



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES • SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

July 8, 2014

Hon. Glen Murray
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change
Ferguson Block
11th Floor
77 Wellesley St W
Toronto ON M7A 2T5

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI), we would like to express our concern regarding recent changes to your Ministry's website. We offer these comments with a view to being constructive and in the hopes that the situation can be rectified and that other Ministries' websites are not similarly altered.

OPPI is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession. Our more than 4,000 members work in government, private practice, universities, and not-for-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, community design, environmental planning, transportation, health, social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development. Members meet quality practice requirements and are accountable to OPPI and the public to practice ethically and to abide by a Professional Code of Practice. Only Full Members are authorized by the Ontario Professional Planners Institute Act, 1994, to use the title "Registered Professional Planner" (or "RPP").

Public policy resources consist of hundreds of policies, guidelines, directives, etc. documents issued by the Province. Over the last 20 years, Ontario Government websites have become the main channel for the Government to communicate public policy information in a timely fashion to professionals and the public. The Province has done a good job of continually improving Government websites and their functionality and accessibility over the last two decades.

To provide full and ready access to public policy resources, a Ministry website must:

1. Post all public policy documents that the Ministry has issued, that are considered active and have not been rescinded.
2. Be organized so that both those who know exactly what they are looking for and those who do not, can quickly navigate to the appropriate subject area.
3. Have a search function that will quickly and efficiently target a public policy document, whether the function is being used by those who know exactly what they are looking for, or by those who have only a rough idea of what they need.

Professional planners advise on, interpret, implement and monitor the implementation of public policy related to land use planning, so the above information is critically important. Timely access to this information is equally important to Ontarians at large, who are the owners and stewards of the social, economic, and ecological resources that are the subject of planning policy.

While there is always room for improvement, by and large, the websites of those Ministries that our profession most deals with and depends on - Environment and Climate Change; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Natural Resources and Forestry; Transportation; Economic Development; Employment and Infrastructure; and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs - meet (or met, in the case of your Ministry) these tests.

OPPI members were dismayed to discover, in exploring your Ministry's website as revamped in April 2014, that much of the progress of the past twenty years has been reversed, and that the revamped website for the most part badly fails the three tests cited above. We have been even more distressed to learn from Government staff that your Ministry's website revamp signals a similar revamp of all other Ministry sites. These are not minor concerns. For example, the D1 through D6 Land Use Compatibility Guidelines which provide critical guidance in implementing the Provincial Policy Statement are no longer accessible on the website. When information, such as this, is not readily accessible, it is not possible for either professionals or the public to have full and ready access to information on public policy.

We urge you and your Ministerial colleagues to immediately place a moratorium on this Government website redesign initiative. We recommend a complete reassessment of this initiative so as to ensure, among other things that Government websites shall continue to meet the above tests, and provide full and ready access to public policy for everyone.

OPPI would be pleased to provide any input that you might deem useful to such a reassessment and to meet to discuss our concerns. Please feel free to contact me at (416) 668-8469 or by email at l.ryan@ontarioplanners.ca

Sincerely,



Loretta Ryan, MCIP, RPP, CAE
Director, Public Affairs
Ontario Professional Planners Institute

Copy:

Hon. Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Hon. Jeff Leal, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Hon. Brad Duguid, Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure
Hon. Bill Mauro, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
Hon. Steven Del Duca, Minister of Transportation