

WOOD SOLUTIONS IN MID-RISE CONSTRUCTION

For more than a decade, Ontario Wood *WORKS!* has been working diligently behind the scenes to advance the use of wood and wood products in commercial, institutional, and industrial construction projects by providing free technical guidance to design-build professionals. How? By connecting practitioners with wood industry suppliers and information, and by delivering presentations and educational opportunities to municipal and building officials, architects, engineers, builders, developers, and students.

Ultimately, through educational outreach and technical support, Wood *WORKS!* seeks to establish a wood “culture,” where wood is recognized as a sustainable and economical building material used for all types of construction.

Team members report that the technical wood information Wood *WORKS!* provides has a direct, positive impact on some projects, leading to wood use in applications where it might not have otherwise been used if the technical question had not been resolved satisfactorily.

By answering technical calls and disseminating the information the group has from sources like the CWC and FPInnovations, Wood *WORKS!* is helping practitioners increase not only their comfort and capacity for wood design, but also their consideration of environmental and socio-economic outcomes. And that translates into great news for the communities and the buildings.

In addition to responding to questions and helping resolve wood-related issues through the technical call service, Wood *WORKS!* also helps Ontario’s design professionals keep current with key developments in the wood industry. Wood *WORKS!* strives to provide information proactively through regular workshops, seminars, and other educational events, including the annual Wood Solutions Fair and wood design luncheon conferences.

For example, in advance of proposed changes to the Ontario Building Code, the group conducted a research study and completed a report on wood solutions in mid-rise construction.

“The valuable thing about this mid-rise information,” says Steven Street, a technical director with Wood *WORKS!* “is that it’s useful whether or not there are updates to the next edition of the building code; though, of course, we hope to see the proposed changes implemented.”

Explains Street: “With our current performance-based code, a designer can already go above four storeys in wood. He or she just has to show the design meets the same structural and safety requirements a building made of other materials would have to meet. Given the proven performance characteristics of wood and engineered wood products, this is not especially difficult. But, going through the process of proving equivalency does take more time.”

Updating the code to permit wood buildings up to six [storeys](#) in height is something Wood *WORKS!* believes is necessary in order to eliminate what it sees as an existing bias against wood products in current edition of the code. A prescriptive limit based on a rigid interpretation of combustible versus non-combustible materials stifles innovation. It unnecessarily limits the use of a sustainable, locally available material that has the potential to reduce construction costs and support the forest products sector – the second largest economic engine in Ontario.

Though there is widespread support in favour of raising the allowable height for wood buildings up to six storeys, as with any potential change, there is also some opposition. There are people who would prefer to see the height limit on wood

construction stay capped at four storeys.

Why? According to Street, “Not everyone can be a leader. Some people just naturally resist change and are unable to break outside of the comfort zone of doing ‘what has always been done.’ In other instances, opposition to the proposed code changes stems from a lack of knowledge, and that’s fine as long as a person is able to recognize this is his or her own limitation. What isn’t acceptable is continuing to support unnecessary restrictions on the people who have the capacity to innovate and devise new structural solutions that meet or exceed the public health and safety requirements of the code, regardless of the material used.”

This article is an [abridged](#) version of Wood WORKS! material [originally published in Sustainable Builder Magazine](#). Wood *WORKS!* is an industry led initiative of the Canadian Wood Council that promotes the use of wood and wood products in construction - providing free technical assistance. Contact Wood *WORKS!* for more information. Toll Free: 1-866-886-3574 or www.wood-works.org

The OWTFA is a member of Wood *WORKS!* [Ontario](#). The OWTFA represents the common interests of the truss industry in Ontario, including promoting the use of wood trusses in residential, commercial and agricultural structures. For more information please contact Mike Phillips, Executive Director of the Ontario Wood Truss Fabricators Association (OWTFA) at 416-235-0194 or www.owtfa.com