



TORONTO
SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTS

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RE: Ontario's Culture Strategy

Established in 1887, the Toronto Society of Architects (TSA) is a non-profit volunteer-based organization comprised of architects, intern architects, students, urbanists, academics, retirees, and architecture enthusiasts. As the Toronto chapter of the Ontario Association of Architects, the TSA plays an advocacy role in the city and region, ensuring that architecture and design are key considerations in public discussions.

In response to the Ministry's call for public feedback and, in keeping with our mandate "to promote and advance the role of architecture and design in Toronto's dynamic community for the enrichment of the city and its citizens", the TSA wishes to draw attention to the critical omission of architecture – and design in general - in the Ministry's discussion paper for Ontario's Culture Strategy.

Current provincial legislation already identifies the cultural value of architecture, grouping it with other cultural activities such as painting, theatre and music. The Ontario Arts Council Act defines arts as "the arts of the theatre, literature, music, painting, sculpture, architecture or the graphic arts, and includes any other similar creative or interpretative activity." By failing to recognize architecture and design's cultural value, the Ministry is advancing on a Culture Strategy with an incomplete definition of culture.



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Architecture is more than a building's utilitarian value. It is a reflection of our society – an embodiment of what we value and believe to be important – a picture of what we were capable of at a certain point in time. Moreover, much like painting and writing, the process of making architecture is also a cultural expression. It is a unique process of iterative drawings, models, and discussions that come together to give shape to our needs and desires. To understand architecture is to be able to read the stories embodied in our homes, workplaces, and cultural and recreational venues.

Design goes beyond aesthetics; it is a holistic way of thinking, founded on solution-based problem solving and problem shaping, tackling both known and ambiguous aspects of the current situation in order to discern paths which lead to our common goals. This means architecture, design and urbanism can all play key roles in helping the Province deliver on complex issues including public health, sustainability, and energy usage. Investing in architecture and design is investing in some of Ontario's most pressing issues.

The TSA undertakes numerous initiatives to raise awareness about architectural design, including exhibitions, publications, competitions, forums, and tours. Many of these initiatives are aimed at making architecture more accessible to the public. During Doors Open Toronto we work with architects to open the doors of their studios, allowing the public to engage and understand the process of making architecture. Similarly, our Toronto Architecture Tours highlight post-war and contemporary architecture in the city, helping the public better understand and engage their modern built heritage. With the Government's support, many of these initiatives could be enhanced and replicated across Ontario, allowing more Ontarians to reconnect with the buildings they inhabit.

The Government can do much more to improve its support of architecture, starting with the recognition of architecture as a cultural activity and product, and its prominent inclusion in Ontario's Culture Strategy. By supporting and recognizing the work of existing organizations and institutions, Ontario can greatly enhance the appreciation of architecture, helping the public better understand and engage the built environment they live in.

This past weekend Globe and Mail architecture critic Alex Bozicovic reflected on the state of design culture in Canada. He stated: "Canada's lack of attention to design is a strategic error. Promoting design is something that other countries see as a matter of cultural diplomacy and economic development". We hope Ontario will lead the country's cultural shift, including architecture and design as cultural priorities.

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We trust our feedback will be taken into the Ministry as it establishes Ontario's first Culture Strategy, and we look forward to an inclusive Culture Strategy for Ontario that recognizes architecture and design as integral components of Ontario's culture.

Respectfully,



Jason Dobbin
Chair



Maria Denegri
Vice Chair

Toronto Society of Architects