Editorial

Code Development Process Is It Serving the Community?

Robert Paullus, P.E., SECB, NCSEA President

For almost ten years, we have been operating under the International Building Code (IBC) from the International Code Council (ICC). The confluence of the three previous model code bodies (*Building Officials and Code Administrators International Inc.* (BOCA), *International Conference of Building Officials* (ICBO), and the *Southern Building Code Congress International* (SBCCI)) ushered in a new era, where the possibility of all jurisdictions in the United States using a single model code could become reality. Today, this dream has largely been realized. Most of the technical provisions for structural engineering are now found in standards, referenced by the IBC. This has allowed engineers to better control the technical provisions, and to imbed them in consensus documents that are less susceptible to influence from non-technical concerns and are generally more stable and less subject to rapid evolution than the codes.

> *"…we recently learned that ICC will drastically change the code development process…"*

However, now that we, as a design and building community, have learned to operate in this relatively new code environment and have set long and short term schedules to meet developmental deadlines, we recently learned that ICC will drastically change the code development process, in order to economize in these hard economic times. There will be numerous changes, but the two most drastic involve (i) a substantial cut in the amount of time for submission of proposals for the 2012 IBC, and (ii) a reduction in the number of proposal hearings per three-year code cycle, from four to only two. Schedules were already tight. The new changes have made it nearly impossible to adequately assemble proposals for inclusion in the 2012 edition of the IBC.

Major proposals for modifications to the structural portions of the building code generally occur within the referenced standards developed by ACI, AISC, AISI, ASCE, MSJC, and others. In order to meet the previous schedules for a three-year code cycle, these groups must begin work on change proposals before a previously adopted version would have been published. Where the standards do not provide adequate coverage, e.g., foundations and construction quality assurance, or when they are not adequately responsive, e.g., simplified wind provisions, NCSEA's Code Advisory Committees sometimes submit proposals directly to ICC, to embed or affect requirements directly in the code. ICC's recently revised schedule, published in February, requires all proposals for the 2012 IBC to be submitted on or before April 24, 2009 (the first 2009 IBC is scheduled to roll off the presses in April). As of late March, ICC extended the submission date for 2012 proposals to June 1, 2009. This provides a little relief, but it does not begin to address the problems caused by cutting fourteen to sixteen months from the development cycle. Both ASCE and AISC, for example, have been working for several years to update their standards for publication in 2010, to make the deadline for the 2012 IBC.

How does this affect end-users of the code and the building community as a whole? The revised schedules mean that several much-needed modifications may not be ready for 2012. Proposals for the 2015 IBC would require submission by the end of 2011. This is three years in advance of publication. Interestingly, the 2015 IBC will be adopting ASCE 7-2010 about the same time that ASCE is publishing ASCE 7-2015, leaving us all designing to requirements that are 5 years out of date. Do we really want to stifle the adoption of new technology to this degree?

While I generally favor code requirements remaining constant for as long a period as possible, modifications that clarify requirements, simplify design processes, and responsibly enhance safety, should be available to end-users as soon as possible. Several of the scheduled enhancements to the ASCE 7-2010 edition, which is supposed be included in the 2012 IBC, are new seismic maps, which are based on a uniform risk of collapse rather than a uniform risk of ground motion exceedance, as well as new wind maps that are based on LRFD design, rather than service level design. In the case of the seismic maps, the design approach is something that the eastern half of the United States has been requesting since the IBC was first published. In the case of the new wind maps, along with other related modifications to ASCE 7, design for wind loadings should become more consistent and less error-prone.

NCSEA's Code Advisory Committee had hoped to introduce a proposal to reorganize IBC Chapter 17 – Structural Tests and Special Inspections, in much the same way as Chapter 18 was reorganized in the 2009 IBC, and with a similar intent, i.e., to make the requirements simpler to understand and implement. If we are to provide adequate regulations and design standards to protect the health and safety of the public in buildings that are serviceable and sustainable, the process simply cannot be shortcut to the degree required by ICC's latest deadlines.

ICC has opened the door to continued discussion regarding this issue. I urge each of you to talk to your local building officials. All stakeholders in the development process, as well as all end-users of the I-codes, need to come to the table, to talk about what we are facing and to find a better solution.▪