



Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association
Association des constructeurs d'habitations d'Ottawa

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Mr. Tim Moerman, Planner II
Environmental Sustainability Branch, Community Sustainability Department
City of Ottawa
110 Laurier Avenue West, 3rd Floor
Ottawa, ON K1P 1J1

Dear Tim,

I am writing on behalf of the Green Committee of the Greater Ottawa Home Builder's Association (GOHBA). We represent home builders, renovators, suppliers and trades, and our mandate is to promote sustainable design and building in Ottawa. We believe that green building provides significant benefits to the City in the form of overall improvements to the housing stock, increased property values and reduced strain on infrastructure. We are, therefore, interested in working with your Department toward the mutually beneficial goal of achieving more green building in Ottawa.

We have identified four specific actions that we are asking the City of Ottawa to take. We recognize the realities of resource constraints, and have been mindful of them in developing our requests.

1. Promote awareness of green building to the public

As a government body with no commercial interest, we believe the City is in the best position to take the lead on green building education and awareness, particularly for residential construction.

We are asking the City to identify promotional opportunities within its existing framework - website, home show participation, mailings to householders, public meetings, etc. - to educate the public on the benefits of green building. The GOHBA Green Committee would be pleased to participate as an industry liaison, providing expertise and advice.

2. Eliminate barriers to using innovative green construction materials and techniques

Product manufacturers and building scientists have made considerable investments in R&D to give us new technologies and new techniques for better, greener buildings. The appearance of these green materials and techniques on job sites, though, often causes problems. When something isn't familiar or recognized by a plans examiner or building inspector, construction is normally stopped until the building official can get answers.

Without a clear process for getting these answers, the delays at inspection can be significant, in effect *penalizing* the industry for building green. To provide some specific examples, our members have experienced this situation around issues of grey water re-use, the placement of vapour barriers, and the use of vacuum insulation panels.

We are asking the City to remove this barrier to green construction by developing and implementing a process that enables city plans examiners and inspectors to quickly get judgments from a central authority on new or unconventional building materials and techniques.

Examples of process that we believe would be helpful are: development of a database where approvals of new materials and methods could be posted and accessed by all building officials, or the designation of trained in-house green experts, who could act as the go-to authority when these situations arise.

3. Amend zoning policies to be in line with the City's long term vision

The City's 20 year vision for development – the Official Plan – is based on a strategy of sustainable development, and specifically seeks to ensure development within the current urban boundary.

Current zoning rules, however, are at odds with this vision as they create a situation that forces developers to apply for revisions to the existing zoning to increase the density, often against the wishes of the local community. Again, this effectively penalizes builders who choose infill or intensification projects that are in line with the Official Plan. You may be aware of the fact that in order to solve this problem GOHBA has been asking the City to create a new comprehensive zoning bylaw to implement the Official Plan since 2003. It is only with this type of clear direction from the City that developers and the local community can work from a shared expectation of what is reasonable and that fits within the City's Official Plan.

4. Consider home owner incentives

We believe that green building and renovation will become “mainstream” only when home owners start to demand it. The incremental costs of building a green home, or renovating a home to be more green, however can be a deterrent. If the gap can be narrowed through rebates or other financial incentives directly to home owners, we will be able to reach the tipping point more quickly. In this regard, GOHBA has been lobbying the federal government to create a permanent 2.5% GST Home Renovation Tax Rebate since the last program expired in December 2010.

Although we understand the City's budget constraints, we feel compelled to point out that incentives to homeowners would have the greatest impact, and we are asking the City to consider incentives that could change the behaviour of home owners and motivate them to build and renovate green. We have found this type of incentive-based approach to be much more successful than implementing regulatory requirements.

The Green Committee would be pleased to meet with you and your colleagues to answer any questions you may have and to explore these ideas further. I look forward to your response.

Regards,



Roy Nandram
President & CEO, RND Construction Ltd.
Chair, GOHBA Green Committee