

November 17, 2017

RE: Submission to the Re-Instated BC Human Rights Commission

Dear Parliamentary Secretary Ravi Kahlon,

As Regional Director BC-Yukon of the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada, I am writing to both commend you on the re-instatement of the Commission, and to reinforce ideas expressed by the Centre for Architecture and Human Rights (CAHR) in their submission to your call for engagement.

Winston Churchill famously stated that “we shape buildings, and thereafter they shape us.” Beyond simply modulating space and separating us from the elements, Architecture and the built realm modulates our agency as citizens in a wide and complex range of ways at, and far beyond, the scale of individual buildings. As such, architecture has a broad spectrum of human rights implications: from children’s rights and the rights of minorities and people with differing abilities; to collective rights to participate in cultural, social and political practices; the right to dwell in a manner that eliminates patterns of inequity (requiring more than simply shelter); to rights (for current and future citizens) to a safe and healthy environment.

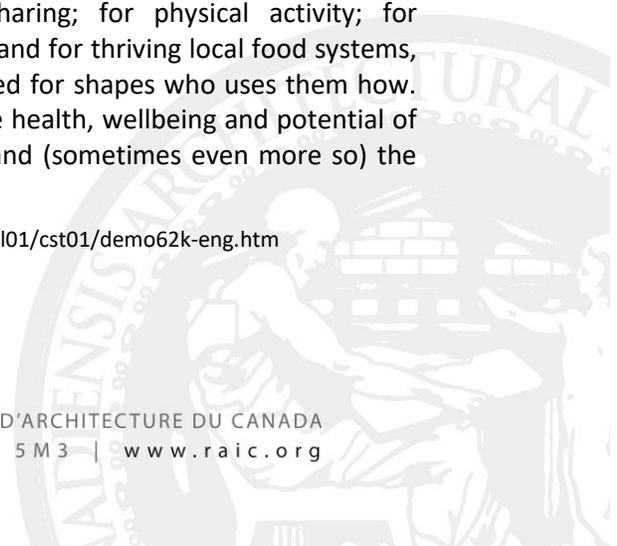
Over 86% of British Columbians live in cities¹; and as a society, we spend about 90%² of our time indoors. From the moment we wake up, through our travels to work, school, our local community centers, libraries, privatized shops or public parks and plazas, our built realm directly and indirectly impacts our ability to fully and freely participate in social, political, economic and cultural life.

The design of individual buildings - from their massing, orientation and interior space configuration, to the products and systems that appoint them - permit or deny access to daylight, views, fresh air, thermal comfort, noise, nature, and physical access by people of different ages or abilities. These factors have been proven to impact everything from the quality of our sleep, our work productivity, our social interactions, our patterns of activity and behavior, to our physical and mental health, and our children’s physiological development.

At the scale our cities, the design of the built realm influences individual and societal patterns of behavior. It creates or negates opportunities for diverse and democratic social interaction; for cultural and political engagement; for recycling and sharing; for physical activity; for intergenerational, cross-cultural and transgender exchange; and for thriving local food systems, economies and ecologies. Who and what spaces are designed for shapes who uses them how. The materials and systems our cities are made of shapes the health, wellbeing and potential of not only the people and places that touch them, but also and (sometimes even more so) the

¹ Statistics Canada - <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62k-eng.htm>

² National Human Activity Pattern Survey, 2001 (funded by US EPA)



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people and places their constituent parts or products come from or end up.

“Architecture is never neutral. It either hurts or it heals.”³ How we design our spaces and our cities can either improve human and ecosystem health; enable/impel social interaction; mitigate climate change; build community trust and resilience; and enable/empower vibrant, diverse, dignified, equitable, and thriving communities. Or, it can do the opposite. In 2015, the US Surgeon General said the design of our built realms was a public health issue. I offer, for all the above reasons, it is also a human rights issue.

The RAIC is the leading voice for excellence in the built environment in Canada, demonstrating how design enhances the quality of life, while addressing important issues of society through responsible architecture. I hope you will consider the above both in reviewing CAHR’s submission, and in revisiting the terms of reference, mandate and areas of focus for the Commission.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss any of the above.

Kind regards,



Jennifer Cutbill
RAIC Regional Director (BC-Yukon)
Architect, AIBC, MRAIC

³ Michael Murphy, co-founder and Director of Mass Design Group.

