

A Future Voice for Construction

The Ontario Construction Design Alliance

A proposal to create a unified voice
to represent the broader
construction industry in Ontario

June, 2010

Introduction

The Ontario design/construction industry is currently fragmented and does not have a single voice with which to speak to government on higher levels issues of policy and regulation. Currently the construction sector is represented by literally dozens of trade, mixed, general contractor and other organizations. Similarly, the design sector also has a number of individual voices that seek the ear of government. Messages and opinions from the industry are not coordinated and are often contradictory. Government has made it clear they would prefer to work with an industry that can deliver consensus opinions, with the authority to speak on behalf of the industry.

The industry must now look at how it does business with the provincial government and find a better way to develop and deliver the necessary unified voice – a voice through which the broader construction industry can provide consensus opinions to the government and can pursue those opinions in a coordinated, effective manner.

For some time now several major Provincial Associations have been meeting to discuss this issue and formulate a proactive strategy. The consensus from those limited discussions is we can create a unified voice for the broader construction industry. Following is a discussion paper outlining how that might be accomplished through the creation of a new 'Ontario Construction Design Alliance' (OCDA – working title only).

Background

A couple of years ago the broader construction industry was almost successful in establishing the 'Construction Advisory Council' with direct ties to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. The Council was established and meetings planned when Minister David Caplan was moved from the portfolio and the CAC was not a priority for the new Minister.

Recent discussions with the current Minister, Brad Duguid, indicate there is some interest in reviving the concept of a unified voice for the industry with a place within government to coordinate broader political consultation.

Over the past few months a number of provincial organizations including the road builders, mechanical contractors and general contractors have been meeting to discuss the subject of improving the industry's dialogue with the provincial government. This proposal to establish the Ontario Construction Design Alliance (OCDA) is the result of those discussions.

Proposal

It is proposed that the Ontario Construction Design Alliance (OCDA) be established to provide a forum for dialogue and consensus building and to serve as a unified voice to government for the broader construction industry. The OCDA would be a body of

provincial organizations representing all aspects of construction from development, design and engineering to civil, ICI and residential construction.

Unlike the CAC model, it is envisioned that this industry organization would not include labour representatives as was mandated by the government at the time. This is predicated on the fact there are already numerous forums for labour-management dialogue with government and that construction employers have a right to dialogue with government from their own perspective. Also deviating from the CAC model, the proposal for the OCDA does not envision developing a formal relationship with any specific Minister or ministry. It would seek a less formal relationship with one ministry, likely with the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, which would facilitate the 'one-window to government' objective.

The proposal does not envision a new formal association with all of the accompanying costs, facilities, paid staff and other trappings. Rather, the industry has already established that the use of less formal coalitions and task forces works well. Technology now facilitates instant communication and information sharing.

Under the coalition model proposed for OCDA, constituent organizations would contribute the necessary resources and administrative support to manage the operation of the OCDA. Specific associations would take up the lead on a given issue, with OCDA being the coordinating body and the unified with which to convey the message. Secretariat duties can be shared and governance need not be steeped in formality. The necessary expertise and resources to succeed collectively reside within our respective organizations and the willingness to share resources means we all have access to the best minds in the industry.

Why Create an Ontario Construction Design Alliance?

The proposal for the OCDA addresses the need for an enhanced consultative partnership between the development, design and construction industry and the provincial government. Specifically, the Alliance would facilitate consensus and clarity of the industry's input to government and provide a focal point for the government to better coordinate initiatives that affect the industry. The proposal seeks to address government's current concerns about the industry's voice being fragmented and at times contradictory. Faced with the inability of the industry to develop consensus opinions, it is very easy for the government to do nothing on the pretext that it isn't getting a well-defined message.

The goal will be to set up a liaison with the government with regularly scheduled meetings with a proposal for industry summits that invite both levels of government to participate in working sessions with industry stakeholders. This has been successfully

done by RCCAO and the Canadian Construction Association and we would follow that model.

The government and the construction industry would both be better served if higher level issues of importance were coordinated within an OCDA of provincial design, engineering and trade associations. The alliance would provide one consensus industry voice in speaking to the government; a forum where stakeholder issues could be better coordinated and managed.

All major participants in the Ontario design, development and construction industry have in the past (i.e. as recently as 2008) supported a proposal to create an Advisory Council .The OCDA would be comprised of leaders from all sectors of the industry. Nothing in their involvement with OCDA would preclude any organization from adopting a dissenting position or continuing to work with government on issues of importance to them as they do now.

Establishing the OCDA would make the industry's experience, expertise and research available to the government. Equally important, it would establish a single authority with which the government could consult on issues of common interest to the industry and the Province of Ontario. The OCDA would facilitate interaction with other government ministries and departments and serve as a source for government to go to for input.

Examples of Current Issues

The OCDA would be charged with dealing with higher level issues of government policy that impact the entire industry. Examples of items that might form initial agendas include:

- Alternative Financing and Procurement
- Competitiveness of Canadian companies vis-a-vis international competition
- Longer -Term Infrastructure Planning
- The Underground Economy in Construction
- Availability of Trained Workers and professionals
- WSIB Rate Increases and Policy issues
- Construction Lien Act
- Environmental Regulation and Sustainability strategies

Summary

A more competitive, efficient and productive design, construction and development industry is a critical prerequisite to the continued development and expansion of the Ontario economy.

There is both the willingness and the ability within the industry to establish an Ontario Construction Design Alliance to facilitate a more efficient and productive consultation process and a coordinated government approach to the industry's challenges.

This proposal purposely avoids fine detail on the functioning, etc. of the OCDA as these would be matters for discussion by the participating organizations. Further work is needed to develop a strategy, funding requirements, membership criteria and governance as well as to determine the structure of the Alliance. The vision is that, at least initially, OCDA would be a virtual organization without a physical office. An interactive web site would be a likely objective to facilitate communication within the alliance and to meet advocacy objectives.

Several organizations have already indicated their interest in moving forward with establishment of the OCDA.

It is essential for an industry like ours to establish a voice that can unify and represent the many diverse interests that exist. Over the past eight years a strong sense of unity has become a reality whether in the cooperation of the design associations and the contractors tackling the ORC and contract issues, or the creation of the industry WSIB Task Force. With the support and joint efforts of associations like CEO, OAA, ORBA, OSWCA, RESCON, RCCAO and the OGCA we are making a difference.

Now is the time to build on those efforts and create a unifying Voice for the Construction and Design industry.