

The ABCs of Building Condition Assessments



Capital planning is a balancing act; especially when it comes to earmarking funds for a Building Condition Assessments (BCAs). That's why taking the right approach and understanding today's options are key to protecting one's bottom line.

"Whether you're conducting a BCA on a building you own or one you're thinking of buying, you want to know its real condition. That means taking a very detailed look at everything from the building's envelope to its mechanical systems and its structure," says Bill Gladu, a Principal with Read Jones Christoffersen (RJC) Engineers.

Certainly, it's the details that count. And getting those right means making a few considerations:

The Right Season

Planning a BCA? Take a look outside. Snow and ice coverage can make it difficult to determine the conditions of roofs, pavements, landscapes, and other

important systems. Likewise, leaks can be hard to detect in severe weather.

"Many items cannot be reviewed visually if covered over, and improper timing or scope of repairs can have a significant impact on budgets," says Gladu.

In short: consider waiting until a full and unobstructed BCA can be carried out.

Define Your BCA Goal

BCA's are conducted for multiple reasons, and each require varying levels of skill and work.

"Those who are buying a building may want to work with specific industry experts who can tell them, and by extension their lending partner, the real condition of the property," offers Gladu, noting, "However, if you're refinancing a loan from a building you already own, you probably already know what the building condition is, so you may instead be in the marketplace for a more general, and lower-priced, review."

Specialist or Non-Specialist

Depending on the BCA motivation, you'll either want a specialist or non-specialist review. The main differences between the two come down to the level of specific expertise and thoroughness required.

For example, specialist reviews are conducted by a team of service providers who already work and practice daily on the building components they are assessing. They each examine property elements specifically related to their field of expertise. In so doing, specialist reviews bring a high level of expertise and detail to the final report.

Non-specialists review, by comparison, are commonly conducted by a single industry professional who complete a more generalized assessment of all aspects of the building. Non-specialist reviews are often sought by clients who already know the condition of their property or have higher risk tolerances.

Understand the Price Gap

Specialist reviews cost more than non-

specialist reviews. That gap doesn't indicate a difference in professionalism, but simply a difference in the level of detail and specialization required.

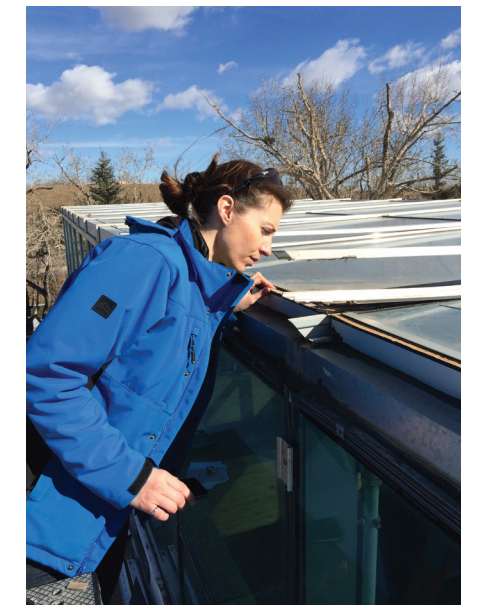
"You can have a big price difference from two very reputable companies, and that difference is going to come down to what you need," says Gladu. "Specialist reviews are always going to cost more



exposure/liability to their fees, while others may have higher limits. Be sure to read the small print regarding liabilities, and compare it to industry norms.

A Little Homework Goes a Long Way

BCAs are not a one-size-fits-all service. Therefore, when approaching your capital planning, it pays to do the market



because you're paying for a team who provide a higher level of accuracy and bring experience when conducting the assessment. In the end, it all depends on what you need from a BCA."

Identify Liability

Whatever route you take, ensure your service provider is willing to put themselves on the line for the work they are doing. Some may limit their

research, define your objective, and partner with the appropriate BCA provider.

Offers Gladu: "There are many different levels of service and expertise provided within this community, so the most important thing is to know what you are buying."

Bill Gladu is a Principal at RJC in the Building Science Group for Central and Eastern Canada. For more, visit www.rjc.ca.

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