Building Thriving Communities For All Canadians

Toward an Architecture Policy for Canada

Rise

SHARE YOUR VOICE FOR ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA

This project is a partnership of the following organizations:

ROAC

REGULATORY ORGANIZATIONS
OF ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA
REGROUPEMENT DES ORDRES
D'ARCHITECTES DU CANADA

Architects' Association of New Brunswick
Association des architectes du Nouveau-Brunswick

Architects Association of Prince Edward Island

Architectural Institute of British Columbia

Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Architects

Nova Scotia Association of Architects

Northwest Territories Association of Architects

Ontario Association of Architects

Saskatchewan Association of Architects

The Alberta Association of Architects

Canadian Council of University Schools of Architecture
Conseil Canadien des Écoles Universitaires d'Architecture

Royal Architectural Institute of Canada
Institut royal d'architecture du Canada

Building Thriving Communities For All Canadians

A Vision Toward an Architecture Policy for Canada

Any architecture policy for Canada must respect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; advance the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada; and acknowledge renewed commitments to nation-to-nation relations between Canada and First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

Rise For Architecture forums and consultation processes aim to include meaningful dialogue with Indigenous peoples to gain knowledge of their cultural values; to help sustain their self-determined practices and design principles; and to develop better informed and more effective policies and programs for Canadians.

This initiative values the presence, livelihood and well-being of Canada's diverse Indigenous peoples. Indigenous rights, values and design principles are foundational priorities, underpinning and traversing the four themes: Place, People, Prosperity and Potential.

Vision of Value

All Canadians deserve healthy, thriving, and vibrant communities that support their lives and ambitions. The built environment plays a key role in supporting communities of all sizes.

Architecture that shapes the built environment affects all of us all the time, yet people rarely consider the important impact it has on their everyday life. Architecture matters on many levels. It expresses who we are as a society and where we have come from, shaping diverse cultures and values. Architecture reflects not only the past and present, but also ambitions for the future. Its beauty inspires us, while its utility supports and enriches daily life.

Canadian communities are facing many serious challenges implicating the built environment, including housing affordability, public health and safety, rapid urbanization, economic and social resilience, as well as the need to adapt to the climate change crisis. The need for long-term policies to create meaningful and resilient environments has never been more important.
Now is the time for urban and architectural design to support sustainable development, social justice and the goals of truth and reconciliation. What we build, and how we build it, can be a powerful agent for positive, long-term social change.

This document sets out a framework for all Canadians to become involved in a public conversation about the key role design plays in improving the quality of the built environment and lives of Canadians. It describes the issues through four overarching themes (People, Place, Prosperity and Potential) and poses several important questions

to stimulate discussion. This vision document and a national, public conversation is led by a volunteer committee of educators, advocates, regulators, and architects in support of a vibrant future for Canada's communities.

Public conversations will give Canadians a voice in shaping built environment policies and empower the public to participate in the design process. The process will explore how a well-designed built environment can cultivate community well-being, build identity, express culture, stimulate the economy, respect the planet, respond to climate change, foster resiliency, lift the human spirit and fuel the imagination.

The results of these conversations will support an aspirational vision for building thriving communities for all Canadians.

This vision will provide guidance to politicians, professionals, and the public on how to achieve more sustainable, just, and inspiring communities, while contributing to economic prosperity and civic pride. This vision will also inspire present and future generations of citizens and city-builders to improve the built environment, strengthening the ecological, social, cultural, and economic well-being of our communities.

Knowing the impact of architecture, and understanding how and why it matters is crucial to achieving positive social outcomes shaped by the built environment. **This document provides a framework to orient public conversations around four themes: Place, People, Prosperity, and Potential.**

Underlying these four themes and their key aspects is the need to address the critical challenge of the climate change emergency and to support the presence, livelihood, and well-being of diverse Indigenous peoples across this land.

Architecture + PLACE

Examines the impact on identity and cultural vitality from the perspective of:

- Context and Scale.
- Land and Resources.
- Cultural Heritage and Vitality.
- Forging Community.

Architecture + PROSPERITY

Looks at the impact on communities of all kinds, including:

- Environmental Stewardship.
- Sustainable Urbanism.
- Equitable Economic Development.
- Adaptation and Resilience.

Architecture + PEOPLE

Explores the impact on the well-being of individuals and groups by considering:

- Health and Happiness.
- Memory and Meaning.
- Dignity, Inclusion, and Social Justice.
- Engagement, Empowerment, and Reconciliation.

Architecture + POTENTIAL

Considers the impact on the future and Canada's place in the world in terms of:

- Architecture as a Creative Industry.
- Creative Collaboration.
- Research and Innovation.
- Education and the Future of Architecture.

Architecture + Place

Canada covers a vast and varied landscape with both common characteristics and unique regional differences. "Place" is defined by interdependent conditions such as topography, climate, habitats, Indigenous tradition, infra-structure, regional history, laws and customs, and cultural heritage. This requires sympathetic and creative design practices.

This theme considers architecture's impact on individual and collective identity. It focuses on the importance of the land on which a project is built and investigates the importance of respecting its unique geographic and cultural characteristics.

CONTEXT AND SCALE

Good architecture enhances people's connection with place. Regardless of a community's size and location, developing appropriate architecture requires listening to locals, learning from regional circumstances, and collaborating with other professionals in the creation of a quality built environment. This is as equally true for dense urban metropolises and their diverse neighbourhoods as it is for sparsely populated towns and remote settlements.
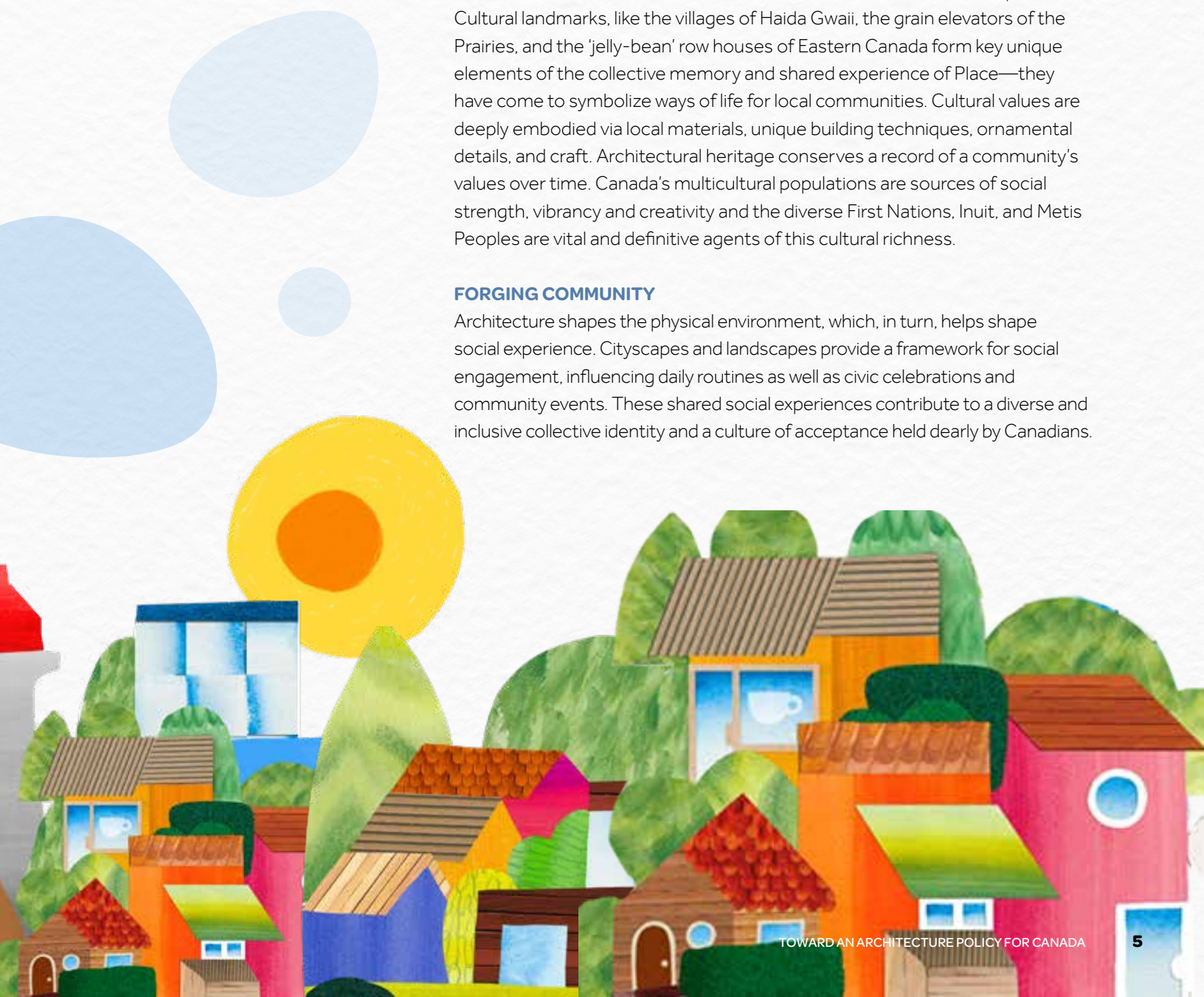
LAND AND RESOURCES

Canada covers an awe-inspiringly vast, varied, and vulnerable terrain, rich with natural resources crucial for wildlife, biodiversity, sustainable ways of life, and industry. The Canadian landscape is also saturated with spiritual significance and long history of use by Indigenous Peoples. Designing in relation to place involves creative responses to inspiring geography and local materials, with a deep respect for natural and human ecosystems.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Architecture reflects Canadian culture and is a medium of artistic expression. Cultural landmarks, like the villages of Haida Gwaii, the grain elevators of the Prairies, and the 'jelly-bean' row houses of Eastern Canada form key unique elements of the collective memory and shared experience of Place—they have come to symbolize ways of life for local communities. Cultural values are deeply embodied via local materials, unique building techniques, ornamental details, and craft. Architectural heritage conserves a record of a community's values over time. Canada's multicultural populations are sources of social strength, vibrancy and creativity and the diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples are vital and definitive agents of this cultural richness.

FORGING COMMUNITY

Architecture shapes the physical environment, which, in turn, helps shape social experience. Cityscapes and landscapes provide a framework for social engagement, influencing daily routines as well as civic celebrations and community events. These shared social experiences contribute to a diverse and inclusive collective identity and a culture of acceptance held dearly by Canadians.

Architecture + People

Architecture can enhance our lives on many levels, potentially helping Canadians have enjoyable, engaging, and meaningful lives. Architecture provides safe and suitable settings in which people live, work, and play; it shapes daily life in ways that foster social cohesion and cultural vitality, inspires personal and collective imagination, and stimulates wonder and respect for the complex world we share and must sustain.

HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

The quality of architecture is linked to the quality of life. Well-designed environments foster physical and psychological health. Spaces with access to daylight, fresh air, and pleasant views not only improve productivity and reduce illness, but also enhance emotional and spiritual well-being.

MEMORY AND MEANING

What we build says something about how we live, what we value, and who we are, both individually and as a society. Cultural institutions such as theatres, libraries, museums, schools, sports facilities, government buildings, and places of worship become symbols of shared values. Everyday places like favourite markets, cafés, streets, and parks form meaningful settings for cherished experiences and preserve our cultural memory.

DIGNITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Architecture affects our sense of dignity and intersects with issues of human rights. Our personal and cultural identities intertwine with where we live, learn, work, and play. The built environment can help people feel fulfilled and hopeful or, conversely, depressed and demoralized. Good design accommodates everyone with dignity, enabling equal access and a sense of belonging. Issues like poverty and prejudice will never be solved by architecture alone, but good design can enhance social equity and foster pride and community.

ENGAGEMENT, EMPOWERMENT, AND RECONCILIATION

People possess the power to influence the quality and direction of design in their communities. Informed participation by affected citizens can compel appropriate action and accountability, and lead to better built environments. By fostering genuine inclusion and mutual understanding, participatory design processes can become transformative vehicles of social agency and reconciliation. Listening, honesty, and openness are essential Indigenous principles that are crucial to any ethical planning and design process.
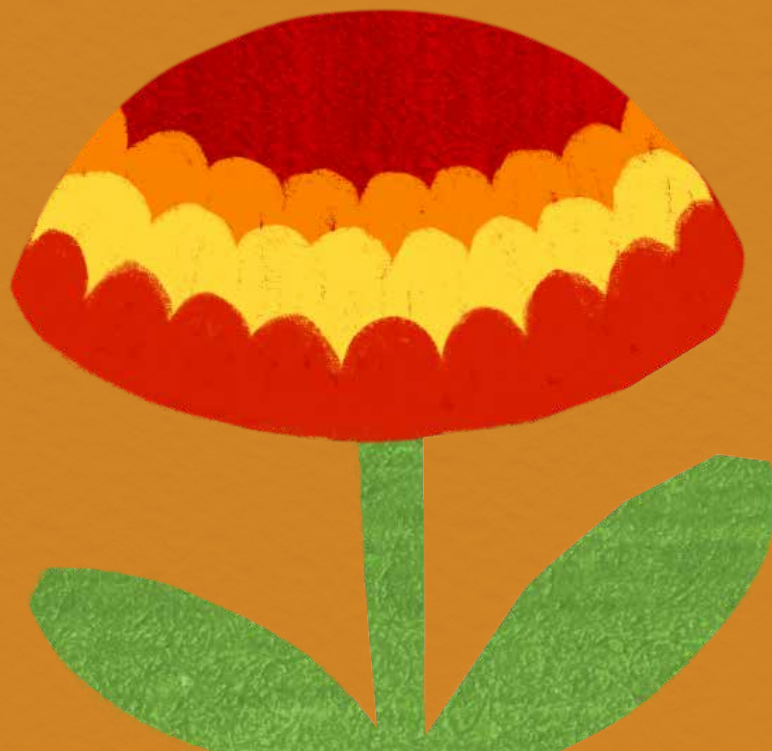
Architecture + Prosperity

A well-designed, resilient, and sustainable built environment enhances society's ability to face the challenges of the 21st century. Human-induced climate change is causing extreme weather events with more frequency, threatening natural ecosystems and communities. Irresponsible resource extraction is causing environmental damage and social upheaval.

Innovative and green technologies are not enough. A prosperous and resilient Canada also needs political will and public care for the collective well-being of our society and the planet.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Architecture affects the planet's health. Energy and water use in buildings and the waste generated in construction have significant impacts. Responsible architectural design offers long-lasting benefits for human health.

Canada has the potential to lead the world in achieving sustainability targets and to advance research on environmentally responsible building materials, techniques, and systems.

SUSTAINABLE URBANISM

Irresponsible urban sprawl is not sustainable. Cities must not simply become larger, but rather develop through planning and design strategies that consider appropriate density, diversity, and ways to enhance the quality of life. Sustainable communities require optimized infrastructure, movement systems, and water supply. Walkable developments and affordable housing with access to public space, civic institutions, schools, and social services forge healthy communities. A holistic approach to urban development, with environmental and social goals, is both necessary and urgent.
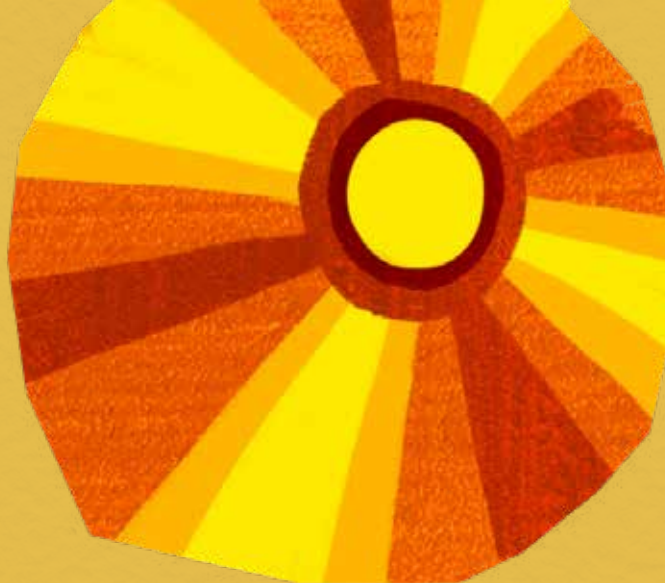
EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Architecture can act as a catalyst for economic prosperity. Investing in building design and city planning generates jobs in diverse sectors with long-term benefits. Well-designed built environments can have reverberating economic benefits for energy production, healthcare, housing, and public safety. Strategic investments can stimulate private enterprise, job growth, and community prosperity. Demonstration projects can prove the positive effects of sustainable technologies, revitalize neighbourhoods, promote tourism, and inspire further research and innovation.

ADAPTATION

Architecture creates the physical framework that becomes part of our social and economic culture for generations. Designers must consider the resiliency of new buildings over time to create environments that add to our social well-being. Creatively adapting existing infrastructure to new uses preserves the cultural memory of our communities. Encouraging adaptive reuse requires changing building practices and cultural attitudes toward older buildings. It challenges designers and the public to recognize the history of our built environment.

Architecture + Potential

This theme considers the implications of the future for Canadian architecture and its place in the world. A public conversation about this will inform a better understanding of current, emerging, and future needs and create a renewed vision of the role architecture can play in Canadian society.

Canadian architectural design and research is internationally respected. Innovation and empathy for people and the land can be strengthened by strong support for applied and academic research.

Canada is already becoming a leader in the areas of wood building technologies, environmental stewardship, sustainable urbanism, and architecture in support of human rights, place-making, and community-building. Building up this for the future will help ensure that Canada continues to contribute to global architectural excellence, attract world-leading researchers, instilling local pride while inspiring future generations of Canadians.
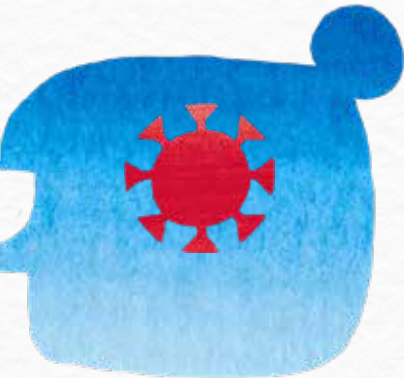
ARCHITECTURE AS A CREATIVE INDUSTRY

A creative Canada needs invigorating architecture. Architecture is the enduring infrastructure that supports other modes of cultural production, enabling diverse arts to thrive. Buildings and cities can be designed as creative hubs, encouraging innovation and collaboration. The built environment is itself a repository of creativity, with capacity to teach the history of creative building solutions and inspire new design approaches. Investment in digital industries and other creative media must be matched with support for innovation in the design of physical settings where creativity is fostered.

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Architectural design requires creative collaboration. Architecture routinely confronts complex circumstances and multi-faceted problems for which there is no single answer or obvious method of proceeding. Designing communities requires unique skills in various means of visual and verbal communication, and always working with and for others. Responding to the challenges of our time in an era of increased specialization requires the capability to comprehensively grasp and compellingly represent overarching intentions and long-term impacts in view of the common good.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Architectural design is inherently a multi-disciplinary research enterprise. Each new building is a unique invention, created for a specific place and users. At the same time, design entails learning from past successes and mistakes, often adapting conventions to new circumstances with new approaches or innovative technologies.

Architecture depends on understanding natural laws and human customs that have changed remarkably little over time. Architectural research spans many fields—engineering, natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts among them—and incorporates methods and findings from diverse disciplines, yielding benefits like direct research funding in the humanities, sciences, and engineering.

EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF ARCHITECTURE

Architecture schools are uniquely positioned to support visionary, experimental, and controversial design research that benefits society by fostering creative innovation. Mixing enthusiastic experts with open-minded youth, academic environments balance real-world challenges with creative license, and offer the freedom to challenge conventional thinking and historical perspective.

Architecture schools have the potential to not only educate the next generation of capable design professionals, but also to discover new possibilities for the discipline. These schools can become the testing grounds for holistically rethinking how to implement sustainable, just, and inspiring environments.

What Is The Way Forward?

These four themes raise a series of challenges for all those who participate in the creation of the built environment—government, public and private building owners, developers, designers, constructors, and individuals in society alike.

THE PUBLIC

The desired outcomes for Place, People, Prosperity, and Potential will be more likely if the public is able to contribute effectively through conversations about the importance of the built environment.

POLICY MAKERS

Relevant and informed policies establish the public interest objectives for the built environment.

BUILDING OWNERS & OCCUPANTS

Whether in the public or private sector, owners and occupants establish the constraints and objectives for every project. They all benefit from a balanced consideration of the long-term economic, social, and environmental value of any investment in the built environment.

THE PROFESSIONS

The design and delivery of the built environment requires strong leadership and collaboration between a variety of uniquely skilled professionals and industry partners operating in a rapidly changing context.
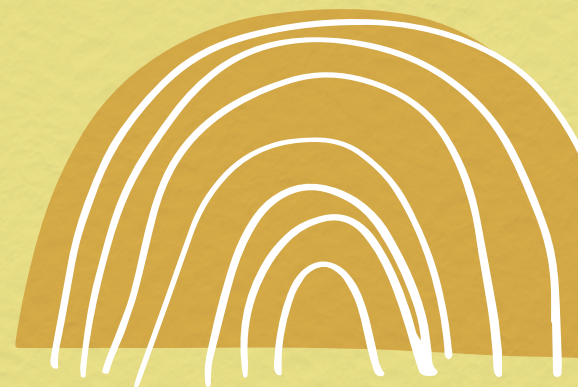
The Key Questions

To help respond to these challenges, we are asking you to consider and discuss several key questions relating to Place, People, Prosperity, and Potential.

How does architecture affect your daily life?

- What do you like about the buildings and public spaces around you?
- What would you change?
- What development projects are you worried about and why?
- What development projects excite you and why?

If you were "Minister of Architecture", what would you do to...

- improve the quality of buildings' aesthetics, functionality, and durability?
- reduce the ecological footprint of buildings?
- better guide project and building owners?
- preserve and enhance the heritage of the built environment and landscapes?
- improve land-use planning?
- consider the opinion of users and inhabitants?

Rise

SHARE YOUR VOICE FOR
ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA

The design and quality of the built environment makes a difference.
The answers to the questions asked here will help create a new partnership between Canadians and those who design and build the places in which they live, work, and play.

Bring your lived experience to this conversation.
Use your voice to help shape more sustainable, just,
and inspiring communities across Canada.

Your lived experiences and resulting conversation, will help define how the design and construction of the environment you live in contributes to the environmental, social, cultural and the well-being of all Canadians. Through dialogue with each other, collectively we can create an Architecture Policy for Canada that will inspire and guide all who contribute to this aspect of the built environment.

Do Your Part: Rise For Architecture!