Forecast

Looking into his crystal ball for 2018 and beyond, Richard Lyall mostly sees red — as in red tape.

As president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) he’s been seeing a lot of red tape and working to cut through it for a couple years now and says there’s no question the same theme will continue through the next year.

The good news, though, he says, is that they’re getting both provincial and municipal governments’ attention and support.

With a steering committee in place and discussions underway about a pilot project to prove the value of streamlining the development approvals process through digital technology, he’s more than hopeful of a breakthrough.

“We’ve made tremendous progress on this issue and brought in Michael De Lint and he’s making a lot of connections with the right people,” says Lyall.

“We have approval of a task force around this and three working groups leading up to some reports in May. We’re nudging them (government) along so it doesn’t get lost.”

The need is palpable. While Toronto has moved to 54% out of 190 places in the world in ranking of development pace, it still has a long way to go.

While there was some suggestions in Toronto’s mainstream media that some of the bottle necks in development were related to red tape in Toronto, Lyall says the biggest issue holding back supply remains red tape and the duplication of approvals process.

“Yes, developers baulk, that’s not news,” he says.

“They’ve always done that because, as a developer told me, some of their projects have taken 22 years to get built.”

“Other jurisdictions have nothing like that. This is why we want to shift to digital. Digital provides comparative data so we can start to look at the data and ask: why does it take five times longer to get an approval in this jurisdiction compared to this other jurisdiction?”

Also on the radar for RESCON through 2018 is the growing demand for taller woodland multi-unit buildings.

“The problem now is that with past six storey wood buildings, they’ve always done that because, as a developer told me, ‘Yes, developers bank land, that’s not news,‘ he says.

“Other issues include bolstering the skilled trades’ apprenticeship programs to ensure there are enough workers to supply the construction industry.

“It used to be that parents wanted their kids to go to university and become doctors and lawyers,” he says.

“That’s changing and people are now seeing construction trades as viable career paths with good jobs and earning potential for their kids. It’s become technology heavy, working with digital plans, BIM and lasers and it’s something many young people can adapt to. We have some programs in schools but we really need to get the kids looking at construction as a career much earlier, even earlier than high school.”

Panel fabrication will also continue to grow as an option for multi-storey projects, he says and that too will mean jobs and growth.

It may cost a little more but in the big picture it means less wastage, higher quality, faster completion, less theft and better health and safety management.
CLEAN WATER IS EVERYBODY’S BUSINESS.

Ontario has an abundance of freshwater in the natural environment, but this does not translate into a low-cost supply of water. Extraction, treatment, transmission, sewage collection, and treatment for discharge is a costly, yet critical, cycle that is vital to public health across the province.

For decades, Ontarians have taken clean water for granted by underfunding their municipal water systems. The result is a municipal water infrastructure deficit in the tens of billions of dollars and a continuing capital under-investment in many municipalities.

Rethinking how we manage and fund these core infrastructure assets is essential to long-term public health and the sustainability of our drinking water sources in the province.
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Keeping the spotlight on the need and benefits of public works investment is the objective of the Ontario Public Works Association (OPWA).

Comprised of more than 600 members in both the public and private sectors, the OPWA is a not-for-profit organization which works to enhance the state of infrastructure in the province.

A chapter of the American Public Works Association which has over 30,000 members across the United States and Canada, OPWA’s mission statement is “to support those who operate, improve and maintain public works and infrastructure through advocacy, education and member engagement.”

That’s not an easy task. With the exception of a part-time executive director, the OPWA is an almost exclusively volunteer-managed organization overseen by a 25-person board which meets bi-monthly.

“Since those board directors come from across the province, co-ordinating those meetings and conducting business can be challenging,” says OPWA president Ed Djulovic, who is also the director of infrastructure and development services with the City of Stratford.

“We can and have used video and teleconferences where some members can’t make the meetings.”

Despite the logistics of geography and the fact members are devoting time above and beyond their professional duties, the association has either launched or participated in a number of endeavours.

An example is its participation in and contribution to the Canadian Public Works Association’s Canadian Infrastructure Report Card which assesses the state of municipal infrastructure assets.

Along with other organizations, the OPWA has also lent its voice to the long ongoing campaign to rectify the nation’s “infrastructure deficit” and that collective effort has certainly caught the attention of senior levels of government, he says.

An example is the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund which is “non-applicable based.” In other words, municipalities don’t have to earmark funding for a specific project, as long as it is used for sewers, roads, bridges and other infrastructure. In 2015, Stratford, Ont. received $200,000, but that is rising to $700,000 this year and will climb to about $1.9 million in 2019, he says.

“One of the association’s most ambitious and high profile events is its annual conference in January where its’ Project of the Year, Innovation, Information Technology, and Supplier/Vendor Maintenance, and personal award winners are announced.”

In the Project of the Year Awards there are 14 different categories including Structures $2 to $10 million, Structures to $10 to $50 million, and Structures greater than $50 million.

One award at this year’s conference, which Djulovic was “gratified to see,” was the selection of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte Water Treatment Plant as Project of the Year in the Small Municipalities and Communities division. It was the first time a First Nations community has received the award.

“The community has been trying to get a wastewater treatment plant since 1989 and has been on a boiled water alert since 2008. I don’t think too many municipalities would put up with that,” says Djulovic.

Project team members consisted of Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corp., First Nations Engineering Services Ltd, and Colliers Project Leaders, and general contractor Murphy.

The award winning Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte water treatment plant was recently selected as Project of the Year in the Small Municipalities and Communities division at the Ontario Public Works Association annual conference — a first for a First Nations community.

PEAK Engineering & Construction.

“Their submission stood out as they used diligent construction management controls, proactive monitoring of the construction site for hazards for worker safety, exceptional community relations, and in charge of controls to protect the natural environment,” says OPWA Awards and Recognition Committee chair Adam Lachhman.

The project team had to design around adverse conditions such as algae blooms in the Bay of Quinte and deal well with property ownership issues, funding delays and budget restrictions set by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, he says.

In explaining the award program process, Lachhman says it actually begins the previous fall when the OPWA issues a call for nominations and project submission through its website and its email distribution list. Deadline for submissions is Nov. 1 and the projects must be sustainably completed within two years of the submission date.

“The lead up to the January conference is a rather hectic period for the committee which evaluates the submissions using set criteria such as the use of good construction management techniques, community relations, and/or unusual accomplishments in the project itself.”

Other determining factors can include quality control, value engineering, innovations, plus time and cost saving techniques. To ensure impartiality the committee uses pre-determined scoring used to assess each submission and where a conflict of interest might arise, such as a committee member being either directly or indirectly connected to the submitted project, that person has to abstain from evaluating in the specific category, says Lachhman.

Another OPWA initiative and one that is still evolving is its almost brand new Right of Way Committee (ROW). Formerly a subset of another committee, it held its first conference last November which attracted more than 250 attendees from municipalities, consulting firms, suppliers, utilities and contractors. Some of the topics included subsurface utility engineering, locates, permitting and new technologies.

“As we urbanize and roads expand right of ways are competing for ever-decreasing spaces,” says ROW committee chair Steve Murphy.

Addressing the challenges of increasingly crowded rights of ways requires technical solutions and the implementation of best practices, he says.

In addition, the OPWA also host a number of social events to facilitate industry networking including a ski day, a golf tournament, as well as ones designed to get young professionals more involved in the association, says Djulovic.

Volunteer power drives the work of OPWA

The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte water treatment plant was recently selected as Project of the Year in the Small Municipalities and Communities division at the Ontario Public Works Association annual conference — a first for a First Nations community.

DAN O’REILLY

The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte water treatment plant was recently selected as Project of the Year in the Small Municipalities and Communities division at the Ontario Public Works Association annual conference — a first for a First Nations community.
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Transportation (MTO), she’d come to meetings with her
own YouTube channel.

RCCAO are relative newcomers to the construction
association world but they’ve wasted no time in forming
alliances with other associations based on mutual interest,
says Manahan.

It didn’t take long for the lead-through-research strat-
 egy to pay off. Their 2007 report, Bridging the Gap, looked
at the shortfall in infrastructure funding for bridge main-
tenance and replacement.

“Timing, of course, is everything,” says Manahan.

“The RCCAO is dipping its toes in the federal pond,
having been invited to present to the Standing Committee on Finance looking at
the Infrastructure Bank concept.”

Andy Manahan
Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

“That was the year of the fatal bridge collapse in Laval,
Que. and then a collapse in Minneapolis.”

Those incidents helped drive their report to the highest
echelons of government, where stakeholders were anxious
to avoid a collapse in their jurisdictions.

“The media coverage was phenomenal on our report.
We ended up having many discussions with municipali-
ties and the province and while it’s taken some time, we’re
seeing funding for repairs and maintenance restored to
MTO budgets,” he says noting RCCAO partnered with
the Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA) on that
report.

More recently RCCAO has joined with its stablemate
RESCON in pushing for a streamlining of development
approvals process.

It’s been a long campaign stretching back to 2009 when
RCCAO released its Environmental Assessment Reform
— A Tool for Economic Recovery report, looking at the
myriad of delays in the Municipal Class Environmental
Assessment (MCEA) process.

The report noted “shovel ready” projects which would
have qualified for federal infrastructure stimulus fund-
ing were being set back an average of 10 months because
the MCEA process took almost 20 months. Lawyer Frank
Zechner’s follow-up study in 2014 found the process had
lengthened to more than 26.5 months.

In all there have been five reports on the MCEA process
and a chorus of voices from several construction groups
seems to have brought a streamlined process a step closer,
says Manahan.

Similarly, it has collaborated with the like-minded
Ontario Municipal Engineers Association (MEA), which
has been frustrated at getting the attention of successive
provincial ministers to acknowledge the importance of
reforming the approvals process — which its member
manage and also find cumbersome.

Last year RCCAO and MEA submitted a joint appli-
cation to the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario
which was endorsed by 13 separate industry and profes-
sional associations such as the Ontario Sewer and Water-
main Construction Association, OGRA, the Ontario Road
Builders’ Association and the Ontario General Contrac-
tor’s Association.

It called for a general streamlining and expediting of the
processes under the MCEA and expediting the response
process while also harmonizing the MCEA with the Plan-
ing Act processes.

Other issues on the table for 2018 include address-
ing Tarion and home construction warranties and WSIB
issues specific to the construction sector.

Looking ahead, Manahan says, the RCCAO is dip-
ping its toes in the federal pond, having been invited to
Ottawa to present to the Standing Committee on Finance
looking at the Infrastructure Bank concept and explor-
ing ways where the federal government might use its
resources to drive economic activity through the con-
struction sector.

“Even though we’re a provincial organization, we’re
punching above our weight,” he says.
**Timber!**

**Logging in with the International Log Builders’ Association**

PETER KENTER
CORRESPONDENT

Canada has carved out a special niche as a country with both excellent timber resources and expert log builders. The International Log Builders’ Association (ILBA) represents log builders across the globe, but was founded in 1974 as the Canadian Log Builders’ Association. Its offices remain in Canada as the association works to promote the log building craft while helping to ensure that modern building standards accept all that log building offers.

The ILBA’s global membership numbers 165 and ranges from contractors, engineers, architects, designers and suppliers to instructors, furniture builders and insurance companies.

ILBA president Robert Savignac has been building log homes and teaching the craft for 40 years. Known in industry circles as Log Bob, he’s operated Arbor Vitae Log Craft for more than 40 years, with the business currently located in Hudson, Que.

“Log home building has endured for centuries,” he says. “Log buildings were constructed in the Middle East when there were still forests across the Arabian deserts. The Scandinavian countries took it to another level. When handcrafted log building came to North America, it was known as Scandinavian Full Scribe. When I served as CEO of the ILBA in 2005 I attended a summit meeting and visited an area in Sweden, north of Stockholm, where my associate showed me a house that was built using the ‘Canadian style’ of log construction. It came full circle, with Canada taking it to a whole new level as well.”

The early days of the association saw its founding father, B. Allan Mackie, working to establish log building as a mainstream construction technique. He built the first log home to gain acceptance by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in the mid-1980s. ILBA continues to work to ensure that modern building standards fully recognize the advantages of log home construction. However, while timber frame construction and cross-laminated timber have recently taken the renewable construction spotlight, log building hasn’t received the same level of attention.

Builders can demonstrate that a log structure can be built air tight, but current building codes overlook the thermal performance and energy efficiency of logs as a building material. “Part of the effort to gain this recognition is to encourage younger builders to get into the industry,” Savignac says. “They won’t get in if they’re fighting code from day one.”

Like most construction businesses, log building is sensitive to the economy. Many log buildings are constructed as second homes, so the 2008 recession saw customers shelving or delaying what they saw as optional projects. While design magazines once featured extravagant “log mansions,” the scale of log homes also diminished.

“Now some log homes are becoming bigger and on the other end of the scale we’re also meeting the needs of the small house movement,” Savignac says. “Log building is ramping up, and those who have stuck with log building are building again.”

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Heritage work a committed passion for CAHP

A couple who met at the Petrie Building in Guelph in the early 1960s wrote their engagement and marriage dates on the edge of a door frame. CAHP president Gerry Zegerius, a senior associate with Tacoma Engineers Inc., discovered it during an inspection and was able to track down the couple’s children and send them a photo of it.

Members of the association are designated as such and “that designation is starting to gain traction. Some RFPs (Requests for Proposals) are now requiring it.”

“Not everything is going to be saved and it often comes down to economics. That’s why heritage professionals have to be skilled negotiators—to make the case why a developer should spend another $500,000 on a building.”

Preserving buildings is not just a case of saving the brick and mortar. It often entails looking for ways to incorporate heritage buildings and/or elements into their projects and “are asking questions” on how that can be realized.

“When I saw this (the inscription) it was too much to resist. I was able to track down the grown family of this couple and sent the picture to them. It turns out Hennie and Gordon met at the Petrie building more than 50 years ago and left their mark. Gordon has passed on, but Hennie was reportedly very happy to see the photo and was able to shed some light on their story.”

“Not every application is accepted, although we will accept an intern member.”

CAHP is comprised of people who are dedicated to identifying, conserving, preserving and—in many cases—repurposing heritage buildings. Working in both the public and private sectors, they have participated and provided input into key pieces of legislation such as the Heritage Act and the Planners Act. But it’s not an organization which is restricted to one profession or trade, he stresses.

“Not everyone likes to go to work every day. But that’s not the case for the approximately 450 members of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals, says its president.

“If that makes for a diversified body, CAHP’s strength and unifying theme is its passion and dedication to heritage issues and projects,” he says.

“We bring a unique skill set and extra level of care (to heritage projects),” says Zegerius, noting that CAHP partners extensively with the National Trust, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, and other heritage groups on various initiatives and issues.

Those organizations have a commitment to protect heritage buildings, while CAHP’s members have the abilities and technical skills to achieve that protection, he points out.