

Chair's Report

As is customary, the Chair's Report will focus on activities in the fiscal year captured in the attached audited financial reports. Board activities were led by Leslie Thompson until September 28, 2019, and focused on much needed improvements and additions to board governance practice and guidelines, needs identified in both the Organizational and Operational Review ACO undertook in 2015-2016 and in Canada Revenue Agency's 2018 audit of the 2015 and 2016 financial years.

Thanks to Ms. Thompson's continued very active involvement, and greatly assisted by Will Coukell's extensive experience and knowledge of not-for-profit management, that work continued throughout 2019 and into 2020. In June 2020, a major goal was accomplished when the last of the envisioned five key governance documents was passed by the Board, and Directors were asked to sign that they had read and understood the ACO Bylaw, ACO Principal Values and Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest Policy, Communication Policy, and Governance Handbook. As of today, all Directors have signed that form.

The challenge for ACO going forward to ensure that this sound organizational framework is maintained. Just as with the built heritage we so value, regular ongoing maintenance and attention to small cracks and signs of weakness is essential. ACO cannot afford to let small mistakes go uncorrected. As with a heritage building, one weak beam can bring down the whole structure. Fortunately, ACO has an excellent staff team to help us identify, correct, and do preventive maintenance.

What ACO has built and achieved together is worthy of this care and attention. The attached slides are a miniscule sample of the activities of our branches during 2019. I don't think we do enough, as an organization, to become aware and celebrate the accomplishments of our branches. My visits to the Windsor, Clarington, St. Thomas, Cambridge, Quinte, Port Hope, South Bruce Grey, London, North Waterloo Region, and Cobourg branches showed me how very, very little I knew about the education and advocacy work done by these committed groupings of ACO members. Branch reports to our quarterly board meetings focus on the special advocacy effort or educational event the branch has recently undertaken, but they miss the ongoing conversations with local decision makers, the ongoing planning for Jane's Walks, Doors Open, walking tours and public displays, the ongoing involvement of ACO branch members in other community organizations. Before these visits, I thought a branch with only six paid up ACO members was doomed, on its death bed. I've changed my mind, and see that a small nucleus of committed people can accomplish a lot.

Of course, more members would be better, as succession planning is essential. To attract more members, it may help to broaden our ideas about heritage conservation. even what heritage is, to help us reach out to segments of our community we haven't included before. It's exciting to see that several branches are formally and informally incorporating NextGen members into their decision-making and agenda-planning processes. Perhaps we can learn from heritage

organizations in other provinces how to embrace Indigenous and more recent immigrant groups' heritage.

Through its participation in the National Council of Heritage Organizations, organized by the National Trust for Canada, ACO strengthened its working relationship with other provincial and territorial heritage organizations during 2019-2020. ACO joined with 40 cross-Canada heritage organizations to lobby for #ShovelReadyHeritage projects as a "green" job-rich solution to COVID-19's economic disruption. Along with nine other provincial/territorial organizations, ACO is part of an initiative to expand the audience, and support, for heritage conservation. And ACO participated in and advised on several of the biweekly virtual Heritage Gatherings presented by National Trust this summer, greatly increasing our public profile.

Internationally, ACO achieved major recognition with its successful nomination of Ontario Place to the World Monuments Fund's 2020 Watch List. Although ACO failed to gain provincial government (Ontario Place's owner) support for an invited appeal for Getty Foundation Keeping It Modern funding, it is working with University of Toronto Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design and the World Monuments Fund to catapult Ontario Place into national and international design attention through an ambitious history-gathering-website-design charrette-conference project.

On the provincial level, ACO continued its work to improve the provincial government policies which help or impede our advocacy work. Advised by our provincial Policy Committee, 22 ACO members met with 24 and 20 MPPs in 2019 and 2020 respectively at our annual Heritage Day at Queen's Park. Interest in strengthening these efforts led to the June 2020 formation of a Government and Community Relations Committee which will work with Policy Committee to explore additional ways to reach ACO's advocacy goals.

During 2019-2020, ACO board and staff met with senior staff in the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, addressed the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs inquiry into the economic impacts of COVID-19 twice -- first on the economic and social wellbeing benefits of heritage tourism, and secondly on the efficacy of heritage infrastructure spending in creating jobs, fighting climate change and remediating the social crisis, and also participated in several consultations on proposed legislative changes, e.g. Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act in May 2019, Ontario Heritage Act and Provincial Policy Statement November 2019. Through ACO's gifted membership in the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO), two Provincial Board members participated in TIAO's Queens Park on September 16, 2020.

ACO branches offered many excellent educational events in 2019-2020. Provincial Board members Shannon Kyles and Marlee Robinson helped plan an excellent Ontario Heritage Conference (OHC) for May 28-30, 2020 in Markham. That conference was, of course, cancelled but ACO is enthusiastically involved in plans for a virtual OHC in June 2021.

-- Kae Elgie