



Ontario Association of Architects

March 31, 2020

His Worship John Tory
Mayor, City of Toronto
100 Queen St. W.
City Hall, Second Floor, West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

[sent via email]

Dear Sir,

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) is the licensing body and professional association for the province's architects. It was established under a provincial mandate to regulate the practice of architecture "in order that the public interest may be served and protected.

The profession's responsibility to the public interest is incredibly important during this pandemic, and architects stand ready to help. All levels of government have referenced the need for additional health-care units, shelters, and emergency clinics to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. These projects require the expertise of not only architects, but also municipal building officials. It is critical that everyone be able to work together safely, maintaining social distancing practices. It is also important that processes be streamlined and expedited for this work to move forward as quickly and responsibly as possible. To this end, I offer the following suggestions on behalf of the architecture profession.

1. Fully embrace the potential of digital services.

Toronto has been a leader in implementing digitally processed permit applications, reviews, and issuing. The City can continue to show leadership and resiliency by leveraging these existing processes to provide services during the COVID-19 crisis. Digital services can also be expanded to include site reviews by introducing simple protocols such as live webcams and real-time mobile video calls that facilitate social distancing.

In the survey sent out by your Economic Support and Recovery Task Force last week, there is an option to prioritize issuing of building and development permits as a way of offsetting financial impact on businesses during the pandemic. The OAA wholeheartedly supports this approach.

2. Enable Toronto's Building Officials to work with their "essential" counterparts.

Ontario's architecture practices fall under the province's list of "[essential services](#)," with respect to being in Category 65 ("professional services including lawyers and paralegals, engineers, accountants, translators") and also playing a critical role in Categories 26 through 29, which deal with the delivery of construction services for a variety of projects. While architects are ready and prepared to step into action, we need our municipal building official counterparts in Toronto's Building and Planning Departments to also be deemed "essential" so we can bring critical health-care projects to fruition. Maintaining good-quality construction with strong infection control protocols in place is essential. To achieve this, we strongly advise the City to explore how we can all work together using remote technologies.

If there are functions that can be safely done without risk to planning and building officials, or those serving on associated panels, committees, boards, and tribunals, then we encourage Toronto to ensure the continuation of this work.

3. Invest in predesign and design activities now.

As a precursor to development and construction, architecture plays a critical role in preparing projects for permit and construction. If the government invests in predesign and design activities now, then Ontario can hit the ground running once it is safe to do so. This will provide opportunities for the construction jobs that will help rebound our economy.

It is important that work resumes quickly once we have emerged from the COVID-19 crisis. Fortunately, predesign and design work can be safely done without risk of spreading the disease. The majority of architecture practices have instituted remote working conditions to continue providing their services throughout the province. Planning and building officials, and those serving on associated panels, committees, boards, and tribunals, can similarly transition to digital work platforms, video conferencing, and hearings. If annual general meetings for publicly traded companies such as banks and insurance companies can be held online, municipal hearings and tribunals can also certainly transition to a digital format.

There are many projects that were identified before the pandemic hit Canada, and are currently on hold waiting for funding approval to move forward. Now is the time to approve those projects, so that the planning, design, and pre-construction work can take place to ensure shovel-ready projects are in place once the pandemic is over.

4. Ensure that Toronto is open for business.

Affordable housing, daycares, schools, community and recreation centres, libraries, emergency services building, and parks require programming and design studies. Many huge projects require small and mid-sized projects to occur to make the large projects possible. These “enabling projects” are complicated and take time. By funding them now, they will be completed, budgeted, and shovel-ready to move when it is safe. These projects also engage many small and mid-size practices in communities across Ontario.

As you know, the architectural profession has a tremendous impact on the province, enabling 14 per cent of Ontario’s GDP and supporting nearly one million jobs. In some respects, this makes it easy to overlook the fact that the majority of architectural practices are in fact small businesses. It is critical to ensure that Toronto itself is open for these smaller businesses as well as international corporations. Architects are immensely educated, insured, and licensed professionals who take responsibility for their work and are ready to contribute to this recharging of our economy.

5. Remember the climate crisis.

Solutions to this crisis can help mitigate the next one. COVID-19 has had the inadvertent affect of drastically reducing our global carbon footprint. The economic “pause” the planet is currently experiencing provides an opportunity to think about how we can respond to the long-term and concurrent climate emergency by striving for “climate stability” in the next generation of projects.

A Toronto that invests in new built projects can futureproof them to ensure they are resilient to the environmental changes on the horizon. By incentivizing energy-efficient projects, and

encouraging the renovation and or restoration of the city's existing building stock, we can significantly improve our carbon footprint. Building more effectively results in the reduction or elimination of energy costs, impacting long-term operating costs, leaving more money in the pocket for owners of public or private buildings, saving the City money and making it a better place to live, attracting other businesses.

There is also an excellent opportunity to expand and create new jobs and business opportunities by promoting research and local manufacturing of the building materials needed for the construction industry as it transitions to greater energy efficiency. Products such as triple-glazed windows, advanced insulation, heat/energy recovery ventilation (HRV/ERV) units, geothermal pumps, ceramic radiant panels, grid-tied battery systems, and grid-scale battery backups can all be developed and manufactured in repurposed industrial buildings around Toronto.

The results of these initiatives would create better, resilient buildings, in a healthier environment, while providing a global competitive advantage for the city. The creation of buildings and industries that address sustainability also offers jobs for Torontonians from across the diverse socio-economic groups making up our diverse city. Additionally, buildings such as social housing, libraries, and community centres are non-profit centres for the government, and lower-operational costs on these buildings is a good financial strategy for the future.

Toronto has frequently taken proactive leadership roles on sustainability issues in the past, and I look forward to it again finding measures to better prepare our city once we find our way through this global pandemic.

If you have any questions, wish to discuss any of this further, or would like the architecture profession's perspective on any matters, I am always open to discussion and would look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your continued leadership,



Kathleen Kurtin, Architect
OAA, FRAIC
President

