

Commentary-Dave Pasolli-Western Wood Truss Association of Alberta

What Will Housing Look Like After the Pandemic?

Remember all those forward thinking city planners convincing us that the future of housing was greater density where you would no longer need gasoline fueled cars to commute to work. Living in a 400 square foot high rise apartment with no parking was what we needed. I imagine people living in those apartments probably had a tougher time in 2020 than someone living in a single family home in the suburbs that could take a drive in the country when everything was shut down.

*“Calgary’s first parking-free condo project will be one of the only of its kind in Canada. There’s so much demand among young buyers and seniors for this option that 650 people have registered interest in the project before pre-sales begin this fall, the developer said.”-
Calgary Herald May13, 2015*



My daughter was one of these enthusiastic young people when she moved to Toronto in March of 2020 looking for the bustling activity of living and working downtown. Within 2 weeks she found herself living in a tiny high rise apartment with a roommate and having to work from home. Wondering if it was safe to take the elevator or go get coffee. As lock downs continued she wondered if she could work from anywhere.

The move to remote working has pushed people out of cities and led to an increase in home buying in the suburbs. Suburban areas have seen higher home sales growth than urban areas, and many homebuyers have increased their willingness to commute when they return to work in the office. In the suburbs, homebuyers are more likely to find traits that are increasingly desirable: larger houses for more time spent at home, dedicated office space and personal outdoor space, as well as proximity to beaches, trails and open space.

Builders are also starting to offer plans with yoga spaces, flex rooms, a focus on indoor air quality, and even sanitized entry ways. None of these were on the list of priority features in 2019.

According to Jennifer Handley, a real estate agent in Nanton, about an hour drive south of Calgary business is booming. And a big chunk of the buyers are coming to the town, which has a population of 2,300 from Calgary. They're telling Hanley they want out of the big city.

"They felt, especially if they were living in a condo apartment and they wanted to sell their place there, come here and not be as close to people — and we've heard that story time and time again," Handley said.

Not only does moving out of the city provide more room to roam, life may be simpler, you do not have to worry about the town of Crossfield bidding on the Olympics or financing multi-billion dollar projects with debt. Although taxes may actually be higher in small towns, they are more inclined to balance a budget.

While 15 sales in Nanton are considered a boom, in these smaller towns homes tend to be built one at a time and were generally considered too small to be on a developer's radar, but I wonder if that is going to change.

In 2000 single family starts in Alberta made up about 65% of the total and by 2020 it had reversed to where multi-family starts made up 65% of the total, driven primarily by affordability. In the major cities like Calgary and Edmonton there seems to be a resistance to give people what they want by not approving new suburban developments and even if they do, insisting on higher density. There also seems to be a war on cars, choosing to spend tax payer dollars on public transit, another place that you probably do not want to hang out in a pandemic.

When the pandemic hit a year ago, I thought who would in their right mind be buying a new house during this? But as we now know there were still buyers, partially fueled by low interest rates and people that were not as personally affected such as government workers. It probably came as a bit of a surprise to your builders as well. They must have made some changes in how they sold homes relying more on virtual tools rather than the old show home traffic model. The ones with great online marketing and social media game were no doubt the winners. Is there an opportunity for their supplier partners to participate by supporting their efforts here?

As the consumer priority list changes it is important that the builders keep on top of it looking for the best methods and products to meet their design challenges.

“If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near.”-Jack Welch

If you have an idea for a commentary or would like to submit your own commentary for a future newsletter please let me know at dave@wwta.ab.ca

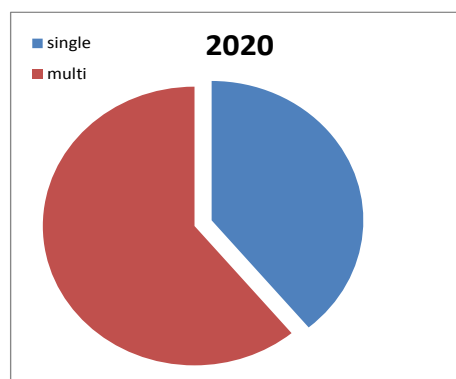
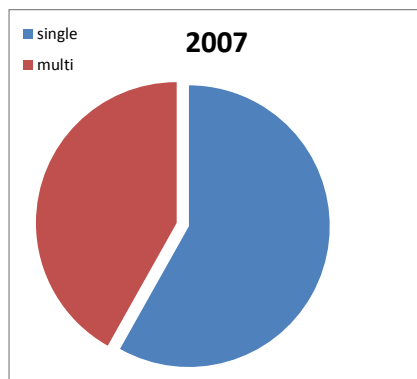
Economic Update

Housing Starts in Alberta were strong to start the year up 46.4% relative to January 2019 with a healthy 2070 starts. Single detached units were up 32.5% and multi-family units increased by 106.6%. The average total housing starts for the month of January are 1678 total units for the last 13 years since I have been keeping track.

Housing Starts

DEMOGRAPHICS	JANUARY				JAN - JAN (YR TO DATE)			
	UNADJUSTED	TREND	2020	2021	% CHANGE	2020	2021	% CHANGE
Single-detached units		⊕	603	799	32.5%	603	799	32.5%
Semi-detached units		⊕	164	186	13.4%	164	186	13.4%
Row units		⊕	238	240	0.8%	238	240	0.8%
Apartment and other unit types		⊕	409	845	106.6%	409	845	106.6%

What was once a single family market has changed over the years to a multi-family market in Alberta due to affordability and a desire to increase density.



It is good to see the price of oil is rebounding above \$60 USD, quite a change from the negative \$38 it hit in April of 2020. Some forecasters are predicting a return to \$100 oil as an end to the pandemic appears to be in sight.

In order for the environmentalists to get us off of fossil fuels they actually need high oil prices to make the switch to electric vehicles more attractive. Certainly stopping pipelines and industry capital expenditures in the development of future resources can achieve this.

Major companies like Shell are now more likely to invest in low-carbon technology including renewable energy than in traditional oil projects. It is natural to think following the cancellation of the Keystone pipeline by President Joe Biden that he will also be under pressure to limit the further development of oil projects and that the US may become more dependent on foreign sources before the great transition to clean energy.

But before we move to renewable energy all together please give Alberta one more boom and let the price of oil fly high.



Quality Control

Topic- Grub Holes



“Grub Holes” are holes that are larger than pin holes. They are made by wood boring grubs, are oval or circular and are found chiefly in felled timber left too long in the woods, they are quite often found in timber that is fire-killed. Penetrations can be quite deep and can penetrate through the entire piece. Grub holes are easily recognized by the fact that the cavities are filled with powder similar to fine sawdust.

Grading Rules for Grub Holes

NLGA 6.4.4.4 states that grub holes are handled on an “equivalent smaller” basis. Equivalent smaller shall mean that the area occupied by all holes shall be added together and treated as the maximum size hole permitted. For example, twelve ¼” holes shall be accepted as equivalent to a single 1” hole. The poorest face shall govern.

To interpret this you have to determine the maximum hole size allowed in the dimension of lumber you are using.

For example: in a #2 structural 2x4 a 1 ¼” hole is allowed per 2 feet of length. If 12- grub holes are equivalent to a 1” hole, then this means that 15 -1/4” holes would be allowed every 2’ in a 2x4. In a 2x6 a 1 ½” hole is allowed per 2 feet so 12 x 1.5 would allow for 18 -1/4” grub holes per 2 foot length.

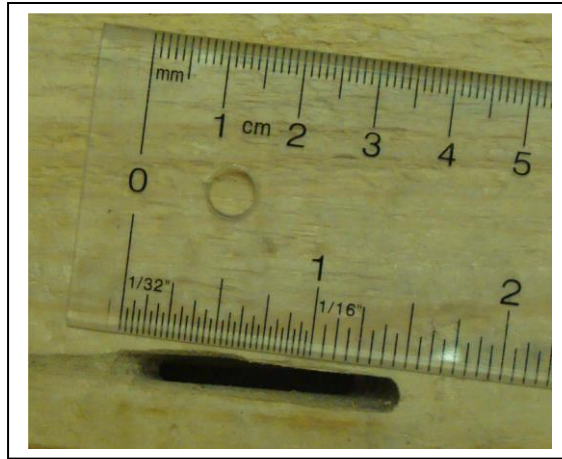
Grub Holes Effect on Trusses

Like most grading rules they are not necessarily designed with the purpose of building trusses that need to be connected with metal plates. Unlike other defects like knots or wane that are easily visible, the potential exists for considerable amount of wood to be removed beneath the surface by the grubs as seen below.



In the past we have said that grub holes could be permitted as long as they were “sparse” and any teeth going into them would be considered in-effective. As the pictures demonstrate quite often these holes are not a simple ¼” hole but may be long or tapered, so you must consider the amount of wood removed, not just count the number of holes. In the picture below the hole shown cannot be counted as one ¼” hole but rather, equivalent to 6 holes because it is 1-1/2” long. Remember that only 15 holes would be

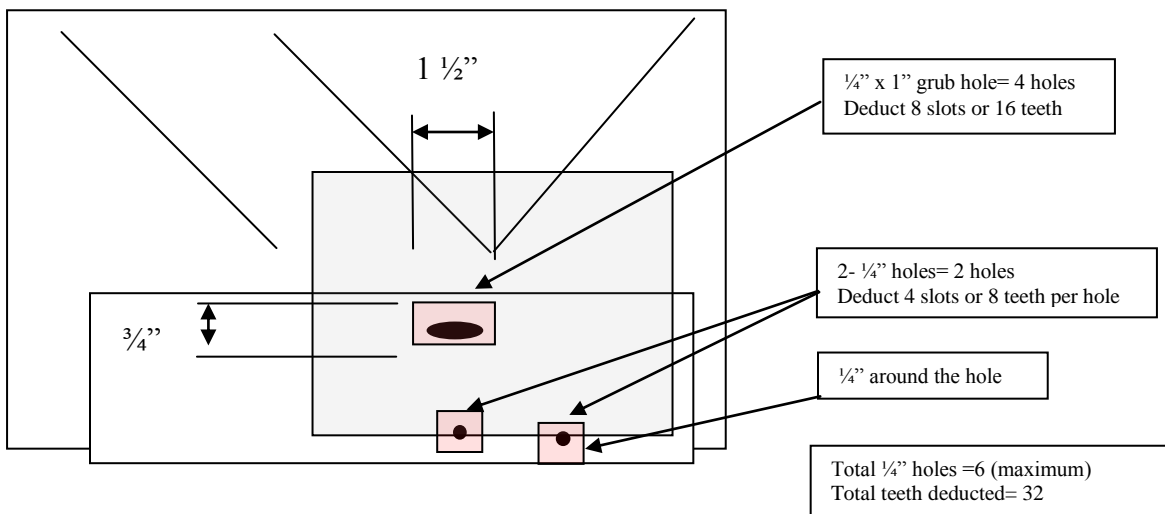
allowed in a 2x4 for a 2 foot length as per the NLGA rules, so you could only have 2 and 1/2 holes this length in a 2 foot piece of lumber.



Plating Rules

Grub holes under metal plates shall be limited to six 1/4" holes or equivalent (the picture above is equivalent to the maximum) in any 1 member. **Teeth within the hole and within 1/4" of the hole shall be considered in-effective.**

Example:



As part of your Quality Management System you should ensure that you have rules to govern grub holes or any other lumber defects that arise.

If you would like me to feature any quality control topic, just let me know.

Health and Safety Toolbox

Similarly to the Quality topic the WWTA would like to give you a monthly item you can discuss when doing your Safety Toolbox meeting. This month we are going to focus on something that has become an emerging issue during the Covid-19 pandemic, common areas.

Employers are expected to prevent **potential serious incidents** identified in common areas such as lunch rooms, smoking areas, locker rooms, etc. The key word to keep in mind is **potential**, and it must be addressed before an actual incident or even if an incident does not happen at all.

Although most of the incidents of transmission have occurred in health care settings, it is still an issue that could become a problem for our industry as our workers do not have the advantage of being able to completely isolate or work from home.

An investigation in Quebec found “Employees will often follow measures while working, but it’s in the little moments in between — during breaks or informal meetings — that people let their guard down. Part of the issue comes from the misplaced sense of safety many feel around the coworkers they see every day.”

1. **Develop and share** resources on controls for staying safe in common areas (e.g. eNews, bulletins).
2. **Focus** on the issue during toolbox meetings and JWHS meetings.
3. **Inspect** that employers are providing and ensuring controls for safe breaks.
4. **Monitor** issue through literature scan and surveillance.



The Alberta Government has a new format OHS eNews you can subscribe to with all kinds of good material at: <https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/>

You Asked a Question

Superimposed Dead Loads

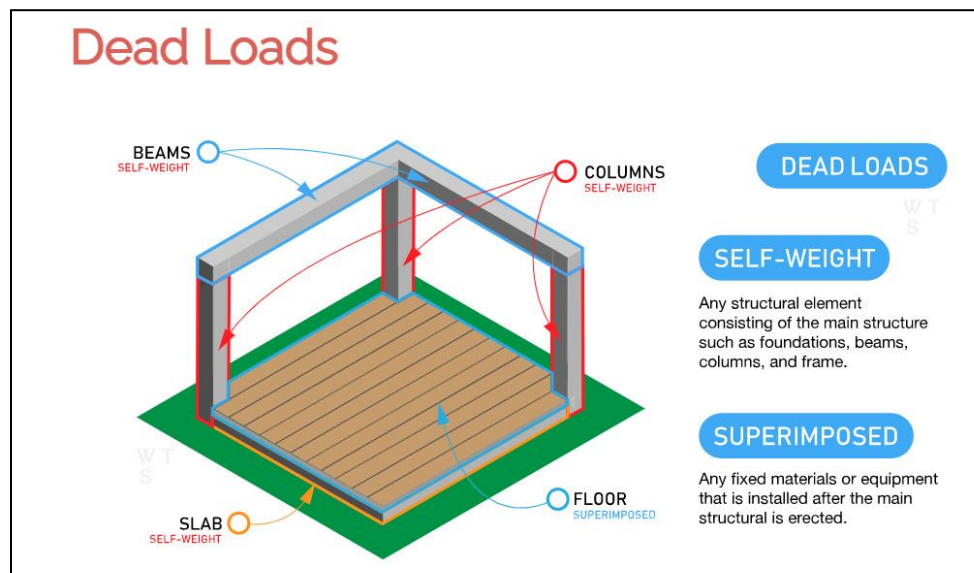
Donald Toews-Commercial Design Manager at ZyTech Building Systems brought to my attention that Structural Engineers are now specifying Superimposed Dead Loads (S.D.L.). They just can't make it easy can they.

Superimposed Dead Loads are defined as dead loads that do not include the structural elements, so the finishes, roofing materials, partitions, toppings etc. Another definition may be any fixed material or equipment installed after the main structure is complete.

The S.D.L. specified **does not** include the structural self-weight of the building, things like trusses, beams, columns, hangers, etc. This load of course, has to be captured and if it is not specified by the Engineer there is a chance that it could be missed.

If both loads are not specified or combined like in the good old days it is not the responsibility of the supplier to determine it. The Structural Engineer of Record should specify all loads. How else could they design the total structure if they do not know the total load? If you encounter a plan without the total load specified it requires a call to the engineer to determine what they want.

Although it may easily be possible for the truss or EWP supplier to determine the weight of the product they are supplying, this does not completely capture the self-weight of the building. You most likely do not have enough information to specify the self-weight if you wanted to.



If you have anything you would like to see in the newsletter just let me know.

News and Events

Annual General Meeting-March 19, 2020

Our Annual General Meeting is fast approaching March 19 at 9:00. I know we are all tired of virtual meeting, but please try and attend. We are planning on having an open forum on the value of the WWTa to members led by Derek Foss and participation is appreciated.

The previous minutes and 2020 financial statements have been e-mailed to the member managers. If you would like to participate as a Board member please let me know.

The log on information is:

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/788888573>

You can also dial in using your phone.

(For supported devices, tap a one-touch number below to join instantly.)

Canada: +1 (647) 497-9391

- One-touch: <tel:+16474979391,,788888573#>

Access Code: 788-888-573

Wage Survey

Thank you for those that contributed to the annual wage survey, I am currently compiling the information and will have it out the week of March 15.

WWTa Online Training

If you have not yet taken a look at the WWTa online training program I would encourage you to, as no doubt you will be hiring new workers in the near future and it is a good method to get them productive earlier and safer. If you want an overview of the program go to the WWTa website at: <http://www.wwta.ab.ca/truss-training-online.html>

Did You Know?

Do you get calls that should really be going to an Engineer, not a truss plant? On the WWTa webpage there is a link to some engineers that you can refer these calls to.

<http://www.wwta.ab.ca/engineering-services.html>