professionals, a capacity constraint the Paper does not adequately address. While the Province is undertaking a workforce study, advancing HCA reforms before this work is completed risks project delays and cost escalation, as sufficient archaeological capacity is essential to meet the proposed requirements for Archaeological Impact Assessments.

#### b) Provincial government, local governments & First Nations

UBCM and others have consistently raised concerns about insufficient provincial capacity to administer the existing HCA. While the Paper proposes faster and more predictable permitting through streamlining, it does not explain how this will be achieved without addressing capacity constraints within the Archaeology Branch and related departments. Without adequate staffing, the proposed reforms are unlikely to be effective, particularly given current fiscal constraints on new hiring by the Province.

The Paper also introduces multiple new systems and requirements – including new permitting structures, expanded roles for local governments in heritage information checks, the negotiation of Heritage Management Plans, and a new duty-to-report protocol – that will require permanent increases in capacity for local governments and First Nations. However, the Paper identifies no provincial funding or revenue sources to support these ongoing obligations. As a result, the proposed framework creates a significant financial risk by downloading new, long-term responsibilities onto local governments without sustainable funding.

#### **Misalignment with other provincial legislation & priorities**

Some UBCM members have raised concerns that the proposed HCA framework conflicts with key provincial priorities, including accelerating housing supply and affordability and delivering critical infrastructure and public safety facilities. Local governments note that expanded archaeological permitting requirements could discourage Small-Scale Multi-Unit Housing redevelopment, increase costs and uncertainty for homeowners and small developers, and delay essential community infrastructure projects.

These impacts run counter to provincial housing mandates under the *Housing Supply Act* and Bills 44, 46, and 47, and are compounded by unresolved uncertainty related to DRIPA and evolving legal interpretations. Moving forward with HCA reforms before these intersecting frameworks are aligned risks increasing tensions among local governments, First Nations and property owners, and undermining trust.

#### **Insufficient local government consultation & engagement**

In November 2025, UBCM submitted consolidated feedback from member local governments and First Nations on proposed amendments to the HCA. That submission identified significant risks of increased financial burdens on local governments, further project delays, and a lack of clarity around implementation roles, processes, and the supporting legislative and regulatory framework. UBCM called on the Province to pause legislative drafting to allow for regional engagement with local governments, co-development of detailed policy materials, and review of draft text prior to the Request for Legislation stage.

As of Spring 2026, these requests have not been acted upon. The Ministry of Forests has not led regional engagement sessions with local governments, has declined co-development of policy materials, and failed to grant a requested extension to UBCM to ensure meaningful input from member consultation. The aggressive 30-day comment period continues a pattern the Province has followed with the HCA amendments, by providing complex policy intentions statements with limited periods for response.

### **Possible path forward on permitting implementation**

UBCM recognizes that changes are needed to the HCA. To responsibly balance the interests of homeowners, homebuilders, industry, local governments and First Nations, and ensure that legislative changes are workable, the Province should adopt a pilot process prior to legislation being introduced. A pilot project initiative could test, and improve, concepts, practices and procedures to inform the final drafting of legislation. Communities of varying sizes would be invited to participate to assess the capacity implications for all parties.

In conclusion, UBCM is appreciative that the government has chosen to take more time to receive feedback on its proposals. Our message to you is that the Province should exercise a leadership role by bringing First Nations, local governments, industry and archaeologists together with provincial staff to develop a pilot project initiative to test the concepts that the Province has developed and address the gaps in clarity, detail and workability identified by UBCM and others.

I thank you in advance for your consideration of our concerns, and as always, I am available to meet and discuss next steps.

Sincerely,



Councillor Cori Ramsay  
UBCM President