

Letter to the Editor: To Doug Ford — One Ontario proposal to streamline development approvals

Arash Shahi October 22, 2021



On behalf of the One Ontario coalition, AECO Innovation Lab has sent the following open letter to Ontario Premier Doug Ford, calling on him to take immediate action to establish a development approval one window data and information exchange standard that will lay the groundwork necessary for streamlining and digitizing the development approvals process.

Dear Premier Ford,

I am writing on behalf of the One Ontario coalition, representing the residential and ICI construction sector; mayors, administrators and building officials from every municipality; pertinent software providers; and various applicable law agencies and ministries.

We need your leadership and support for the establishment of a development approval one window data and information exchange standard that will lay the groundwork necessary for streamlining and digitizing the development approvals process.

The One Ontario proposal is a tangible solution presented to the government by an unprecedented coalition of stakeholders who operate in this space, understand the problem and have researched best practices from around the world.

After extensive preparation, in March of this year, we submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

It is aligned with the Simpler, Faster, Better Services Act.

However, we are still waiting for guidance, much less approval. With recovery underway and a critical ever-growing housing demand exceeding supply, there is an urgent need to act.

According to the World Bank, Canada currently ranks 64th out of 190 countries in the world on development approval efficiency for routine building projects and we are behind the many jurisdictions that have taken innovative steps to modernize and digitize their systems.

Research shows that streamlining and integrating development approval will result in up to a 70 per cent reduction in approval time to develop projects.

While some digitization of the building permit process is occurring in various Ontario municipalities, existing e-permitting platforms are siloed, fragmented and don't take into consideration the up to 45 applicable law agencies involved in broader development approvals.

While positive, this route is inefficient and incomplete in scope. The fact is no single municipality can solve this problem on its own without provincial engagement and leadership.

The current patchwork of digitization efforts is hindering broader streamlining efforts as municipal, regional and ministerial agencies each pursue their own unique digital solutions that are not interconnected and therefore restrict interoperability.

Research shows a top-down approach is necessary to implement impactful modernization. In our situation, this means a solution requires the support of the Ontario government.

One Ontario's proposal will lay the groundwork for a modern solution that will ensure Ontario remains a growing, economically robust and innovative province. It will also eliminate data silos, giving the Government of Ontario the complete transparency and visibility that it needs to facilitate increased housing supply across Ontario.

As a successful businessman and leader of Canada's economic powerhouse, you understand, innovation is time-sensitive and requires action.

Developers and builders are trying their best to bring more housing to market faster, but are forced to deal with the slow, current regulatory approvals process that lacks transparency or accountability for applicants. We therefore need your leadership to kick-start this critical step.

Thank you for your consideration of this vital matter.

Sincerely and on behalf of the One Ontario Coalition,

Arash Shahi, CEO of AECO Innovation Lab and principal researcher of One Ontario Initiative