

## **NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION**

### **Presentation to Standing Committee**

#### **Bill 52: An Act to amend the Building Code Act 1992 with respect to the height of wood frame buildings**

Good morning.

My name is Iain Angus. I am a Councillor for the City of Thunder Bay and Vice President with the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association. I am pleased to have this opportunity to present NOMA's views on Bill 52, An Act to amend the Building Code Act 1992 with respect to the height of wood frame buildings.

NOMA represents the interests of 37 municipalities from Kenora and Rainy River in the west to Hornepayne and Wawa in the east. Our region is proud of its long and successful history in the forest industry – for decades, many of our communities relied on forestry as the main source of jobs and taxes. In recent years, the perfect storm that hit the forest industry has decimated these communities through mill closures, job losses and decreased tax bases.

Bill 52 presents an opportunity to help revive the struggling forest industry by amending the Building Code to facilitate greater use of wood in buildings by increasing the maximum height limit of wood frame buildings from four to six storeys. Creating demand for Ontario's wood products supports the forest industry – a key economic sector of the province. By increasing opportunities to build with wood from Ontario's sustainable managed forests, the proposed code changes support forest industry jobs and forest dependent communities.

This change will provide more design and cost options for developers and could help facilitate the construction of more mid-rise buildings as well as providing more intensive uses within existing neighbourhoods at a scale that contributes to transit supportive, pedestrian oriented mixed use neighbourhoods.

The addition of light wood-frame for mid rise construction will increase competitiveness in the Ontario construction industry. According to developers, architects and engineers, the key features of mid-rise light wood-frame structures that reduce construction cost include: lower labour and material costs, reduced construction time, improved quality through off-site fabrication, wider range of labour available, ease of running services and improved productivity levels. Some developers have speculated on wood offering up to a 20% discount on traditional construction costs.

Furthermore, we would like to take the opportunity to remind you that wood is the only renewable construction material. The expanded use of wood is good for the environment because it captures and stores carbon dioxide from the atmosphere that would be released back into the air if the trees are burned or decomposed. In addition, an increase in demand for wood will encourage further forestation and those tree seedlings will continue to capture carbon dioxide as they grow.

In the past 18 months, Thunder Bay has seen two significant projects utilize wood in their construction. The first is the Thunder Bay District Social Services Board, which recently constructed new headquarters that fully implemented the use of wood in construction as shown in the photos below.



The second project is at Confederation College which recently completed an expansion of one of their buildings to construct their Regional Education Alliance for Community Health (REACH) facility. The expanded building features a very impressive concourse area with three-storey high wood beams (photo below) and has been designated as a Canadian Wood council demonstration building. The College was committed to including a wood feature in their construction in recognition of the importance of forestry to our region.



Information provided by the Canadian Wood Council shows that for every 125 mid-rise structures of six storeys built in Ontario under the amended Building Code, the amount of wood used would sustain a mid-sized softwood lumber mill and approximately 200 direct mill and woodland jobs. Prior to the forest sector crisis, there were 11 sawmills in operation in Northwestern Ontario, 8 of those sawmills have now been permanently closed, one is operating and two remain idled indefinitely, waiting for the market to improve. There is no doubt that these proposed changes to the Ontario Building Code would result in increased demand for lumber products that we believe would allow these two idled sawmills in Northwestern Ontario to resume production, providing much needed jobs in our communities.

The business community is also supportive of this legislation. In 2010, NOMA forwarded its' resolution of support for the building code changes to the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce and the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce, both of which have passed resolutions in support. Furthermore, a similar resolution was also recently adopted by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce at its Annual meeting in St Catharines at the beginning of May. It is clear that these business organizations recognize the incredible value of a strong forest industry to the economy of our province.

As the Ontario economy continues to sputter, the changes proposed to the Ontario Building Code in Bill 52 would provide an economic boost by opening new markets in Ontario. We encourage the Committee and all Members of the Ontario Legislature to support this Bill and in so doing support the Ontario forest industry.

Thank you,