

A Blueprint for Success: Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy

PUBLIC COMMENT

Our association, the Ontario Structural Wood Association (OSWA) and the industry that we represent across Ontario, wishes to announce our support for the Ontario Forest Sector Strategy. The ability to grow what is broadly called the forest sector with industry support, innovation and new investment is a real and viable opportunity for Ontario.

OSWA has approximately 70 members spread around all of Ontario. We employ thousands of people and use a vast amount of wood products. Our members design, manufacture and distribute structural wood components used by the building industry to build residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural buildings throughout the province. We are a large, value added user of wood and specialty wood products in Ontario. The opportunities to use wood in construction have been growing in recent years and we believe this opportunity is both good for our industry and the province as a whole. Efforts should be made to enable this growth to continue for many reasons including economic, health and environmental.

During our participation in the roundtables and now with our reading of your draft strategy we have identified four main issues which we feel need to be addressed to support the continued growth of our industry in Ontario.

EDUCATION

Unfortunately, the education system is not fully meeting our needs. We primarily draw employees from technical programs in the engineering, architectural and construction faculties of our community colleges. A shortage of appropriately trained skilled employees is a drag on the growth of our industry.

ONTARIO BUILDING CODE

The existing building code system is slow and cumbersome. New product developments and new construction methods, including many that you identified in your document, are being developed faster than the building code can adapt to them. This bureaucracy slows innovation in the building industry. Closer integration with the building industry itself is required to achieve a more responsive building code. We see the need for a performance based building code system to allow new technologies to be utilized quickly and efficiently. Currently the use of wood products is unfairly restricted in a number of ways by the Ontario Building Code. We believe that where any product can be shown to meet a minimum performance requirement that product should be allowed by our building code regardless of what type of product it is. Similarly, the Ontario Building Code should move more quickly to adopt mass timber initiatives included in the National Building Code. The lag between release of the National Code and the Ontario Code that relates to it provides a distinct head start to manufacturers in other provinces.

SUPPORT OF WOOD INDUSTRY

The recent initiative of the province of Ontario to allow mid-rise buildings to be built with wood was a positive step for our industry and the province as a whole. That initiative was strongly supported by WoodWorks Ontario, which is a provincial arm of the Canadian Wood Council. This organization provided technical support both in the development of the initiative and for the eventual rollout once approved. WoodWorks Ontario is an essential marketing arm for the wood building industry in Ontario. OSWA members are typical of much of the value added wood industry in Ontario; we are populated by small and medium sized businesses. WoodWorks provides some of the support required for our industry to grow and prosper in Ontario. OSWA would like to see provincial support of WoodWorks Ontario continued. We believe the organization has a large role to play with new product innovations that are coming including mass timber, engineered wood and wood panel / pre-fabrication developments.

CONSULTATION

We applaud this entire Forestry Strategy initiative. The wood industry is an unrecognized but major economic force in Ontario. We urge your government to continue to consult with industry as you develop new policies. And particularly to consult with OSWA as you develop ideas to aid in the growth of value added wood industries across Ontario. To aid in this consultation process we specifically request a seat on the proposed Forest Sector Strategy Advisory Committee.

Submitted January 31, 2020
Mike Phillips, Executive Director
Ontario Structural Wood Association
mphillips@oswa.ca