

# Housing, reform of approvals top stakeholder wishlists

Don Wall May 15, 2023

Construction stakeholders have developed long wishlists of demands as the 2023 Toronto mayoral byelection day approaches, with project approvals, housing and project procurement mentioned several times by policy watchers in the sector.

The byelection will be held June 26, a vote necessitated by the resignation of Mayor John Tory on Feb. 10. The winner will serve out the remainder of the 2022–2026 city council term.

## RESCON

Richard Lyall, president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON), says top priorities for the next mayor are not only to increase efficiencies in Toronto's development approvals process but also address municipal government "culture."

"We've just got a really inefficient process that needs to be looked at," he said, citing cumbersome or obtrusive zoning, fees and permitting practices.

But the culture problem, Lyall said, is the overriding problem that needs fixing from the top.

"Put it this way, the attitude in the bureaucracy is that the building industry is the enemy, which is odd because we build everything. We build the social housing, we build the non-profits, we build the condos, we build the low rise, the highrise. It's the industry that builds everything. We're not the enemy."

Changes to planning approvals urged by RESCON would bring efficiency, responsiveness and predictable timelines.

Lyall said RESCON also wants to see mitigation of "exorbitant" taxes, fees, development charges and levies, which now represent 31 per cent of a new-home purchase price in Toronto.

The council would also like to see the mayor champion zoning changes with more as-of-right zoning on corridors and avenues. Lyall said he fully supported city council's vote on May 10 to permit fourplexes on single-family sites.

RESCON will be hosting an election debate May 24 focused on housing.

## GTSWCA

The primary ask of the Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association (GTSWCA) is to improve the administration of Toronto's infrastructure projects. Contractors consider Toronto a risky municipality in which to take on project work, said a GTSWCA statement, because it is difficult to get paid in a timely manner and there are often unmanageable levels of risk heaped on to projects.

"These are very much fixable administrative issues related to the way the city is procuring, managing and paying for their projects," said association executive director Patrick McManus.

First, said the GTSWCA, improve the project payment system, particularly for work associated with change orders. Contractors have to fight for payments for change order work, even when they have confirmed approval from the city, said McManus.

In every other municipality, when a change order is approved, the value of the new work performed is paid on the next progress draw.

The association also urges the next mayor to commit to faster turnaround on scope change decisions and commit to a maximum three-week award time. This will reduce uncertainty and allow contractors to build in lower fixed costs and less for project risk into their bid prices.

## TCA

Suzana Fernandes, vice- president of operations for the Toronto Construction Association, stressed the TCA is neutral in the mayors race but suggested the association's members would be watching three issues with special interest during the campaign.

They are: removing red tape slowing the development approvals process; addressing the high levels of development charges; and whether the candidates are committed to the additional spending that will be required to fix existing infrastructure as well as build new transportation and other public infrastructure.

Fernandes listed six different approvals bottlenecks and asked, "Our industry wants to build, the city needs us to continue building, so where do these candidates stand on supporting our industry and working together to facilitate a faster, more efficient process?"

## RCCAO

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) is prioritizing housing, state-of-good-repair projects and long-term infrastructure planning on its mayoral wishlist.

RCCAO executive director Nadia Todorova said Toronto municipal leaders must do everything possible to ensure the city can address the housing supply shortage and ensure continued investment in critical infrastructure to keep up with growth.

“Key things we know will help reduce wait times and costly delays are to speed up the development approvals process and embrace innovative concepts like electronic permitting,” she said.

The new mayor should collaborate with the federal and provincial governments to ensure appropriate funding in response to the pandemic’s impact on Toronto’s capital budget, ensuring state-of-good-repair projects are not dropped. Similarly, collaboration is required to ensure mobility on roadways and public transit remains a top priority.

## PCA

The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) remains focused on ensuring there is fairness and competition in bidding on the city’s construction projects, said PCA vice-president for Ontario Karen Renkema.

“Currently, only contractors and workers affiliated with select unions are permitted to bid on and build institutional, commercial and industrial projects procured through the City of Toronto,” stated Renkema.

No other municipality in Ontario restricts bidding based on union affiliation, the PCA said.

“We strongly encourage Toronto council and all candidates running for mayor to support a competitive bidding process.”

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