



SPECIAL FEATURE

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Residential

RESCON wants to continue to “get the red out”

IAN HARVEY
CORRESPONDENT

Looking into his crystal ball for 2018 and beyond, Richard Lyall mostly sees red — as in red tape. As president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) he’s been seeing a lot of red tape and working to cut through it for a couple years now and says there’s no question the same theme will continue through the next year.

The good news, though, he says, is that they’re getting both provincial and municipal governments’ attention and support.

With a steering committee in place and discussions underway about a pilot project to prove the value of streamlining the development approvals process through digital technology, he’s more than hopeful of a breakthrough.

“We’ve made tremendous progress on this issue and

brought in Michael De Linton and he’s making a lot of connections with the right people,” says Lyall.

“We have approval on a task force around this and three working groups leading up to some reports in May. We’re nudging them (government) along so it doesn’t get lost.”

The need is palpable. While Toronto has moved to 54th from 57th out of 190 places in the world in ranking of development pace, it still has a long way to go.

While there was some suggestions in Toronto’s mainstream media that some of the bottlenecks in development were the result of land banking, Lyall says the biggest issue holding back supply remains red tape and the duplication of approvals process.

“Yes, developers bank land, that’s not news,” he says.

“They’ve always done that because, as a developer told me, some of their projects have taken 22 years to get built.”

Economic Snapshot

The outlook for Germany, the hottest economy in the G7, is bright into 2019



John Clinkard

It appears the analysts who in late 2016 were projecting the world economy was doomed to exhibit weak growth in perpetuity were wrong. One of the clearest illustrations of this mistaken view is performance by the German economy over the past year.

After posting a gain of 1.9% in 2016, the largest economy in the European Union grew by 2.5% in 2017. This increase, a seven-year high, was well ahead of the consensus estimate of 1.5% to 2% and just behind Canada, which exhibited the fastest growth (3%)

among the G7 group of major developed countries.

While Germany’s growth in 2017 was broad-based, two sectors exhibited significant strength. First, driven by the vigorous growth of the global economy (discussed in Snapshot #4 and more recently by the OECD), the total value of German exports increased by 6.3% y/y following a very small gain of 0.9% y/y in 2016.

Across major commodity groups, the largest gains occurred in sales of motor vehicles, machinery and equipment, electric equipment and computer, electronic and optical products. By region, 9% of German exports are destined for the U.S., followed by 8% to France, 7% each to China, the UK and the Netherlands and 5% each to Italy, Austria and Poland.

Given that the U.S. is a market for just 5% of Germany’s steel exports, the self-destructive steel tariffs recently announced by the U.S. administration appear unlikely to have a significant impact on the German economy in the near term.

In December, new orders for manufacturing rose by 3.8% m/m largely due to an 11.8% jump in orders from countries within the euro area plus a 2.8% rise in orders from non-euro countries. Against the positive outlook for the global economy, exports of manufactured goods, especially durables, should continue to make a major contribution to the growth of the German economy through 2018 and into 2019.

As a result of the rapid acceleration in exports of manufactured goods and a concomitant rise in industrial capacity utilization to a ten-year high of 87%, business non-residential investment posted a gain of 4.4% in 2017, its strongest showing since 2014. Moreover, in light of the above-noted very strong rise in manufacturing orders, investment will likely continue to make a significant positive contribution to growth over the course of 2018.

While the overall outlook for investment remains positive, a recent easing in business confidence, a growing shortage of qualified workers, and the appreciation of the euro suggest that firms’ investment plans will moderate in the second half of the year.

The strong pattern of investment and the concomitant growth of industrial production boosted total employment by +1.5% y/y in 2017. This increase, the largest since 2007, was mostly due to strength in private sector hiring, and it caused

Germany’s unemployment rate to decline from 4% to 3.6% over the past twelve months. This combination of sustained growth of employment and a 2.7% rise in wage rates caused private consumer spending to accelerate from 1.9% y/y in 2016 to 2.3% in 2017.

The recent positive pattern of exports, business investment and consumer spending has been accompanied by very strong housing demand in most of Germany’s major metro areas. In a recent analysis of the housing market, Deutsche Bank noted that the current real estate cycle which started in 2009 shows no signs of cooling. Over the past eight years, house prices and rents in Germany’s major metro areas have increased by 60% to 90%. Further, the combination of strong growth of employment and positive net immigration have severely depressed rental vacancy rates. Looking forward, the positive outlook for employment, persisting relatively low interest rates and sustained immigration should cause housing demand to remain strong and maintain upward pressure on both house prices and rents well into 2019.

The Germany economy appears likely to expand at or close to the same rate in 2018 as it did in 2017. However, with an unemployment rate at 3.6%, the lowest it has been since 1981, and the capacity utilization rate at 87.9%, just slightly below its record high (88.7%), the economy is operating at an unsustainably rapid pace and it will probably moderate in the second half of this year or early in 2019. This prospect for a more moderate, sustainable rate of growth in the range of 1.5% to 2.5% is based on a consensus assessment.

John Clinkard has over 35 years’ experience as an economist in international, national and regional research and analysis with leading financial institutions and media outlets in Canada.

“There are something like 45 agencies or ministries which have a role in decision-making,”

Richard Lyall
Residential Construction Council of Ontario

Also, developers don’t ramp up office staff to get the maximum numbers of projects through in a given year. They prefer a steady stream of projects moving through at a sustainable rate with few bottlenecks and delays. Projects which could be delayed tend to get put on the backburner to allow more viable developments to move through.

The big factor holding back the supply chain of housing, which in turn, would keep home prices in check is rooted in the approvals process, he says.

“Here, there are something like 45 agencies or ministries which have a role in decision-making,” he says.

“Other jurisdictions have nothing like that. This is why we want to shift to digital. Digital provides comparative data so we can start to look at the data and ask: why does it take five times longer to get an approval in this jurisdiction compared to this other jurisdiction?”

Also on the radar for RESCON through 2018 is the growing demand for taller wood frames multi-unit buildings.

“The problem now is that with past six storey wood you’re into mass timbers and specialty pieces,” he says.

“We just don’t have the supply but we’re working with the industry to resolve that. Once we do we’ll start to see more pressure for taller wood-framed structures.”

Other issues include bolstering the skilled trades’ apprenticeship programs to ensure there are enough workers to supply the construction industry.

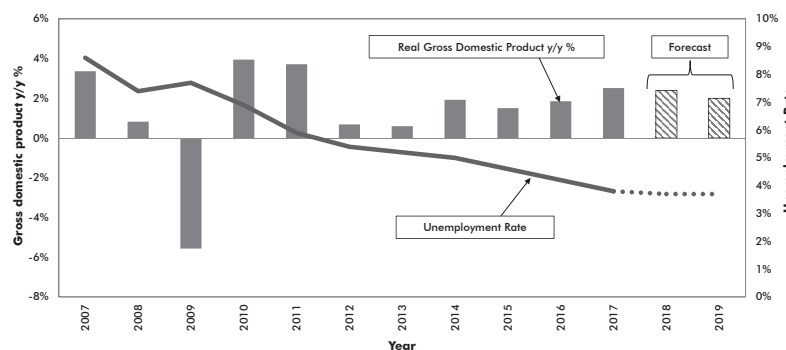
“It used to be that parents wanted their kids to go to university and become doctors and lawyers,” he says.

“That’s changing and people are now seeing construction trades as viable career paths with good jobs and earning potential for their kids. It’s become technology heavy, working with digital plans, BIM and lasers and it’s something many young people can adapt to. We have some programs in schools but we really need to get the kids looking at construction as a career much earlier, even earlier than high school.”

Panel fabrication will also continue to grow as an option for multi-storey projects, he says and that too will mean jobs and growth.

It may cost a little more but in the big picture it means less wastage, higher quality, faster completion, less theft and better health and safety management.

Germany: Real Gross Domestic Product y/y % vs Unemployment Rate



Data Source: Deutsche Bundesbank, Federal Statistical Office Wiesbaden.
Chart: ConstructConnect — CanaData.



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Public Works

Volunteer power drives the work of OPWA

DAN O'REILLY
CORRESPONDENT

Keeping the spotlight on the need and benefits of public works investment is the objective of the Ontario Public Works Association (OPWA).

Comprised of more than 600 members in both the public and private sectors, the OPWA is a not-for-profit organization which works to enhance the state of infrastructure in the province.

A chapter of the American Public Works Association which has over 30,000 members across the United States and Canada, OPWA's mission statement is to "support those who operate, improve and maintain public works and infrastructure through advocacy, education and member engagement".

That's not an easy task. With the exception of a part-time executive director, the OPWA is an almost exclusively volunteer-managed organization overseen by a 25-person board which meets bi-monthly and an executive which meets on the alternate months.

Since those board directors come from across the province, co-ordinating those meetings and conducting business can be challenging, says OPWA president Ed Dujlovic, who is also the director of infrastructure and development services with the City of Stratford.

"We can and have used video and teleconferences where some members can't make the meetings."

Despite the logistics of geography and the fact members are devoting time above and beyond their professional duties, the association has either launched or partnered with other organizations in a number



YORK REGION

The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte water treatment plant was recently selected as Project of the Year in the Small Municipalities and Communities division at the Ontario Public Works Association annual conference — a first for a First Nations community.

of endeavours.

An example is its participation in and contribution to the Canadian Public Works Association's Canadian Infrastructure Report Card which assesses the state of municipal infrastructure assets.

Along with other organizations, the OPWA has also lent its voice to the long ongoing campaign to rectify the nation's "infrastructure deficit" and that collective effort has certainly caught the attention of senior levels of government, he says.

An example is the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund which is "non-application based." In other words, municipalities don't have to earmark funding for a specific project, as long as it used for sewers, roads, bridges and other infrastructure. In 2015 Stratford, Ont. received \$200,000, but that is rising to \$700,000 this year and will climb to about \$1.9 million in 2019, he says.

One of the association's most ambitious and high profile events is its annual conference in January where its' Project of the Year, Innovation, Information Technology, and Supplier/Vendor Maintenance, and personal award winners are announced.

In the Project of the Year Awards there are 14 different categories including Structures \$2 to \$10 million, Structures to \$10 to \$50 million, and Structures greater than \$50 million.

One award at this year's conference, which Dujlovic was "gratified to see", was the selection of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte Water Treatment Plant as Project of the Year in the Small Municipalities and Communities division. It was the first time a First Nations community has received the award.

"The community has been trying to get a wastewater treatment plant since 1989 and has been on a boiled water alert since 2008. I don't think too many municipalities would put up with that," says Dujlovic.

Project team members consisted of Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corp., First Nations Engineering Services Ltd, and Colliers Project Leaders, and general contractor

PEAK Engineering & Construction.

"Their submission stood out as they used diligent construction management controls, proactive monitoring of the construction site for hazards for worker safety, exceptional community relations, and implementation of controls to protect the natural environment," says OPWA Awards and Recognition Committee chair Adam Lachhman.

The project team had to design around adverse conditions such as algae blooms in the Bay of Quinte and deal with property ownership issues, funding delays and budget restrictions set by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, he says.

In explaining the award program process, Lachhman says it actually begins the previous fall when the OPWA issues a call for nominations and project submission through its website and its email distribution list. Deadline for submissions is Nov.1 and the projects must be sustainably completed within two years of the submission date.

The lead up to the January conference is a rather hectic period for the committee which evaluates the submissions using set criteria such as the use of good construction management techniques, community relations, and/or unusual accomplishments under adverse conditions.

Other determining factors can include quality control, value engineering, innovations, plus time and cost saving techniques.

To ensure impartiality the committee uses pre-determined scoring used to assess each submission and where a conflict of interest might arise, such as a committee member being either directly or indirectly connected to the submitted project, that person has to abstain from evaluating in the specific category, says Lachhman.

Another OPWA initiative and one that is still evolving is its almost brand new Right of Way Committee (ROW). Formerly a subset of another committee, it held its first conference last November which attracted than 250 attendees from municipalities, consulting firms, suppliers, utilities and contractors. Some of the topics included subsurface utility engineering, locates, permitting and new technologies.

"As we urbanize and roads expand right of ways are competing for ever-decreasing spaces," says ROW committee chair Steve Murphy.

Addressing the challenges of increasingly crowded rights of ways requires technical solutions and the implementation of best practices, he says.

In addition, the OPWA also host a number of social events to facilitate industry networking including a ski day, a golf tournament, as well as ones designed to get young professionals more involved in the association, says Dujlovic.



YORK REGION

The award winning Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte water treatment plant helped eliminate a boiled water alert in the community which had been in place since 2008.

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IAN HARVEY
CORRESPONDENT

Organizing an industry association to lobby for change is always a challenge but when the group contains both management and trade union representatives of the construction industry it's more complex.

"The board has to balance the focus and so they look for issues which will benefit everyone and avoid other issues," says Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) which was formed in 2005 with a vision to drive the construction sector forward so all stakeholders could benefit.

"And given the make up of the board, there are some issues we generally avoid."

As such, says Manahan, the plan from the outset was to establish the RCCAO brand as thought leaders in construction through credible, authoritative research, which would not just add to the conversation but drive it.

"Right out of the gate that was the plan, to commission the best academic consultant advice and that hasn't changed," he says.

"Though, as any industry association will attest, there are the shared frustrations of getting the attention of government to ensure their ideas aren't just being skimmed and ignored.

"You want people to actually read the reports, especially at the provincial minister level. That's the hard part. They have people who will read the reports on staff but often it's just the executive summary. Then you get lucky with ministers, like Donna Cansfield when she was Minister of Transportation (MTO), she'd come to meetings with her written notations in the margins."

Getting anyone's attention for anything in the digital world is difficult because there's a constant demand from mobile and computer screens to phone calls and meetings. RCCAO is also amplifying its messaging beyond a website, email blasts and Twitter, to hosting videos on its own YouTube channel.

RCCAO are relative newcomers to the construction

association world but they've wasted no time in forming alliances with other associations based on mutual interest, says Manahan.

It didn't take long for the lead-through-research strategy to pay off. Their 2007 report, Bridging the Gap, looked at the shortfall in infrastructure funding for bridge maintenance and replacement.

"Timing, of course, is everything," says Manahan.

"The RCCAO is dipping its toes in the federal pond, having been invited to present to the Standing Committee on Finance looking at the Infrastructure Bank concept,"

Andy Manahan
Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario

"That was the year of the fatal bridge collapse in Laval, Que. and then a collapse in Minneapolis."

Those incidents helped drive their report to the highest echelons of government, where stakeholders were anxious to avoid a collapse in their jurisdictions.

"The media coverage was phenomenal on our report. We ended up having many discussions with municipalities and the province and while it's taken some time, we're seeing funding for repairs and maintenance restored to MTO budgets," he says noting RCCAO partnered with the Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA) on that report.

More recently RCCAO has joined with its stablemate RESCON in pushing for a streamlining of development approvals process.

It's been a long campaign stretching back to 2009 when RCCAO released its Environmental Assessment Reform — A Tool for Economic Recovery report, looking at the myriad of delays in the Municipal Class Environmental

Assessment (MCEA) process.

The report noted "shovel ready" projects which would have qualified for federal infrastructure stimulus funding were being set back an average of 10 months because the MCEA process took almost 20 months. Lawyer Frank Zechner's follow-up study in 2014 found the process had lengthened to more than 26.5 months.

In all there have been five reports on the MCEA process and a chorus of voices from several construction groups seems to have brought a streamlined process a step closer, says Manahan.

Similarly, it has collaborated with the like-minded Ontario Municipal Engineers Association (MEA), which has been frustrated at getting the attention of successive provincial ministers to acknowledge the importance of reforming the approvals process — which its member manage and also find cumbersome.

Last year RCCAO and MEA submitted a joint application to the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario which was endorsed by 13 separate industry and professional associations such as the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association, OGRA, the Ontario Road Builders' Association and the Ontario General Contractor's Association.

It called for a general streamlining and expediting of the processes under the MCEA and expediting the response process while also harmonizing the MCEA with the Planning Act processes.

Other issues on the table for 2018 include addressing Tarion and home construction warranties and WSIB issues specific to the construction sector.

Looking ahead, Manahan says, the RCCAO is dipping its toes in the federal pond, having been invited to Ottawa to present to the Standing Committee on Finance looking at the Infrastructure Bank concept and exploring ways where the federal government might use its resources to drive economic activity through the construction sector.

"Even though we're a provincial organization, we're punching above our weight," he says.

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Timber!

Logging in with the International Log Builders' Association

PETER KENTER
CORRESPONDENT

Canada has carved out a special niche as a country with both excellent timber resources and expert log builders. The International Log Builders' Association (ILBA) represents log builders across the globe, but was founded in 1974 as the Canadian Log Builders' Association. Its offices remain in Canada as the association works to promote the log building craft while helping to ensure that modern building standards accept all that log building offers.

The ILBA's global membership numbers 165 and ranges from contractors, engineers, architects, designers and suppliers to instructors, furniture builders and insurance companies.

ILBA president Robert Savignac has been building log homes and teaching the craft for 40 years. Known in industry circles as Log Bob, he's operated Arbor Vitae Log Craft for more than 40 years, with the business currently located in Hudson, Que.

"Log home building has endured for centuries," he says. "Log buildings were constructed in the Middle East when there were still forests across the Arabian deserts. The Scandinavian countries took it to another level. When hand crafted log building came to North America, it was known as Scandinavian Full Scribe. When I served as CEO of the ILBA in 2005 I attended a summit meeting and visited an area in Sweden, north of Stockholm, where my associate showed me a house that was built using the 'Canadian style' of log construction. It came full circle, with Canada taking it to a whole new level as well."



ROBERT SAVIGNAC

Robert Savignac is the president of the International Log Builders' Association (ILBA), which represent log builders worldwide but was founded in 1974 as the Canadian Log Builders' Association. ILBA membership includes contractors, engineers, architects, designers and suppliers.

The early days of the association saw its founding father, B. Allan Mackie, working to establish log building as a mainstream construction technique. He built the first log home to gain acceptance by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in the mid-1980s.

ILBA continues to work to ensure that modern building standards fully recognize the advantages of log home construction. However, while timber frame construction and cross-laminated timber have recently taken the

renewable construction spotlight, log building hasn't received the same level of attention.

Builders can demonstrate that a log structure can be built air tight, but current building codes overlook the thermal performance and energy efficiency of logs as a building material.

"We know that a well-built log home constructed to ILBA standards is warm and performs well," Savignac says.

"However, logs have been cheated out of their actual performance value because our

building codes don't recognize the 'R' value of logs. They see logs the same way they see a wood stud acting as a thermal bridge that diminishes the effectiveness of a thermal envelope. But logs provide thermal mass that retains heat and radiates it back into the structure. We currently must overbuild the thickness of a wall — or we compensate with more insulation or a thermal heat pump — just to achieve code."

The association is attempting to rectify that situation by working on research projects to vindicate the thermal performance of logs, along with partners that include the BC Log & Timber Building Industry Association, the Great Lakes Logcrafters Association, the Log Homes Council, and global manufacturers. A series of five model log homes are currently being built for analysis in the National Research Council's cold testing chamber in Ottawa.

"Part of the effort to gain this recognition is to encourage younger builders to get into the industry," Savignac says. "They won't get in if they're fighting code from day one."

Like most construction businesses, log building is sensitive to the economy. Many log buildings are constructed as second homes, so the 2008 recession saw customers shelving or delaying what they saw as optional projects. While design magazines once featured extravagant "log mansions," the scale of log homes also diminished.

"Now some log homes are becoming bigger and on the other end of the scale we're also meeting the needs of the small house movement," Savignac says. "Log building is ramping up, and those who have stuck with log building are building again."

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Preservation

Heritage work a committed passion for CAHP

DAN O'REILLY
CORRESPONDENT

Not everyone likes to go to work every day. But that's not the case for the approximately 450 members of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals, says its president.

"They are very passionate, committed, and hard working," says Gerry Zegerius, a structural engineer and senior associate with Guelph-based Tacoma Engineers Inc.

A national organization with members spread across the country, CAHP is comprised of people who are dedicated to identifying, conserving, preserving and—in many cases—repurposing heritage buildings. Working in both the public and private sectors, they have participated and provided input into key pieces of legislation such as the Heritage Act and the Planners Act.

But it's not an organization which is restricted to one profession or trade, he stresses.

"Our members range from heritage window restorers, to heritage masons, to architects and engineers."

If that makes for a diversified body, CAHP's strength and unifying theme is its passion and dedication to heritage issues and projects, he says.

"We bring a unique skill set and extra level of care (to heritage projects)," says Zegerius, noting that CAHP partners extensively with the National Trust, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, and other heritage groups on various initiatives and issues.

Those organizations have a commitment to protect heritage buildings, while CAHP's members have the abilities and technical skills to achieve that protection, he points out.



HANS ZEGERIUS

A couple who met at the Petrie Building in Guelph in the early 1960s wrote their engagement and marriage dates on the edge of a door frame. CAHP president Gerry Zegerius, a senior associate with Tacoma Engineers Inc., discovered it during an inspection and was able to track down the couple's children and send them a photo of it.

Members of the association are designated as such and "that designation is starting to gain traction. Some RFP's (Requests for Proposals) are now requiring it."

Protecting the integrity of the designation is the reason CAHP administers rather rigorous admittance standards. Prospective members must have a "demonstrated knowledge of their particular field of expertise" and provide letters of reference. That documentation is reviewed by the association's membership committee which then makes a recommendation to the association's 15-member board.

"Not every application is accepted, although we will accept an intern member."

Touching on the membership committee, Zegerius says it is one of the hardest working and busiest committees of a very active volunteer-driven association which has only one paid employee.

There are several other committees and the full board "meets" once a month through tele-conferences. It wouldn't be practical from either a financial or logistical perspective to meet in person. However, ideas are exchanged and networking carried out at the National Trust's annual conference and the meetings of the association's three chapters, Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec/Maritimes, he says. (Members in other regions of the country are affiliated with one of those chapters.)

Citing a number of successful heritage restoration projects in cities such as Guelph and Hamilton, he says progress is being made in protecting this country's dwindling inventory of heritage assets and some of the credit does belong to the association.

Of course, recognition also should be extended to other organizations and to developers "who often take large financial risks and who are not always acknowledged for doing so."

Some developers at least are looking for ways to incorporate heritage buildings and/

or elements into their projects and "are asking questions" on how that can be realized. But many threats remain, especially in high property values areas such as Toronto where high densities are needed to make projects financially viable.


"Not everything is going to be saved and it often comes down to economics. That's why heritage professionals have to be skilled negotiators—to make the case why a developer should spend another \$500,000 on a building."

Preserving buildings is not just a case of saving the brick and mortar. It often entails hours of painstaking research in libraries and archives piecing together the history of buildings and the stories of the lives of the people who once lived or worked in them, says Zegerius.

As an example, he cites the recently restored Petrie Building in Guelph which is Canada's last remaining example of a pre-1890 machine stamped metal clad building. Tacoma Engineering was the structural consultant and during an inspection, he discovered some writing on the edge of a door frame in the upper floors which had been left vacant for several decades. It was the engagement and wedding dates of a Gordon and Hennie.

"When I saw this (the inscription) it was too much to resist. I was able to track down the grown family of this couple and sent the picture to them. It turns out Hennie and Gordon met at the Petrie building more than 50 years ago and left their mark. Gordon has passed on, but Hennie was reportedly very happy to see the photo and was able to shed some light on their story."

It is stories like that which separates heritage work from all other forms of construction, says Zegerius.



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