

# So You Want to Become a Construction Code Official?



Builder Brief BB0402

Ken Sagan and Mark Fortney

## Introduction

Pennsylvania's Uniform Construction Code Act (Act 45 of 1999) establishes a statewide code that regulates commercial and residential construction—a first for Pennsylvania. The Act requires that certified code officials enforce the new Uniform Construction Code (UCC).

In many areas, there will be, a need for code inspections for the first time. For much of Pennsylvania, the idea of certification for code inspectors is new to many municipalities. Some have required their employees to possess BOCA certification, but most have not required certification in the past.

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) is responsible for developing regulations to certify code officials. DLI has developed the certification requirements, certification fees, and continuing education requirements.

## Enforcement Options

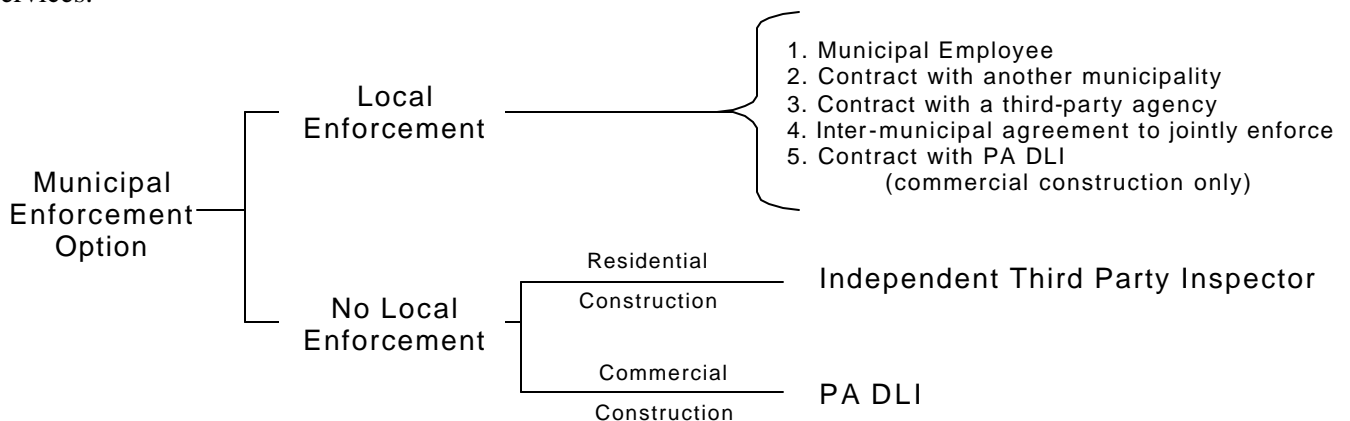
Municipalities have the option to either enforce the UCC locally or to opt out. **If a municipality opts out**, commercial construction will be regulated by the DLI. For residential construction, the permit applicant will have to hire an independent “third party construction code official” to provide the necessary services.

**Municipalities that opt in** have at least five options for administering and enforcing the code, as shown in the chart below. They can also combine alternatives to develop an overall approach that works best for their particular area. For example, a municipality could perform the plan reviews and contract for some or all of its inspections.

### Enforcement before Act 45

The decision as to whether to have a building code and which code to use was generally made by Pennsylvania's 2,567 municipalities. About 45% have enacted a building code. There is no uniformity to the building codes used in Pennsylvania. The codes range from a modern BOCA code to a 1970 era BOCA code to a collection of local ordinances.

How the code was enforced varies widely. Some municipalities that have adopted a building code currently collect building permit fees but perform no inspections. In others, the code is enforced by an inspector who is a political appointee. Still others employ professionals who are certified by an organization such as BOCA. They perform detailed plan reviews and numerous inspections during construction.



## Job Opportunities

The implementation of the UCC will create a demand for more certified code officials. How many? As of the printing of this document, 941 individuals in Pennsylvania have some form of certification from BOCA. It is estimated that between 2,000 to 5,000 certified code officials will be needed after the UCC is implemented. If this estimate is correct there will be a large shortfall, even if the number needed turns out to be closer to 2,000 than 5,000.

DLI expects more than half of Pennsylvania's municipalities to opt out of enforcing the code. So there will be a demand for independent third party construction code officials to inspect residential construction in these geographic areas.

The employment opportunities for code officials will vary from area to area, depending on construction type and local enforcement approaches. Table 1 gives a general picture of employment opportunities.

**Table 1: Employment Opportunities**

Employer Classification	Construction Type	
	Residential	Commercial
State Employee		+
Municipal Employee	++	++
Municipal Third Party Official	++	+++
Independent Third Party Official	+++	

+ Low ++ Moderate +++ High

## How to become a certified code official

DLI has established the requirements for becoming a certified construction code official in Pennsylvania. (In this document, the term "construction code official" includes administrators, inspectors, and plans examiners.) There are 15 certification categories for commercial construction and 5 for residential construction, listed in Table 2. These certifications generally follow the same categories as BOCA.

## Existing code officials grandfathered

The DLI is allowing anyone who is currently conducting code inspections to be grandfathered for three years for residential construction and for five years for commercial construction.

Existing code officials, who were performing plan reviews or inspections prior to the effective date of the UCC, must register with the DLI and provide an affidavit from their employer responsible for building code enforcement and administration.

This policy will avoid making the anticipated shortage of code officials worse. And these officials will have time to get the certifications needed to continue to do the work they are performing.

At present, BOCA and two other national building code organizations are merging with the International Code Council (ICC). ICC will take over certification and testing, and some of the existing BOCA categories will change.

For more information on BOCA's or ICC's Certification Programs, you may contact them at the web site or phone number listed at the end of this document. They will provide you with information on certification, how to prepare for exams, and how to schedule the examinations.

After passing the certification test(s), you must complete a DLI Application for Certification. This registers your certification with the State and allows you to perform plan reviews and/or inspections in Pennsylvania. Once you are certified, DLI will put your name on a list of certified code inspectors. This certification is transferable to other states.

Pennsylvania's certification must be renewed every three years. To renew your certification, you must provide documentation that you have obtained required number of the continuing education credits. DLI requires 15 credit hours of approved continuing education for each certification, up to a maximum of 45 credit hours every three years.

**Table 2: Certification Categories And Examination**  
(in alphabetical order )

Certification Categories	BOCA Examination Number and Name	
	Commercial	Residential
Accessibility Inspector/ Plans Examiner	A1 Accessibility	
Building Inspector		1A Building 1 & 2 Family Dwelling
Building Plans Examiner	1B Building General	
	1C Building Plan Review	
	3B Fire Protection General	
	3C Fire Protection Plan Review	
Electrical Inspector	2B Electrical General	2A Electrical 1 & 2 Family Dwelling
Electrical Plans Examiner	2B Electrical General, or	
	2C Electrical Plan Review	
Energy Inspector	E2 Commercial Energy Inspector	E1 Residential Energy Plan Review & Inspection
Energy Plans Examiner	E3 Commercial Energy Plan Review	
Fire Inspector	F1 Fire Prevention Inspection General I	
Mechanical Inspector	4B Mechanical General	4A Mechanical 1 & 2 Family Dwelling
Mechanical Plans Examiner	4B Mechanical General, or	
	4C Mechanical Plan Review	
Plumbing Inspector	5B Plumbing General	5A Plumbing 1 & 2 Family Dwelling
Plumbing Plan Examiner	5B Plumbing General	
	5C Plumbing Plan Review	

## Qualifications

Becoming certified is a necessary step in becoming a Construction Code Official. But by itself certification does not guarantee a job—or satisfactory performance. Instead, certification should be regarded as a minimum qualification.

Generally speaking, code officials need both hands-on experience and knowledge of the construction process and materials. For example, many municipalities require inspectors to have some combination of the following qualifications:

- work experience in the construction trades;
- completion of an apprenticeship program;
- at least two years of education in either engineering or architecture; or
- an associate degree with courses in construction technology, blue-print reading, mathematics, building inspection, or public administration.

In addition to construction experience, many jurisdictions require a bachelor's degree with an emphasis on building science and technology. Code officials must also possess strong leadership, management interpersonal skills and communication skills.

The certification requirements for code officials will have long-term effects on many aspects of the construction industry. The certification process will increase the professionalism of officials and will ultimately create a new career path. Other states that have enacted a building code and certification of code officials have seen an increase in the demand for trained and educated code officials. As the requirements are increased for code officials so does the salary.

### Contact the following organizations for more information on:

#### State certification:

Department of Labor & Industry  
[www.dli.state.pa.us](http://www.dli.state.pa.us)  
(717) 787-3323

#### Code certification testing:

Building Officials Code Administrators  
International  
[www.bocai.org](http://www.bocai.org)  
(215) 638-0554

International Code Council  
[www.intlcode.org](http://www.intlcode.org)  
(703) 931-4533

#### Building-code-related training in PA:

PA Code Training Consortium  
[www.engr.psu.edu/CTC](http://www.engr.psu.edu/CTC)

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PHRC  
219 Sackett Building  
University Park, PA 16802  
Telephone: (814) 865-2341  
Fax: (814) 863-7304

[www.engr.psu.edu/phrc](http://www.engr.psu.edu/phrc)