



Ontario Association of Architects

April 12, 2016

## Open Letter: Bird-Friendly Design

On the occasion of Bird Impact Reduction Day, the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) wishes to add its voice to the current conversations surrounding bird-friendly design in Ontario.

As the self-regulating body of Ontario's architects, the OAA is dedicated to promoting and increasing the knowledge, skill and proficiency of its members, and to administering the *Architects Act* in order that the public interest may be served and protected. Bird-friendly design strategies are a valuable part of any design and our members play an important role in minimizing the impact of buildings on wildlife.

According to the Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), the estimated number of migrating birds killed in North America annually in collisions with buildings ranges from 100 million to 1 billion birds. Collisions with buildings are a leading cause of death of migratory birds, second only to habitat loss. More recently, the deaths of over 30 birds caused by collisions against an elevated second floor walkway at Ottawa City Hall has brought the importance of bird-friendly design strategies to public attention.

Wildlife collisions with buildings are caused by a numerous factors including site specific conditions, landscaping, habitat destruction, glazing design, building illumination, among other factors. Making informed design decisions can have significant impact on mitigating bird collisions; architects, landscape architects, developers, clients and users all play a role in helping reduce the negative effects of these factors on wildlife.

We have witnessed in the past few years significant progress towards bird-friendly design strategies, including the development of bird-friendly design guidelines and policies in individual cities such as the City of Markham and the City of Toronto. However, we believe it is important to work with all stakeholders and experts, including architects, to produce a single province-wide standard for bird-friendly design which could be incorporated into the Ontario Building Code, ensuring efficacy, feasibility and consistency across the province.

In addition, while building code changes will ensure bird-friendly design standards are followed in new buildings and those undergoing significant renovation, it is equally important to address existing buildings with a high rate of bird collisions. In these cases we must go beyond building code requirements by taking retroactive measures to mitigate these collisions and the loss of wildlife.

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It is also important to emphasize the significance of supporting ongoing research on this topic, including the development and identification of design strategies and products that are truly effective in reducing wildlife collisions. Whether it is design elements such as glazing design or user-based factors such as artificial light use, we must continue to explore ways to reduce the negative impact of buildings. Work done by existing advocacy groups such as FLAP are an important resource as we move towards wildlife-friendly design, and we encourage our members and the public to learn more about this topic.

The existing research and strategies must also be coupled with a well-considered public education strategy to ensure architects and the public are aware of the tools and strategies available. Public education must also ensure clients have an understanding of cost implications of the different solutions, ensuring budgets and expectations are clear from the beginning. With informed architects, landscape architects, developers, clients, and users, we can create a long lasting culture of change.

As always, the OAA remains committed to working with the Province, cities, and different stakeholder groups on issues relating to built form, including the development of wildlife-friendly design. Through our Sustainable Built Environment Committee (SBEC), we will continue to examine the situation and work with allied organizations in increasing the knowledge, skill and proficiency of our members on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toon Dreessen', with a large, sweeping flourish above the name.

Toon Dreessen, Architect  
OAA, FRAIC, AIA, LEED AP  
President