



## **RESCON: Construction pivoted rapidly during the COVID-19 crisis**

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In the period of time that has elapsed between my writing and you reading this, much will already have changed, as that is the way things have been moving lately with the COVID rollercoaster – particularly in residential construction.

We continued working through the shutdown because housing is a need and Premier Doug Ford committed to those waiting for their homes, sometimes desperately, that they would get them.

We committed that we would not let him down in managing this. We didn't.

We were the first industry to develop and implement COVID-specific protocols for residential construction sites, which was a crucial element in most of the sector being designated as an essential workplace. It was an all-hands-on-deck process involving labour, government and management.

As the premier pointed out at a recent press conference, the construction industry has done “an incredible job” and he is now looking to us to set the gold standard. We will not let him down.

The pace of adjustment during the COVID pandemic has been relentless. So much has been done to date and so much remains. This crisis will accelerate changes and reforms in ways not considered possible just a few months ago.

Innovation will be the flavour of the day going forward – whether it is modular construction, missing middle housing, procedural reforms (reviews, permits and inspections) and logistical changes, including hoisting and elevating innovation.

It will be critical for Ontario’s economy that the residential construction industry remains vibrant and dynamic. It can. To do this, the spirit that saw us through the last few months will carry on.

This will mean maintaining, first and foremost, the new safety protocols. Discipline will be the order of the day. Second, clear communication with contractors, trades and government officials will be vital.

This will evolve using the latest technologies available and some yet to be developed. Each of us will need to have an attitude of, “How can we improve?” rather than, “Why we can’t.” To borrow my favourite storyline of all time, “Failure is not an option.”

This will mean continuing to construct homes for people to the highest standards with the commitment of all involved. It means having a project review, permitting and inspection system that supports this effort.

It also means having a streamlined planning and site-plan system to clear the path for new developments and, in particular, address the missing middle housing supply shortage. Herein will lie the solutions to improving housing affordability.

There will be advances in time-saving, off-site construction innovation which will, in turn, require more innovative hoisting and elevating technologies.

They will be needed to hoist components into place and move workers, materials and eventually residents efficiently and safely.

Innovative integrated design and supply chain management improvements will be implemented.

There will be critical changes to various touch-free elements in buildings. Many advances were already in the works pre-COVID, but the necessity to spur the economy will drive change at an accelerated pace.

New skills will be developed at all phases and training will have to be developed and introduced. In other words, things are no longer the same and won't be going forward.

But this can be a good thing. The shutdown has shown many that they can work from home if they want to. It has shown what can work with respect to online learning, and also what doesn't.

It has exposed our systemic flaws, including those antiquated paper-laden approvals and apprentice registration processes. Distancing will require it to change.

The situation is forcing questions about why we need to do things a certain way. The old line about that is, "The ways we always have will no longer pass muster."

Depending how one looks at these things will determine how they are addressed. If the opportunities and challenges to come are addressed in a positive way, we have shown we can move mountains.

And we must.

Residential construction pivoted rapidly to this challenge and we will continue to evolve this transformative process with our friends at the OHBA and BILD. New housing will be better than ever.

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