



Ontario Association of Architects

May 24, 2019

Via email

The Honourable Steve Clark, MPP
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
College Park 17th Floor, 777 Bay St
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Dear Minister,

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) was pleased to note the introduction of the government's recently announced *More Homes, More Choice Act*. Housing is an issue of great concern not only to the government and the OAA, but also to the province on the whole. We look forward to responding to this in more detail in the near future.

In the interim, I wanted to follow up on our earlier submissions dated January 25 and March 12 in response to the Province's housing consultation. The impetus of both letters was to continue the OAA's mandate of protecting the public interest—in this case, by ensuring design excellence in the public realm and recommending improvements to the Site Plan Approval (SPA) process.

After receiving feedback from our members and other industry stakeholders, both in support and in opposition to our recommendations, the OAA hosted a roundtable discussion on April 17. The event included senior representatives from the OAA, the development industry, the landscape architecture profession, urban planners from both the public and private sectors and chairs of Design Review Panels (DRPs) from across the province.

Throughout the conversation, three topics emerged:

- The current SPA process is broken;
- Design Review Panels remain an important part of the SPA process; and
- Municipalities across the province have implemented various solutions to improve the SPA process, some of which are worth sharing with other municipalities.

During the roundtable, participants offered some initial suggestions to improve the process. These included:

- Using electronic processing services to reduce environmental impacts while also allowing multiple municipal departments to review projects concurrently, providing transparency to the applicant and enabling the tracking of a project's progress through the system;
- Assigning a project champion or shepherd (a member of municipal staff—ideally, an architect) to take responsibility for the identification, careful co-ordination and speedy review of submissions to SPA by all required departments; and
- Sharing of successes, knowledge and processes between municipalities.

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In the spirit of transparency and accountability, I will note some participants at the roundtable expressed their opposition to the OAA's recommendation in our March 12 letter to restore the design exclusions to the *Planning Act*. However, the OAA continues to believe this is a necessary step to improving approval time and, more generally, the built form in Ontario.

I would also like to state that we unequivocally support the work of Design Review Panels. The OAA has received a legal opinion confirming there is no reason to believe these panels could not continue to exist in their voluntary and advisory role since no municipality has relegated any approval authority to a DRP. In fact, DRP members have repeatedly stressed to the OAA that the reason behind their success is that participation is voluntary, entailing a collegial approach between subject matter experts from many disciplines, including architects, landscape architects and urban planners who garner the respect of the proponents.

The OAA has enjoyed a longstanding collaborative relationship with the government and looks forward to working with you on cutting red tape and increasing the availability of housing across the province. As we consider a submission on Bill 108, we hope to continue to be of assistance to you and your Ministry.

Given the critical importance of this matter and the magnitude of its impact, we urge the government to advance the discussion further on improving housing affordability and reforming site plan approval. In doing so, Ontario architects should and want to be part of this conversation and are uniquely trained to offer important insight into the development of solutions that benefits the public interest.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Kurtin, Architect
OAA, FRAIC
President

