

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2015

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HOUSE BILL 255  
Committee Substitute Favorable 3/31/15

Short Title: Building Code Reg. Reform.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 18, 2015

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO REFORM BUILDING CODE ENFORCEMENT TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC GROWTH BY CONFORMING WORK IN PROGRESS INSPECTION AUTHORITY TO RECENTLY ENACTED INSPECTION LIMITATIONS, BY REQUIRING THE BUILDING CODE COUNCIL TO STUDY THE ALTERNATE METHODS APPROVAL PROCESS, BY CLARIFYING THE DEFINITION OF OFFICIAL MISCONDUCT FOR CODE OFFICIALS, BY ELIMINATING MANDATORY PLAN REVIEW FOR RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURES, BY RAISING THE THRESHOLD FOR REQUIREMENT OF A BUILDING PERMIT, BY CREATING THE BUILDING CODE COUNCIL RESIDENTIAL CODE COMMITTEE, BY REQUIRING INTERNET POSTING OF CERTAIN COUNCIL DECISIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS, BY CLARIFYING THAT INSPECTION FEES COLLECTED BY CITIES AND COUNTIES MAY ONLY BE USED TO SUPPORT THE INSPECTION DEPARTMENT, AND BY REQUIRING THAT INSPECTIONS BE PERFORMED IN FULL AND IN A TIMELY MANNER AND INSPECTION REPORTS TO INCLUDE ALL ITEMS FAILING TO MEET CODE REQUIREMENTS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**PART I. COMPLIANCE WITH BUILDING CODE INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS**

**SECTION 1.(a)** G.S. 153A-360 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 153A-360. Inspections of work in progress.**

As-Subject to the limitation imposed by G.S. 153A-352(b), as the work pursuant to a permit progresses, local inspectors shall make as many inspections of the work as may be necessary to satisfy them that it is being done according to the provisions of the applicable State and local laws and local ordinances and regulations and of the terms of the permit. In exercising this power, each member of the inspection department has a right, upon presentation of proper credentials, to enter on any premises within the territorial jurisdiction of the department at any reasonable hour for the purposes of inspection or other enforcement action. If a permit has been obtained by an owner exempt from licensure under G.S. 87-1(b)(2), no inspection shall be conducted without the owner being personally present, unless the plans for the building were drawn and sealed by an architect licensed pursuant to Chapter 83A of the General Statutes."

**SECTION 1.(b)** G.S. 160A-420 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 160A-420. Inspections of work in progress.**

As-Subject to the limitation imposed by G.S. 160A-412(b), as the work pursuant to a permit progresses, local inspectors shall make as many inspections thereof as may be necessary to satisfy them that the work is being done according to the provisions of any applicable State and



1 local laws and of the terms of the permit. In exercising this power, members of the inspection  
2 department shall have a right to enter on any premises within the jurisdiction of the department  
3 at all reasonable hours for the purposes of inspection or other enforcement action, upon  
4 presentation of proper credentials. If a permit has been obtained by an owner exempt from  
5 licensure under G.S. 87-1(b)(2), no inspection shall be conducted without the owner being  
6 personally present, unless the plans for the building were drawn and sealed by an architect  
7 licensed pursuant to Chapter 83A of the General Statutes."  
8

## 9 **PART II. STUDY ALTERNATIVE APPROVAL METHODS**

10 **SECTION 2.** The North Carolina Building Code Council shall study procedures  
11 and policies for the approval of alternative materials, designs, or methods. The study shall  
12 include review of the following elements:

- 13 (1) The alternate methods application process, including requirements for initial  
14 application submittal, supporting information, and site-specific or  
15 project-specific application submittals.
- 16 (2) Time lines for the application process, including application submittal,  
17 Council review, and final approval or denial of applications, including the  
18 feasibility of a requirement that final determinations be rendered on a  
19 completed application within 30 days of the date an application is  
20 determined to be complete.
- 21 (3) Procedures for appeal of applications denied by the Council.

22 In conducting the study, the Council may utilize support services provided by staff  
23 from the Engineering Division of the Department of Insurance. The Council shall report its  
24 findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislative changes, to the 2016  
25 Regular Session of the 2015 General Assembly when it convenes.  
26

## 27 **PART III. CLARIFY OFFICIAL MISCONDUCT FOR CODE OFFICIALS**

28 **SECTION 3.(a)** G.S. 143-151.8 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

29 "(c) For purposes of this Article, "willful misconduct, gross negligence, or gross  
30 incompetence" in addition to the meaning of those terms under other provisions of the General  
31 Statutes or at common law, shall include any of the following:

- 32 (1) The enforcement of a Code requirement applicable to a certain area or set of  
33 circumstances in other areas or circumstances not specified in the  
34 requirement.
- 35 (2) For an alternative design or construction method that has been appealed  
36 under G.S. 143-140.1 and found by the Department of Insurance to comply  
37 with the Code, to refuse to accept the decision by the Department to allow  
38 that alternative design or construction method under the conditions or  
39 circumstances set forth in the Department's decision for that appeal.
- 40 (3) For an alternative construction method currently included in the Building  
41 Code, to refuse to allow the alternative method under the conditions or  
42 circumstances set forth in the Code for that alternative method.
- 43 (4) The enforcement of a requirement that is more stringent than or otherwise  
44 exceeds the Code requirement.
- 45 (5) To refuse to implement or adhere to an interpretation of the Building Code  
46 issued by the Building Code Council or the Department of Insurance.
- 47 (6) The habitual failure to provide requested inspections in a timely manner."

48 **SECTION 3.(b)** The North Carolina Code Officials Qualification Board shall, no  
49 later than October 1, 2015, notify all Code enforcement officials in the State of the clarification  
50 to the grounds for disciplinary action enacted by this act.  
51

1 **PART IV. ELIMINATE MANDATORY PLAN REVIEW FOR RESIDENTIAL**  
2 **STRUCTURES AND RAISE THRESHOLD FOR BUILDING PERMIT**  
3 **REQUIREMENT**

4 **SECTION 4.1.** G.S. 143-138(b5) reads as rewritten:

5 "(b5) Exclusion for Certain Minor Activities in Residential and Farm Structures. – No  
6 building permit shall be required under the Code or any local variance thereof approved under  
7 subsection (e) for any construction, installation, repair, replacement, or alteration costing ~~five~~  
8 ~~thousand dollars (\$5,000)~~ fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) or less in any single family  
9 residence or farm building unless the work involves: the addition, repair, or replacement of load  
10 bearing structures; the addition (excluding replacement of same capacity) or change in the  
11 design of plumbing; the addition, replacement or change in the design of heating, air  
12 conditioning, or electrical wiring, devices, fixtures (excluding repair or replacement of  
13 electrical lighting devices and fixtures of the same type), appliances (excluding replacement of  
14 water heaters, provided that the energy use rate or thermal input is not greater than that of the  
15 water heater which is being replaced, and there is no change in fuel, energy source, location,  
16 capacity, or routing or sizing of venting and piping), or equipment, the use of materials not  
17 permitted by the North Carolina Uniform Residential Building Code; or the addition (excluding  
18 replacement of like grade of fire resistance) of roofing. The exclusions from building permit  
19 requirements set forth in this paragraph for electrical lighting devices and fixtures and water  
20 heaters shall apply only to work performed on a one- or two-family dwelling. In addition,  
21 exclusions for electrical lighting devices and fixtures and electric water heaters shall apply only  
22 to work performed by a person licensed under G.S. 87-43 and exclusions for water heaters,  
23 generally, to work performed by a person licensed under G.S. 87-21."

24 **SECTION 4.2.(a)** G.S. 153-357(a2) is recodified as G.S. 153-357(a3).

25 **SECTION 4.2.(b)** G.S. 153A-357, as amended by subsection (a) of this section,  
26 reads as rewritten:

27 **"§ 153A-357. Permits.**

28 ...

29 (a1) A permit shall be in writing and shall contain a provision that the work done shall  
30 comply with ~~the State Building Code~~ relevant requirements of the North Carolina Building  
31 Code and all other applicable State and local laws and local ordinances and regulations.  
32 ~~Nothing in this section shall require a~~ A county to ~~shall~~ review and approve residential-building  
33 plans submitted to the county for any commercial and multifamily structure pursuant to Section  
34 R-110 of Volume VII of the North Carolina State the North Carolina Building Code; provided  
35 that the county may review and approve such residential building plans as it deems necessary.  
36 Code. No permit may be issued unless the plans and specifications are identified by the name  
37 and address of the author thereof; and if the General Statutes of North Carolina require that  
38 plans for certain types of work be prepared only by a registered architect or registered engineer,  
39 no permit may be issued unless the plans and specifications bear the North Carolina seal of a  
40 registered architect or of a registered engineer. Review and approval of plans for the  
41 construction of structures subject to the North Carolina Residential Code for One- and  
42 Two-Family Dwellings shall not be required by a county, provided that a county may require  
43 building plans to be available on site during the inspection process. If a provision of the  
44 General Statutes of North Carolina or of any ordinance requires that work be done by a licensed  
45 specialty contractor of any kind, no permit for the work may be issued unless the work is to be  
46 performed by such a duly licensed contractor.

47 (a2) No permit issued under Articles 9 or 9C of G.S. Chapter 143 shall be required for  
48 any construction, installation, repair, replacement, or alteration costing ~~five thousand dollars~~  
49 ~~(\$5,000)~~ fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) or less in any single-family residence or farm  
50 building unless the work involves: the addition, repair or replacement of load bearing  
51 structures; the addition (excluding replacement of same size and capacity) or change in the

1 design of plumbing; the addition, replacement or change in the design of heating, air  
2 conditioning, or electrical wiring, devices, appliances, or equipment; the use of materials not  
3 permitted by the North Carolina Uniform Residential Building Code; or the addition (excluding  
4 replacement of like grade of fire resistance) of roofing. Violation of this section constitutes a  
5 Class 1 misdemeanor.

6 ...."

7 **SECTION 4.3.(a)** G.S. 160-417(a2) is recodified as G.S. 160-417(a3).

8 **SECTION 4.3.(b)** G.S. 160A-417, as amended by subsection (a) of this section,  
9 reads as rewritten:

10 "**§ 160A-417. Permits.**

11 ...

12 (a1) A permit shall be in writing and shall contain a provision that the work done shall  
13 comply with ~~the State Building Code relevant requirements of the North Carolina Building~~  
14 Code and all other applicable State and local laws. Nothing in this section shall require a A city  
15 to shall review and approve residential-building plans submitted to the city for any commercial  
16 and multifamily structure pursuant to Section R-110 of Volume VII of the North Carolina State  
17 the North Carolina Building Code; provided that the city may review and approve such  
18 residential building plans as it deems necessary. Code. No permits shall be issued unless the  
19 plans and specifications are identified by the name and address of the author thereof, and if the  
20 General Statutes of North Carolina require that plans for certain types of work be prepared only  
21 by a registered architect or registered engineer, no permit shall be issued unless the plans and  
22 specifications bear the North Carolina seal of a registered architect or of a registered engineer.  
23 Review and approval of plans for the construction of structures subject to the North Carolina  
24 Residential Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings shall not be required by a city, provided  
25 that a city may require building plans to be available on site during the inspection process.  
26 When any provision of the General Statutes of North Carolina or of any ordinance requires that  
27 work be done by a licensed specialty contractor of any kind, no permit for the work shall be  
28 issued unless the work is to be performed by such a duly licensed contractor.

29 (a2) No permit issued under Articles 9 or 9C of Chapter 143 shall be required for any  
30 construction, installation, repair, replacement, or alteration costing ~~five thousand dollars~~  
31 (\$5,000) fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) or less in any single family residence or farm  
32 building unless the work involves: the addition, repair or replacement of load bearing  
33 structures; the addition (excluding replacement of same size and capacity) or change in the  
34 design of plumbing; the addition, replacement or change in the design of heating, air  
35 conditioning, or electrical wiring, devices, appliances, or equipment; the use of materials not  
36 permitted by the North Carolina Uniform Residential Building Code; or the addition (excluding  
37 replacement of like grade of fire resistance) of roofing. Violation of this section shall constitute  
38 a Class 1 misdemeanor.

39 ...."

## 40 41 **PART V. CREATE BUILDING CODE COUNCIL RESIDENTIAL CODE** 42 **COMMITTEE**

43 **SECTION 5.1.** G.S. 143-136 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

44 "(c) Residential Code Committee Created; Duties. – Within the Building Code Council,  
45 there is hereby created a Residential Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings Committee  
46 composed of five members of the Building Code Council, specifically the licensed general  
47 contractor specializing in residential construction who shall serve as chairman of this  
48 committee; the licensed general contractor specializing in coastal residential construction; the  
49 registered engineer practicing structural engineering; the licensed plumbing and heating  
50 contractor; and the licensed electrical contractor. This committee shall meet upon the call of its  
51 chairman to review any proposal for revision or amendment to the North Carolina State

1 Building Code: Residential Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings, including provisions  
2 applicable to One- and Two-Family Dwellings from the NC Energy Code, NC Electrical Code,  
3 NC Fuel Gas Code, NC Plumbing Code, the NC Mechanical Code, and the NC Existing  
4 Building Code and no revision or amendment to any of these codes applicable to residential  
5 construction may be considered by the Building Code Council unless recommended by this  
6 committee. This committee shall also oversee the process by which the Council conducts its  
7 revision pursuant to G.S. 143-138(d). This committee shall also consider any appeal or  
8 interpretation arising under G.S. 143-141 pertaining to North Carolina State Building Code:  
9 Residential Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings and make a recommendation to the  
10 Building Code Council for disposition of the appeal or interpretation."

11 **SECTION 5.2.** G.S. 143-138(d) reads as rewritten:

12 "(d) Amendments of the Code. – The Building Code Council may periodically revise  
13 and amend the North Carolina State Building Code, either on its own motion or upon  
14 application from any citizen, State agency, or political subdivision of the State. In addition to  
15 the periodic revisions or amendments made by the Council, the Council ~~shall~~ shall, following  
16 the procedure set forth in G.S. 143-136(c), revise the North Carolina State Building Code:  
17 Residential Code for One- and Two-Family Dwellings, including provisions applicable to One-  
18 and Two-Family Dwellings from the NC Energy Code, NC Electrical Code, NC Fuel Gas  
19 Code, NC Plumbing Code, and NC Mechanical Code only every six years, to become effective  
20 the first day of January of the following year, with at least six months between adoption and  
21 effective date. The first six-year revision under this subsection shall be adopted to become  
22 effective January 1, 2019, and every six years thereafter. In adopting any amendment, the  
23 Council shall comply with the same procedural requirements and the same standards set forth  
24 above for adoption of the Code. The Council, through the Department of Insurance, shall  
25 publish in the North Carolina Register ~~and shall post on the Council's Web site~~ all appeal  
26 decisions made by the Council and all formal opinions at least semiannually. The Council,  
27 through the Department of Insurance, shall also publish at least semiannually in the North  
28 Carolina Register a statement providing the accurate Web site address and information on how  
29 to find additional commentary and interpretation of the Code."  
30

## 31 **PART VI. BUILDING CODE COUNCIL REQUIRED WEB SITE POSTINGS**

32 **SECTION 6.1.** G.S. 143-141 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

33 "(c1) Posting on Department Web Site. – The Department of Insurance shall post and  
34 maintain on that portion of its Web site devoted to the Building Code Council all appeal  
35 decisions, interpretations, and variations of the Code issued by the Council within three  
36 business days of issuance."

37 **SECTION 6.2.** G.S. 143-138.1(b) reads as rewritten:

38 "(b) The Department of Insurance shall post and maintain on ~~its Web site~~ that portion of  
39 its Web site devoted to the Building Code Council written commentaries and written  
40 interpretations made and given by staff to the ~~North Carolina Building Code Council~~ and the  
41 Department for each section of the North Carolina Building Code. Code within three business  
42 days of issuance."  
43

## 44 **PART VII. INSPECTION FEES TO BE SPENT ONLY FOR ACTIVITIES OF** 45 **INSPECTION DEPARTMENT**

46 **SECTION 7.1.** G.S. 153A-354 reads as rewritten:

47 **"§ 153A-354. Financial support.**

48 A county may appropriate any available funds for the support of its inspection department.  
49 It may provide for paying inspectors fixed salaries, or it may reimburse them for their services  
50 by paying over part or all of any fees collected. It may fix reasonable fees for issuing permits,  
51 for inspections, and for other services of the inspection department. All fees collected under the

1 authority set forth in this section shall be used for support of the administration and activities of  
2 the inspection department and for no other purpose."

3 **SECTION 7.2.** G.S. 160A-414 reads as rewritten:

4 **"§ 160A-414. Financial support.**

5 The city council may appropriate for the support of the inspection department any funds  
6 that it deems necessary. It may provide for paying inspectors fixed salaries or it may reimburse  
7 them for their services by paying over part or all of any fees collected. It shall have power to fix  
8 reasonable fees for issuance of permits, inspections, and other services of the inspection  
9 department. All fees collected under the authority set forth in this section shall be used for  
10 support of the administration and activities of the inspection department and for no other  
11 purpose."

12  
13 **PART VIII. INSPECTIONS TO BE PERFORMED IN FULL AND IN A TIMELY**  
14 **MANNER AND INSPECTION REPORTS TO INCLUDE ALL ITEMS FAILING TO**  
15 **MEET CODE REQUIREMENTS**

16 **SECTION 8.1.** G.S. 153A-352 reads as rewritten:

17 **"§ 153A-352. Duties and responsibilities.**

18 (a) The duties and responsibilities of an inspection department and of the inspectors in  
19 it are to enforce within the county's territorial jurisdiction State and local laws and local  
20 ordinances and regulations relating to:

- 21 (1) The construction of buildings;
- 22 (2) The installation of such facilities as plumbing systems, electrical systems,  
23 heating systems, refrigeration systems, and air-conditioning systems;
- 24 (3) The maintenance of buildings in a safe, sanitary, and healthful condition;
- 25 (4) Other matters that may be specified by the board of commissioners.

26 These duties and responsibilities include receiving applications for permits and issuing or  
27 denying permits, making necessary ~~inspections~~, inspections in a timely manner, issuing or  
28 denying certificates of compliance, issuing orders to correct violations, bringing judicial actions  
29 against actual or threatened violations, keeping adequate records, and taking any other actions  
30 that may be required to adequately enforce the laws and ordinances and regulations. The board  
31 of commissioners may enact reasonable and appropriate provisions governing the enforcement  
32 of the laws and ordinances and regulations.

33 (b) Except as provided in G.S. 153A-364, a county may not adopt a local ordinance or  
34 resolution or any other policy that requires regular, routine inspections of buildings or  
35 structures constructed in compliance with the North Carolina Residential Code for One- and  
36 Two-Family Dwellings in addition to the specific inspections required by the North Carolina  
37 Building Code without first obtaining approval from the North Carolina Building Code  
38 Council. The North Carolina Building Code Council shall review all applications for additional  
39 inspections requested by a county and shall, in a reasonable manner, approve or disapprove the  
40 additional inspections. This subsection does not limit the authority of the county to require  
41 inspections upon unforeseen or unique circumstances that require immediate action. In  
42 performing the specific inspections required by the North Carolina Building Code, the  
43 inspector shall conduct a full inspection and provide the permit holder with a complete list of  
44 all items which fail to meet the requirements of the North Carolina Residential Code for One-  
45 and Two-Family Dwellings."

46 **SECTION 8.2.** G.S. 160A-412 reads as rewritten:

47 **"§ 160A-412. Duties and responsibilities.**

48 (a) The duties and responsibilities of an inspection department and of the inspectors  
49 therein shall be to enforce within their territorial jurisdiction State and local laws relating to

- 50 (1) The construction of buildings and other structures;

- 1           (2)    The installation of such facilities as plumbing systems, electrical systems,  
2                    heating systems, refrigeration systems, and air-conditioning systems;  
3           (3)    The maintenance of buildings and other structures in a safe, sanitary, and  
4                    healthful condition;  
5           (4)    Other matters that may be specified by the city council.

6 These duties shall include the receipt of applications for permits and the issuance or denial of  
7 permits, the making of any necessary ~~inspections~~, inspections in a timely manner, the issuance  
8 or denial of certificates of compliance, the issuance of orders to correct violations, the bringing  
9 of judicial actions against actual or threatened violations, the keeping of adequate records, and  
10 any other actions that may be required in order adequately to enforce those laws. The city  
11 council shall have the authority to enact reasonable and appropriate provisions governing the  
12 enforcement of those laws.

13       (b)    Except as provided in G.S. 160A-424, a city may not adopt a local ordinance or  
14 resolution or any other policy that requires regular, routine inspections of buildings or  
15 structures constructed in compliance with the North Carolina Residential Code for One- and  
16 Two-Family Dwellings in addition to the specific inspections required by the North Carolina  
17 Building Code without first obtaining approval from the North Carolina Building Code  
18 Council. The North Carolina Building Code Council shall review all applications for additional  
19 inspections requested by a city and shall, in a reasonable manner, approve or disapprove the  
20 additional inspections. This subsection does not limit the authority of the city to require  
21 inspections upon unforeseen or unique circumstances that require immediate action. In  
22 performing the specific inspections required by the North Carolina Building Code, the  
23 inspector shall conduct a full inspection and provide the permit holder with a complete list of  
24 all items which fail to meet the requirements of the North Carolina Residential Code for One-  
25 and Two-Family Dwellings."  
26

## 27 **PART IX. EFFECTIVE DATE**

28       **SECTION 9.** This act becomes effective October 1, 2015.