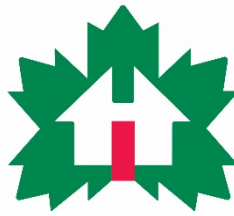


**Canadian
Home Builders'
Association**



Opening Remarks

Kevin Lee, CEO

Canadian Home Builders Association

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities (TRAN) Meeting 71

Tuesday, May 30, 2023

Subject: Adapting Infrastructure to Face Climate Change

A study focusing how to create communities that are more resilient and sustainable in the face of climate change (infrastructure and housing), including the implementation of more resilient infrastructure and building products.

Good day everyone and thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

CHBA is the voice of the residential construction industry in Canada, with more than 8,500 member companies from coast to coast. Our industry is responsible for more than 1.5 million jobs, \$107 billion in wages, and \$211 billion in economic activity.

Our members are the builders, developers, renovators, and all the supporting trades and services that build and renovate Canada's homes and communities from coast to coast. We share the concern and desire for resilient homes and communities, and have been actively engaged on this file for years.

With the climate change crisis upon us, we are also challenged with another crisis - housing affordability, and the associated dramatic lack of housing supply in Canada. Coordinated government action is needed to address these simultaneous crises of climate change and housing affordability and supply.

The Lytton fire, the Barrie tornado, flooding in many regions of Canada, and the Calgary hailstorm have all been chilling reminders that homes and buildings face challenges with extreme climate events.

When we see the damage from extreme weather events like these, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that building codes must be updated immediately. It is common that when crisis occurs, the first thing some people think is that we need to regulate. While regulation can be part of the toolbox, it needs to be thought through carefully, as there are other measures that should come first that may better address the problem, and in less costly fashion. Over regulation can quickly drive up costs when our housing crisis can't afford it. Furthermore, many effective measures to protect homes against extreme climate events are not related to the construction of individual housing units, but to things such as natural infrastructure upgrades, community emergency planning, and yard maintenance and landscaping. And houses need to be resistant to the risks relevant to their particular location. We also have 16 million existing housing units in Canada that need to be considered.

What we need right now are the right, proven, market-based solutions, and we need to ensure those are affordable, and if not, innovate to find cost-efficient solutions. It is also critical that regulation not be rushed without proper cross-disciplinary analysis. We don't want to create risk through unintended consequences. This is doubly true when it comes to municipalities who should not be implementing a hodgepodge of bylaws on construction and renovation with the best of intentions that can lead to other unintended problems.

To find the right solutions, CHBA has been working with other organizations to produce guidance for Canadians on resilience with respect to their homes. We have helped develop wildfire resistance guidelines, worked on CSA standards for flooding and wind resistance, and are continually engaged in the building code process where all the issues and building science need to come together in a complete house-as-a-system approach.

Through these activities we have learned there are things that can be done now, but that there is also much more work to do. As industry and governments, we need to de-risk and address the gaps in current solutions—such as how to manage risk during the construction process, and how to find solutions that are affordable for Canadians, remembering codes apply to building affordable and social housing too.

But most importantly, there is much that needs to be done at the infrastructure level first. We know how to make housing more resilient to extreme weather events, but if the infrastructure is not protecting homes from significant effects of these events first, the measures that can be applied to homes can be meaningless. For example, without forest management, protecting homes from wildfire may be futile. If there is no catch basin, flood protection measures such as installing backflow valves in basements will have limited effect.

Thinking beyond traditional core infrastructure like roads and bridges, public transit, and water systems, we also need to consider the electrical grid and energy system—resilient and sustainable communities need to be powered by resilient energy infrastructure. We also need to remove regulatory and technical barriers that currently hinder the installation of solar and energy storage solutions, for example.

We also need to consider communications infrastructure—this is important for aging in place and for working from home, which are growing trends that can contribute to creating resilient and sustainable communities.

We have two simultaneous crises—climate change, and housing affordability. For housing, we can make a real difference if we take aim with coordinated action on two key targets.

First and most importantly, we need to adapt municipal infrastructure to protect our homes and communities from the significant effects of extreme climate events. We also need to collect, analyze and make location-specific climate data available so that we can target resources toward communities facing urgent and critical risk. This will also ensure we bolster our construction for the right risks in the right places, and don't regulate in blanket form in areas that don't warrant the added costs.

Second, and with the regional data and variances embedded in the national guidelines, we need to promote consistent application of these at the municipal level to streamline resilient practice and reduce the friction and confusion created by inconsistent local rules. This can be done by first focusing resources on voluntary programs that will allow us to de-risk potential solutions, address the gaps, increase industry capacity, and build awareness among homebuyers and homeowners. In this way, we promote the implementation of cost-efficient solutions at scale, and codes and standards can follow if and as appropriate.

Thank you.