Codes & Standards

Online Voting Offers Bigger Voice to Code Officials

By Julie Ruth

The International Code Council, iccsafe.org, once again integrated Online Governmental Consensus Voting for the recently completed 2016 Group B Code Cycle. ICC developed the OGCV process to provide a way for representatives of the ICC Governmental Members (code officials) to participate in the development of the codes they are charged with enforcing, without having to incur the expense and inconvenience of attending code development hearings in person.

This was the third time ICC has incorporated the OGCV process. The online voting procedure was first used in the 2014 ICC Group C Code Cycle, which determined content of the 2015 IgCC, and then again during the 2015 ICC Group A Code Cycle.

The objective of the ICC in implementing the online voting process has been to increase participation in the code development process by the code officials who enforce them, and therefore, the governmental members that code officials represent.

If the ICC can gain buy-in of the codes by the governmental members who adopt them, they will hopefully continue to adopt, update and enforce these codes going forward. If the governmental members do this, the designers and builders will not have any choice but to continue to buy the I-codes. The implementation of the online voting by the ICC can be viewed as a way of gaining more feedback from their customers.

It is difficult to predict the success of this objective. Previous participation in online voting has been tepid. The actual number of votes cast on each item never exceeded 300. However, a great deal more fanfare was made of the OGCV for the 2016 cycle.

Some ICC Chapters set up voting centers where their active members were able to come together, view the videos of the hearings, discuss them and vote in a real-time atmosphere.

The ICC proclaimed they saw a "significant increase in participation" in online voting in the 2016 cycle, with as many as 162,000 votes cast. There were, however, almost 600 items considered. If the same number of people voted on each item, that still results in fewer than 300 people actually voting. It seems more likely that a higher number of votes were cast on certain items of greater interest than others. As of this writing, the actual vote tally cannot be confirmed, as it has not yet been made available.

What is definite is that online voting has changed how we develop codes. We as an industry will need to reexamine the manner in which we convey to code officials the message we need them to understand, so that they can make better informed decisions. Doing this will help us to provide a product that effectively meets the needs of our customers. This will be a new challenge for us going forward.

As we go forward in 2017, this column will examine the impact of online voting on the 2018 I-codes and what possible lessons it may hold for us. ▣

Julie Ruth is a code consultant for the American Architectural Manufacturers Association, aamanet.org. She can be contacted through AAMA at 847/303-5664 or via e-mail at julruth@aol.com. Ruth is also owner of JRuth Code Consulting, jruthcodeconsulting.com.

What happened: The International Code Council adopted Online Governmental Consensus Voting, allowing for increased participation of code officials in the code development process.

Why it matters: Online voting has changed code development. The industry will need to reexamine how it communicates information to code officials, so that the officials can make better informed decisions.