



Ontario Association of Architects

October 10, 2014

Dear Colleagues,

The political season is upon us again, and the Ontario Association of Architects wanted to give our membership some food for thought regarding ongoing OAA initiatives that hold great relevance at a municipal level.

We've highlighted some of our most pressing priorities into a questionnaire that you could forward to your local municipal candidates. Or, even better, you could use this document as talking points if you are able to set up a meeting with them.

If you happen to get a response, please do not hesitate to forward it on to our Policy Analyst Adam Tracey (adamt@oaa.on.ca) and we'll be sure to post it on our site for other architects to see. Alternately, you could tweet (@oaarchitects) or comment in the BLOOAG (<http://www.oaa.on.ca/bloaag>).

Remember—the municipal election is on October 27th and I encourage you all to vote. We are a small but critical profession and our voices should be heard.

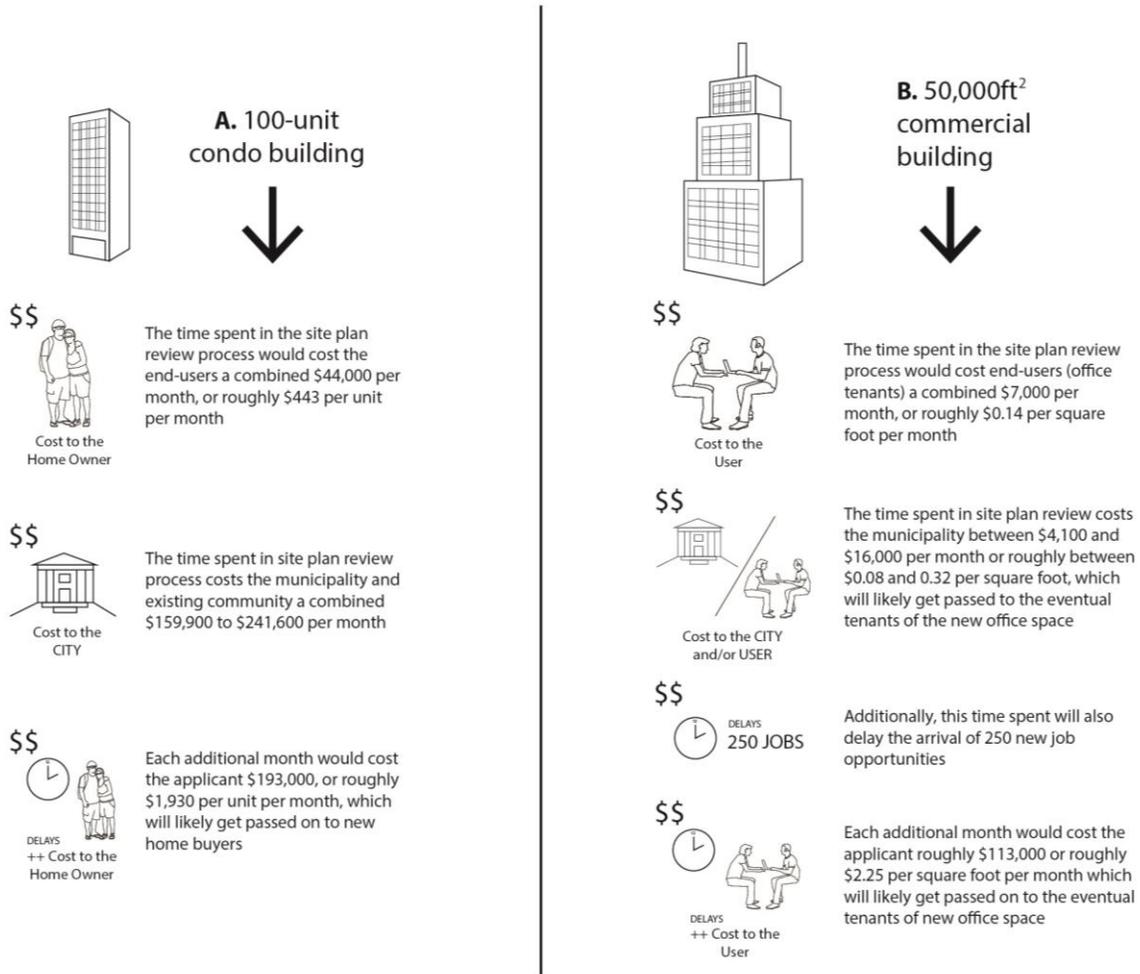
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bill Birdsell'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Bill Birdsell, B.E.S., B.Arch., OAA, FRAIC
President

Site Plan Approval

In 2013, the OAA commissioned a study on the Site Plan Approval process throughout Ontario. The study found significant delays, inefficiencies, and costs for all parties including the applicant, the municipality, and the end user. Across two case studies, the report identified the following costs:



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While there are some examples of site plan processes that function better than others, the reality is that most if not all could use significant improvement. **If elected, how do you intend to improve the site plan approval process in your municipality?**

Design Quality

The impacts on our society that result from the value of design is something that is not well understood. As we spend the majority of our lives within a built environment, we commonly take for granted the buildings in which we live, work, and play.

Not surprisingly, there is a growing body of literature citing significant benefits for our society that suggests we shouldn't take this for granted. This includes not only extensive qualitative evidence, but quantitative evidence showing how the built form can significantly improve the way we in which we live, but can also generate significant cost savings and operational efficiencies. A 2006 report from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)ⁱⁱ noted an 11:1 Return on Investment [on consulting fees] over the life of an asset resulting from *Design Innovation*.

In a day and age where it often seems more common to count pennies than to perform visioning exercises, **what would you do to ensure quality of design in municipal construction if you were elected?**

Quality-Based Selection (QBS)

The OAA opposes the selection of architects using a lowest-bid mentality, citing numerous studies and wide-ranging opinions from within the design and construction industry that the most effective and efficient way to procure design is through an approach that selects consultants not by price, but by quality. The use of QBS in the United States has been mandatory since 1972, when the federal government passed the *Brooks Act* requiring architecture firms be selected “based upon their competency, qualifications and experience rather than by price.”

In Ontario many (if not most) municipalities claim to use QBS. But it is not a true QBS, as a significant amount of is assigned to price (e.g. low bid) instead of the technical merits. And cutting corners and focusing on lowest cost not only reduces the quality of the built form; as explained by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, it actually costs municipalities far more in the long-run.

If elected, do you commit to implementing a true Quality-Based Selection Process in your municipality?

Housing Affordability

The price of the housing has soared, climbing to \$398,618. Ontario is well above the national average, sitting at \$428,280ⁱⁱⁱ. This cost has decoupled from wages, which according to the Canadian Real Estate Association and Statistics Canada have remained largely stagnant over the past 17 years.

The international community has become involved, with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reporting that housing affordability in Canada “is a concern” and that almost 40 per cent of the country’s population lives in a city “where house prices are seriously or severely unaffordable”^{iv}. This assessment was echoed in Demographia’s *2014 International Housing Affordability Survey*, which concluded Canada has no major markets with housing affordability and that “the future for the household standing of living in Canada could be grim”^v.

Housing affordability is a growing concern to the people of Ontario, and the province’s architects share this concern. **If elected, what steps would you take to improve the cost of housing in your municipality?**

ⁱ “A Review of the Site Plan Approval Process in Ontario”, *Bousfields Inc and Altus Group*, <https://www.oaa.on.ca/oaamedia/documents/Site%20Plan%20Approval%20Process%20in%20Ontario%20Report.pdf>, Oct 2013.

ⁱⁱ “Design Making and Investment Planning: Selecting a Professional Consultant”, *InfraGuide/Federation of Canadian Municipalities*, Jun 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Home sales rise in August”, *CBC News*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/housing-canada/>, 15 Sep 2014.

^{iv} “High housing cost boost inequality, OECD tells Canada”, *Canadian Press (via CBC News)*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/high-housing-costs-boost-inequality-oecd-tells-canada-1.2672574>, 11 Jun 2014.

^v “10th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey: 2014”, *Demographia*, <http://www.demographia.com/dhi.pdf>, 20 Jan 2014.