

CDAO broadens focus to champion Ontario construction

By Don Wall Oct 2, 2015

It seems like the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO) has been around forever.



It has survived name and status changes, attracted most of Ontario's heavyweight construction and design associations as members, negotiated hard-fought deals with [Infrastructure Ontario](#) (IO) and outlasted several Ontario economic development ministers.

It's ironic to learn, then, that the [CDAO](#) is officially just in its infancy, having conducted its inaugural annual general meeting on Sept. 9 and officially voted itself into existence as a non-profit association.

The CDAO has established itself as a significant voice representing Ontario's construction industry over the last five-plus years, working as a loose yet powerful alliance of associations. Some members include the Consulting Engineers of Ontario (CEO), the Mechanical Contractors Association of Ontario, the Ontario General Contractors Association, the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** and the Ontario Road Builders' Association.

Since 2010 the CDAO has been active trying to influence on issues such as the far-reaching Building Together infrastructure plan, launched in 2011, to impactful agreements on bundling of contracts reached with IO in November 2012.

But still, it has all been informal, with none of the trappings of an official association, until now.

"We do have a history to live up to," commented Barry Steinberg, elected chair of the CDAO at its recent AGM. Steinberg is a veteran of the movement stemming from his role as CEO of the CDAO member CEO and he served as the alliance's most recent chair before its official inauguration.

"This is what happens when fairly like-minded organizations get together to see how we can take issues of common interest and advocate for them together."

Successes over the past five years bred the need to adopt a more formal organizational structure, explained Steinberg. The CDAO became incorporated in June 2014, a prelude to the Sept. 9 milestone.

Steinberg said the CDAO will rely heavily on the expertise of individual members and the staffing and research resources of the 15 member associations.

"We are surrounded by a bunch of intelligent people and we respect one another a great deal but beyond that we get to draw on the resources of our respective organizations," he said.

Steinberg identifies the CDAO's number-one concern, both over its past five years and moving into the future, as the need for sustained public infrastructure planning and financing. Ontario's economic future depends on it, he said.

The earlier incarnation of the CDAO worked with Ontario cabinet ministers with economic development or infrastructure responsibilities, such as Brad Duguid and Bob Chiarelli, to develop the Building Together plan and confirm the importance of concerted "municipal asset planning" as a catalyst for growth.

"We pushed for that, and that was accepted," Steinberg said. "That was our first significant success, it put the CDAO on the map, that is when the ministries wanted to talk to us."

Most of the dialogue so far has been with the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, as it is now called, and IO, but Steinberg says while advocacy on infrastructure will remain paramount, the CDAO will expand its engagement in future to tackle issues involving other ministries and the broader public sector including municipalities and the educational sector.

"With the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA), we are losing so much time and money through the environmental regulatory process," Steinberg said as an example.

"There is a lot of regulatory red tape that does not need to be there. That has an impact on building infrastructure."

The average time it takes for a project to get through an MCEA, he said, is now 28 months.

Discussions have already started on this with Ontario's Minister of Environment and Climate Change Glen Murray, who has expressed openness and sympathy on the issue, Steinberg said.

With Natural Resources, there should be discussions about species at risk, he said; with Municipal Affairs and Housing, the CDAO wants to talk about affordable housing.

"I think in the coming year we will be broadening our reach," said Steinberg.