

Architects ready to work with Liberals

by Don Wall Oct 27, 2015

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) is poised to pitch in on policy as the new Liberal government moves to implement campaign pledges on social housing, green infrastructure and First Nations community redevelopment, said its vice-president Allan Teramura in a post-election interview.

The social housing and green infrastructure plans are components of the Liberals' \$125 billion, 10-year infrastructure package presented as the party's showcase initiative during the campaign. The Liberals, under leader Justin Trudeau, swept to power with a majority on election night, Oct. 19, sending the ruling Conservatives into opposition. Besides the infrastructure projects, Teramura also identified a continuing hot issue for the RAIC that might be influenced by the influx of Liberals in Ottawa — plans for the much-maligned Memorial to the Victims of Communism, proposed for a prominent Wellington Street site near Parliament Hill by the National Capital Commission (NCC) and championed by the Conservatives. The new Ottawa Centre MP for the district, Liberal Catherine McKenna, wants a different location, as do many other area Liberals, the architectural community in general and the RAIC itself.

The NCC will revisit design and location issues in November and Teramura says it looks positive that the NCC might reconsider the decisions it made under the urging of the Conservatives.

Teramura assumes the role of RAIC president in January and he indicated that he intends to be an activist top executive working alongside newly appointed RAIC executive director Jody Ciuffo, who officially starts her job in December. Ciuffo has been active in governmental relations during her career.

"Other professional associations have not been shy about working with parliamentarians on issues of concern to them and it has been awhile since we have done that, so we are hoping to reactivate that whole way of working with the government," said the Ottawa-based Teramura. "If they have that big infrastructure plan, if they are spending money on affordable housing, we have members with expertise in that area and we could provide very valuable advice."

There are right ways and wrong ways to build social housing, said Teramura: "There are strange ways of going about that, and even just the renewal of affordable housing, too, that is going to be a major concern."

Teramura talked about a lecture he had attended recently given by Globe and Mail columnist Doug Saunders, author of the book *Arrival City*, which reviewed how nations can accept immigrants and refugees. It was topical, said Teramura, given that during the campaign the Liberals pledged to accommodate 25,000 Syrian refugees.

"Saunders said that the setting in which they arrive can make a big difference in how successful they are. In traditional downtowns where there is inexpensive housing nearby, where there are little shops where people can set up mom-and-pop type businesses with multiple generations in the same area, it tends to make for more successful immigrant stories," said Teramura

"Today, many immigrants are arriving and living in suburban towers, with poor transit and without communities to start their own businesses, and that is kind of an architectural problem. The children of these groups are getting into trouble and not as successful as other immigrants have been in the past.

"Certainly within our membership we have people with expertise on this that would be helpful as the government tries to make strategic decisions on this." Similarly, the RAIC is in a good position to contribute to the development of green infrastructure.

"For sure a lot of our members have a lot of depth on that subject, a lot of practitioners who are global leaders on this area and have completed projects that show that lower carbon emissions are possible even with existing technology."

During the campaign, the RAIC launched an election toolkit that highlighted, among other issues, the need to upgrade the living standards in First Nations communities. The RAIC had previously put in place a task force peopled by native architects and designers to assist with designing better First Nations communities, the RAIC VP noted, and said this could be an effective consulting tool.

"In the past, money has been spent but they don't actually consult in a meaningful way, with the result that they spend money but the projects aren't as successful as they could be."