

Chair's Report for AGM June 22, 2024

Through Education and Advocacy, to encourage the conservation and reuse of structures, districts and landscapes of architectural, historic and cultural significance, to inspire and benefit Ontarians.

This is my last Chair's Report as I will soon be stepping down to the position of Past Chair. I want to thank the Board and the Staff namely Will Coukell without whom I could never have done this job, Tai So, Alex McKinnon, Adrian Lancashire and Marie May.

2018-2022 Strategic Plan Goals

The Strategic Directions and Key Priorities operationalize Architectural Conservancy Ontario's mission and as such should serve as a foundation for planning for the foreseeable future.

Responsible Financial Reporting

During 2023 I began the second year of my term in June at the last AGM. I had agreed to do a third term until June 2024. 2023 therefore was my second full year as fiscally our year runs from January until December. I want to congratulate the Branches along with Tai So, our Branch Coordinator, Will Coukell, COO and Eben Rawluk, Treasurer on the completion of the Audit. Our bookkeeper Marie May is very instrumental in this process. Hence this AGM is being held in June and we are thus financially compliant with CRA regulations. Finally, thank you to the Branches for your work in getting the financials completed for this AGM so that the auditors can more easily do their work.

Scalable Long Term Development and Fundraising

One of our ongoing challenges is the future financial viability of the organization. Very late in 2023 we hired a new Development Coordinator who would manage fundraising for the organization. **As part of the Strategic Plan process that we are currently undertaking as well as the Working Group established in April 2024, this strategic direction will be front and centre in our discussions. More about this later in the report.**

Well Stewarded Branch Development

Over the course of my term, one of my goals was to work with Branches so that there was more of a relationship between Branches and the Board. Consequently, I began a Branch newsletter which I have endeavoured to publish after each Board and/or Executive meeting. This newsletter reaches out to all of the members of the Branch Boards. In talking to each of the Branch Chairs/ Branch representatives, I have come to learn that they have been receiving them and have appreciated the updates on Board activities. Connecting the 10 Committees of the Board who do work on behalf of the

organization with the 16 Branches who represent the organization geographically was and has been a challenge. I have continued to ask the branches to invite me to their meetings and/or events and I will attend where possible.

Engaging Communications: Connect with Membership; Tell our story; Promote the value of What We Do

As was mentioned, relationships with the Branches are important for the continued success of the organization. An organization that does not work cooperatively and collaboratively with its parts cannot function. And this works both ways. As Chair, I have continued to stress that Branch Boards share information from the organization with their members which continues to be a challenge. If the grassroots does not see value in the work of the Board, then our organization cannot be as strong as it should. The work of the ACO should therefore filter into the communities that the Boards serve. Hence it is very important that the members of the Branch Boards share information with their membership who may or may not check out the website frequently or read Acorn in a Nutshell. We had an interruption in the production of Acorn in 2023 that continued into 2024. We are in the process now of restarting that publication.

I have had the opportunity this past year to speak to communities where there are no ACO Branches to assist with their Heritage concerns and to speak of the role of ACO. As one example, I spoke to the Millbrook Historical Society to bring the concept of Keep, Fix, Reuse to their community as they work to establish a Heritage Conservation District in the wake of Bill 23.

Powerful Advocating with Government and Other Bodies

Heritage is under attack in Ontario. Under the misdirected notion of Heritage being an impediment to housing and even affordable housing, legislation was introduced late in 2022. This Act known as Bill 23 was the manifestation of concerns raised the year before in the Housing Affordability Task Force. Working along with the Policy Committee and the Government and Community Relations committees of ACO to produce media releases, responses to the ERO and letters to Ministers and MPP's, kept all of us very busy to advocate on behalf of not only ACO members but all Ontarians who care about our province's history and heritage.

Apart from all of the communication mentioned above, I, along with many other ACO members attended the conference in London in 2023 and Gravenhurst in 2024 and attended MPP Day at Queen's Park in both 2023 and 2024. We have also reached out to staff members who work in the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing along with Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

As the years pass by, our efforts for MPP Day have continued to be more successful with more MPP's involved and more visiting us in the reception that we hold at Queen's Park on MPP Day in Heritage Week. This is money well spent in my opinion. Organized by the staff of ACO and attended by staff as well as

numerous ACO volunteers, this program organized by the ACO Board members and the Policy and Government and Community Relations Committees has resulted in ACO having a much higher profile in the Political world of Queen's Park as well as the media especially the major outlets such as the Toronto Star, Globe & Mail and CBC. The beneficiaries of this work are the branches and their communities as well as communities throughout Ontario.

Many of ACO's success stories have occurred outside of Branches. In 2024, the ACO Board successfully convinced the Township of King to overturn a de designation motion of a depression era Community Hall. The Board is often contacted by communities where there is no ACO branch to assist with heritage concerns. This is just one example.

Operational and Organization Review Follow-up

The previous Strategic Plan was for 2017-2022 and we are organizing by the end of 2023 to start the planning for updating this Plan.

Embracing Diverse Groups through Outreach

Although it continues to be a goal that we have not lost sight of, this area continued to be a challenge. Our organization has attracted a few members from diverse communities to its committees and Branches. In advocating for changes to Bill 23, we have continually pointed out that this Bill discriminates against LGBTQ2S+ and BIPOC communities. An ongoing concern is also diversity in age and we would hope to continue to work to gain Next Gen members provincially and in the Branches.

Going Forward:

With the aforementioned achievements and challenges in mind, we began the fiscal year of 2024, with the following goals:

1. Working with Government

It is somewhat obvious that a great deal of work is being done in this area and that is continuing. A new challenge has presented itself in the form of a new Provincial Planning Statement which again has decreased protections for heritage landscapes.

The Ontario Science Centre in Don Mills is also now under threat of demolition. I shall be continuing to advocate for its retention on the current site and with renewed programming and renovation to the facility. Ontario Place has now entered another phase in which the government has recently passed Bill 154, the New Deal for Toronto Act which appears to give the government carte blanche to do whatever they deem necessary to proceed with these egregious plans. **ACO will continue to work with other interested parties to fight these plans. ACO has had one success in 2024 which is that the extension of the deadline for listed properties that we requested on MPP Day and**

subsequently with MPPs was granted by the government. This is why the work of ACO is very important and should be supported both financially and by involvement of all members. Political action is even more important today than it was in the past. Working within your constituency to advocate with your MPP for Heritage is even more necessary. The success of the listings extension campaign is evidence of that.

2. Scalable Long Term Development and Fundraising

We can see from the Financial Reports that our finances are a concern. We are using up some of our principal assets which were donated for the organization to do the excellent work that we have seen. As a result of a motion of the Board Meeting of April 2024, we have established a working group to look at expenses and report back to the Board by October of this year. The working group will be taking a look at reducing costs for the provincial office and finding ways to fund those necessary expenses. That group has been formed and we are in the process of organizing our meeting schedule.

3. Embracing Diverse Groups Through Outreach

Heritage conservation is no longer focussed on just settler landscapes. We need to learn more and be more inviting to Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+ and immigrant groups. We need to reach out to these groups so that they can see that by working together, more can be accomplished. The Strategic Plan under development to be made available to the Board and Membership before the end of 2024 will have more detailed plans on this issue.

4. Engaging Communications and Well Stewarded Branch Development

It continues to be a goal to engage with the membership and to enlarge the membership. Many of the branches have seen their membership dwindle throughout Covid and it is imperative that all branches resolve to regain members. Some branches are involved in outreach in new communities within their boundaries. Others are looking to reach out to younger members and are developing social media strategies. Branches should resolve to find activities beyond just advocating to prevent demolition but to celebrate the heritage they have. This can be done by engaging with their communities such as in Doors Open Events, Jane's Walks, and House Tours etc. In so doing, new members may be attracted to the branch, thus lightening the load for all of us who are working so hard in these difficult times for heritage.

I continue to have concerns over the lack of relationship between Board initiatives and the membership. Last year's MPP day had 20+ ACO members participate. Every branch has an MPP and it should be important to all branch members that someone from the branch participate on that day, either in person or virtually. Being a member of ACO should not be just about what goes on in your bubble. The broader society needs all of us

to be engaged. ACO needs you to be engaged in the organization both financially as well as through involvement. Only in this way can ACO continue onto 100 years of work.

Gaining funding and interacting to celebrate the work we do at Awards Night is important to the reputation and viability of the organization. Again there was not a lot of attendance for that evening. Please encourage all members in your Branch to attend this very important ACO event .And please nominate individuals in your communities for Awards when they have participated in significant heritage preservation projects and events.

Conclusion:

2023 presented a lot of challenges and 2024 continues to do so. Thank you to all ACO members for the work that you do to protect heritage. Only by having as much of us working together for the same goals, can we fight the good fight and protect what we know to be important in our province.