



## A FORM-BASED TAKE ON ZONING

### Form-Based Codes in Canada

Bill 23 has changed the way communities will plan their future built environments. As new focus is placed on zoning for character, Ontario communities can learn lessons from Québec – nowhere moreso than the city of Laval.

The city of nearly half a million people has introduced Canada's first full-scale form-based code. Used frequently in the United States, this model of zoning is organized around a predictable built form and public realm by sorting typologies by physical form, not separation of uses. This type of zoning does away with time-consuming individual statutory reviews – developments are approved as-of-right.

As the City of Laval describes the code:

*Rather than separating the territory into zones according to prescribed uses, it makes it possible to create an overall vision based on the different physical characteristics of the territory. It then divides the territory into several entities defined according to the architectural and landscape characteristics common to a sector or a district. This by-law then prescribes the appropriate form, scale and character of development desired for each of the entities.*

The Form-Based Code Institute, Smart Growth America's program dedicated to such zoning codes, describes these policies as "keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development, rather than only distinctions in land-use types." This contrasts with conventional zoning, which focuses on micromanaging and segregating land uses and intensity through abstract parameters while overlooking an integrated built forms.

Further, "form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory. They are drafted to implement a community plan." That plan can reflect the democratic will of a community through preconsultation, ensuring that the code reflects public expectations.

Laval, for instance, developed its code along a "participatory urban planning approach" designed to promote dialogue between planners, citizens and communities. The resulting code combined the technical knowledge of professional planners and the experiences of residents to develop the final document collaboratively.

A form-based code includes a regulating plan, standards for the public realm and building configurations, a streamlined and

clearly defined administrative process, and a glossary of clearly-defined technical terms. They can also include architectural standards governing exterior cladding and quality, landscaping standards, and policies for signage, stormwater drainage, slopes, trees and solar access.

In Canada, communities such as Edmonton and Revelstoke integrate elements of a form-based code into their zoning bylaws. Laval is the first in Canada to develop one municipality-wide – and policy mechanisms exist that allow more communities to follow.

Ontario's Planning Act empowers municipalities to regulate character through zoning. This language enables policies like form-based codes to be implemented, whether for individual districts or for entire communities.

Form-based codes offer a means to build more homes faster while still maintaining both quality and a unified community character. As planning in Ontario evolves to meet the new framework introduced by Bill 23, innovations like form-based codes can be powerful tools to help communities build tomorrow's heritage neighbourhoods, today.



# BUILD IT RIGHT, NOW

News From Ontario's Masonry Professionals

Spring 2023

## MESSAGE FROM ONTARIO'S MASONRY INDUSTRY

Ontario's planning framework has changed a lot over the past year, but the challenge of building attractive and livable communities hasn't changed. It's up to progressive planners and elected officials to find new ways to make tomorrow's communities as enduring and welcoming as the heritage communities we know and love.

From 2006, many communities embraced an approach to built form planning rooted in Site Plan Control. While the More Homes Built Faster Act changes what can be done through the site plan process, communities have many avenues for planning out the buildings and neighbourhoods of the future. Tools like Community Development Permits and form-based codes can be used to put good design into practice, while cutting across time-consuming discretionary reviews in favour of as-of-right approvals.

Exterior cladding is an objective part of what makes a good building. It's as important as height, massing, setbacks, windows, garage positions and articulation. Communities have tools to regulate all these character elements. What goes on the outside of the building must be part of the mix.

Cladding affects factors that have lasting effects on both homeowners and communities. Durable exteriors determine if a building will age gracefully or deteriorate in the face of weather and natural hazards within a few decades. It has effects on maintenance costs

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## ONTARIO NEEDS AFFORDABLE HOMES, BUT THEY DON'T HAVE TO LOOK CHEAP

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The More Homes Built Faster Act presents municipalities with a double challenge. Not only is the province setting an aggressive goal of 1.5 million homes over a decade, it has changed the mechanisms communities use to enforce exterior design standards. Yet it's at precisely such a time, with so many new homes envisioned, that such standards are most vital.

As densities increase, the quality of the built form becomes more important. Buildings and architecture become the prevailing scenery and define the character of districts and neighbourhoods. These buildings may look good when they're new, but what will they look like when they're old?

The government has placed a priority on overcoming "Not in my Backyard" objections to new development. These objections cannot be addressed by lowering standards and settling for less. Municipalities won't avert NIMBYism by building the sorts of ugly, out-of-place developments that any reasonable person would object to – in fact, they will feed it.

A better approach is to build "Quality in my Backyard" – expediting approvals, but keeping a focus on quality design.

Quality in my Backyard, or QIMBY, combines expedited approvals with a commitment to doing density well. That means building well-designed, multimodal and livable developments that both fit the community and provide attractive and welcoming amenities. It means setting standards that guide developments along lines that contribute to a community's unique character and sense of

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## LET'S BUILD TOMORROW'S HERITAGE NEIGHBOURHOODS, TODAY.



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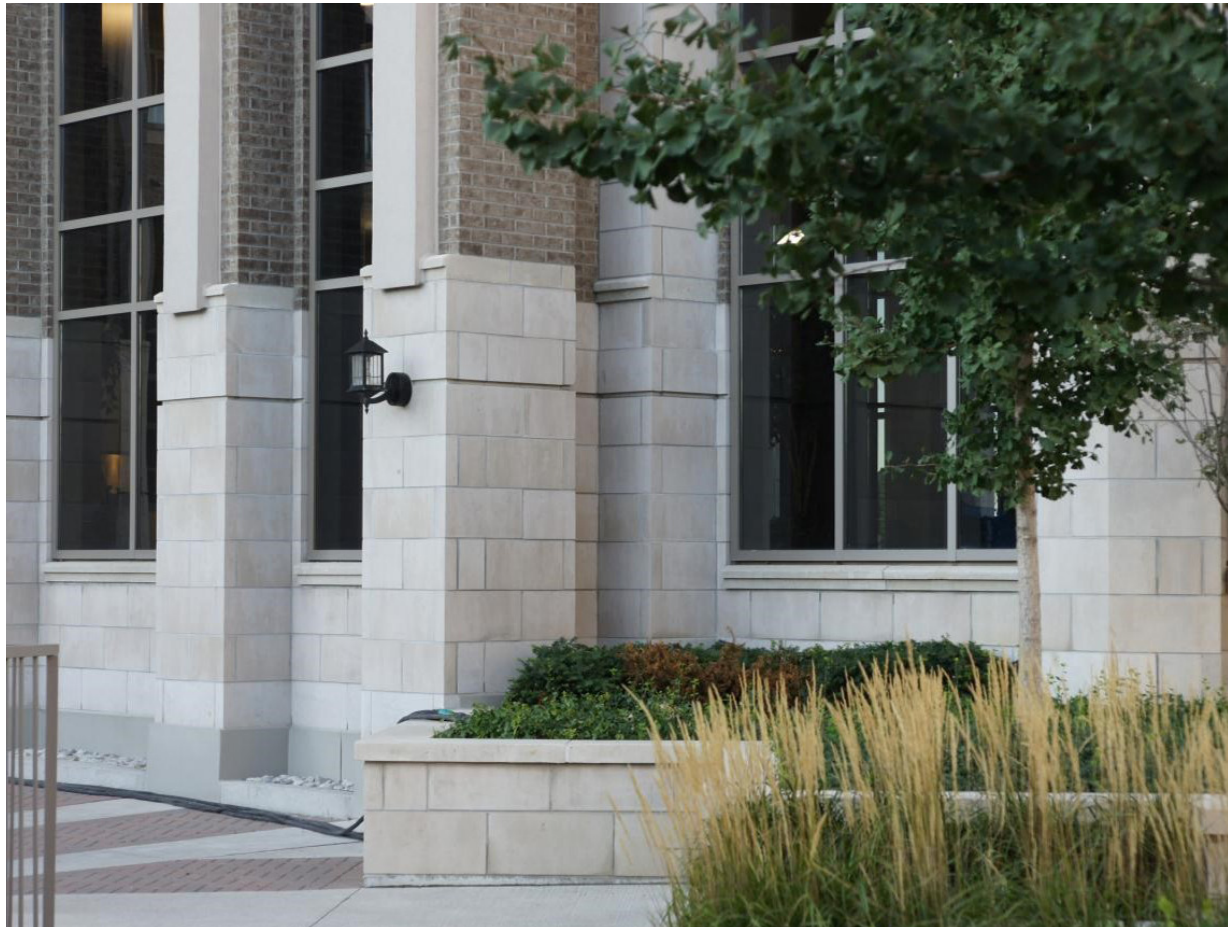
and resistance to events like severe wind and hail, which also contribute to controlling insurance premiums. It affects a building's fire resistance and soundproofing. It also influences emissions: Low-durability materials need to be replaced more, which means more remanufacturing and more emissions from shipping.

Making exterior cladding a policy matter doesn't mean dictating aesthetics. Outside of heritage neighbourhoods, communities don't need to force a style on developers or homebuyers. The best policy is clear, objective and measurable – stating a clear preference for materials suitable for building exteriors, while leaving their configuration up to the builder.

In some provinces, communities address these through statutory documents like zoning plans by regulating a minimum percentage of certain materials on building facades. This can be emulated in Ontario by specifying preferred primary building materials – for instance, preferring durable and natural materials like brick and stone as at least 51% of the exterior cladding. Low-durability materials may also be discouraged.

Ontario's ambitions to build more homes over the next decade are broader and more far-reaching than ever. To build them is one thing – but communities must ensure they're still built well.

**Andrew Payne, Executive Director, Masonry Council of Ontario**



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place. That includes the architectural design of the development.

Exterior design standards should be an important part of how communities define quality, including preferred materials. Cladding that decays or ages quickly may look good when it's new, but shows its lack of quality within a few years. Policies like zoning bylaws and preconsultation requirements can be used to require more durable and long-lasting cladding materials, while leaving specific style and arrangement up to the creativity of the architect. Such policies should be clear, specific and as objective as possible – clear enough that proponents know what to expect and can essentially treat the policy as a checklist.

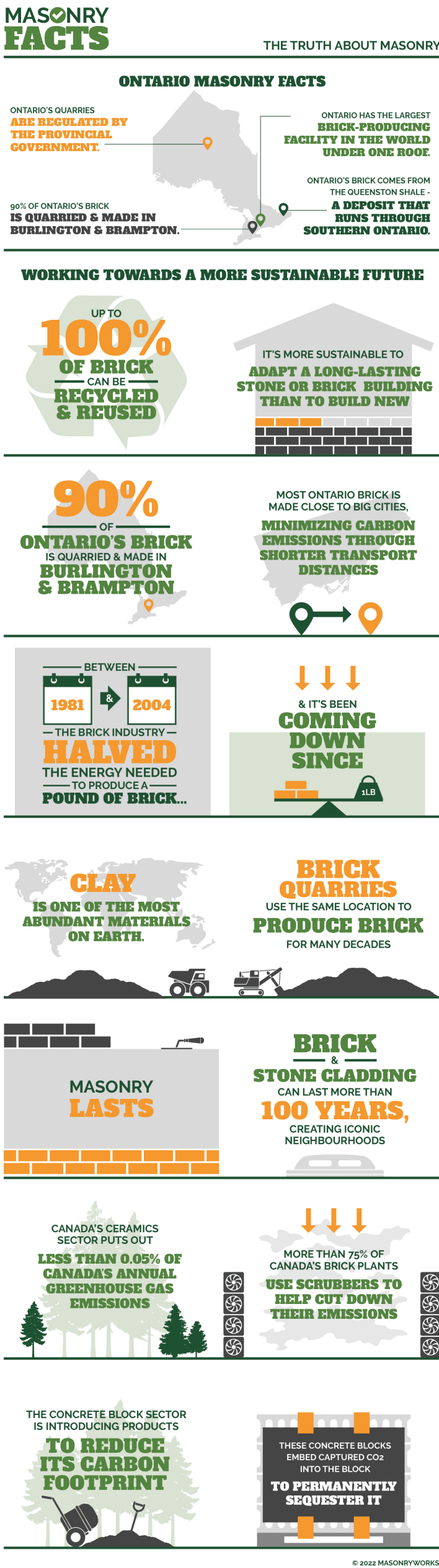
Most communities already implement some exterior design standards at the zoning stage. Matters like articulation, massing and setbacks are commonly incorporated. Exterior building materials are no different – they're a matter of character that contributes to

the quality of a development, part of the allowance for character allowed by the Planning Act.

Most Canadian builders should have no difficulty meeting such common-sense standards for exterior quality. QIMBY policies are intended as a safeguard against bad actors – those who cut corners, use low-quality materials and give little thought to the character of a community. Municipalities should encourage and welcome high-quality development while laying out common-sense safeguards against the kinds of projects any reasonable person would object to.

If Ontario is to build another million and a half housing units – more units than it has ever built in a ten-year span – it's absolutely vital that they be built well. The more homes today's communities must build faster will define Ontario's architectural environment for generations. Let's build them not just faster, but well.

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## MASONRY: LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE

### Building with Brick and Stone Supports Sustainable Design

As more and more communities move towards embracing sustainable design, it's time to consider the building blocks of tomorrow's new buildings – literally.

Local building materials offer sustainability advantages over materials shipped from elsewhere in Canada, or from abroad. The closer a material originates to the job site, the less distance it has to be trucked. Less time on a flatbed means less emissions being pumped into the atmosphere by the trucks.

In that respect, Ontario has a major advantage: It's the centre of Canada's brick industry.

More than 90% of Canadian brick is manufactured in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Most of it comes from the Niagara Escarpment. In fact, Ontario is home to Brampton Brick – North America's largest masonry-producing facility under one roof. In Burlington, Canada Brick produces roughly half of the brick in the country.

Because so much of Canada's brick is produced close to fast-growing communities in and around Toronto and Hamilton, the travel times from the quarry to the job site are low. Most of Ontario's fastest-growing communities are well within 500 kilometres of a brickmaking facility. The majority are even closer.

How close are they? In 2021, Ontario's fastest-growing community was East Gwillimbury. If a developer were to build something there using brick, stone and block produced in Brampton, the material would travel about 90 kilometres from the Brampton Brick facility to the job site. Other materials are less local: Vinyl siding, for instance, relies on hydrocarbons produced only in small quantities in Ontario, while wood products mostly come from Alberta and British Columbia.

Beyond shipping distance, however, there's a hidden advantage: Brick only needs to be shipped once.

Long-lived building materials pay down their carbon debt over time, while short-lived ones renew and increase it every few years as replacement is needed. Building materials like stucco and EIFS may last 25 years or less, and when they fail, new material must be manufactured and installed. Brick and stone last 100 years and can withstand impacts like weather, mould, insects and other hazards that would damage less durable cladding.

Over that lifespan, the material will contribute no further emissions. Once it exits the kiln, brick is inert – it creates no emissions once it's laid. Brick is also non-combustible, ensuring that even in a catastrophic fire, it will create no emissions.

The masonry sector reduces waste through brick and stone's modularity. Any brick that is not fired in the kiln goes back into the feed, reducing waste during brickmaking. Because brick comes in modular units, it can be cut at the construction site, further reducing waste. By contrast, wood makes up 54% of all construction waste in Ontario.

Technologies like CarbonCure and Carboclave blocks, which sequester CO2 directly into the block, have potential to remove significant emissions from the air. Between 1981 and 2004, the sector cut the energy required to manufacture a pound of clay brick by half, and the amount of clay needed to produce brick has also come down. Technologies like scrubbers and innovative fuels are also helping to make masonry more sustainable for the future.