

# In-person meetings help move building projects along

Builders advised to also understand a site's sensitivities and constraints early in the approval process

BY JOHN MINER, *Ontario Farmer*

Stratford - Michelle Dada has advice for farm builders trying to navigate their way through the regulatory approvals process for a project.

A consulting engineer and founder of MNT Consulting Group, Dada said there has been a shift to online application processes, particularly coming out of Covid times.

While online processes can be great, she recommends builders push to meet the people in a municipality responsible for approving a project as a group.



**Michelle Dada: "Let's get everyone in the room and go through it"**

"That is where I really think we could tighten up efficiency," Dada told the Canadian Farm Builders Association conference in Stratford.

"I'm a huge advocate for requesting in-person meetings, requesting group gatherings, verses silo meetings, or email trails that go around for months."

The layers of regulation and separate requirements such as site plan approvals, green development standards, or zoning certificates has led municipalities to break the functions into different groups within their organizations.

"You might work in one municipality, but you are dealing with three or four departments in the municipality that you don't feel are speaking to one another," she said.

"Let's get everyone in the room and go through it."

Dada's consulting company specializes in rural, shoreline and agricultural development across Ontario, working with builders and regulators.

In her 20 years of experience, Dada said she has seen faster approvals when there is pre-consultation, giving regulators the opportunity to comment on a project before it is fully developed.

"You have the opportunity to take those comments back and make some tweaks that can smooth things out for everybody," she said.

In the pre-consultation meetings with municipal planning staff, Dada said builders should ask questions and identify constraints, know where they don't have wiggle room on a site.

"If we know we are going to need a fire route onsite because the fire officer is saying it is something they are not going to budge on, let's get that accommodated."

There are a number of issues that can stall a

project, she said.

Zoning is a big one. Then there are septic system requirements, wells, and fire protection.

There has been a big uptick in the requirement for fire routes on sites, Dada said.

What has worked in speeding up the process from her perspective is to start by looking at the site and the servicing requirements instead of just the building plans. Understand the site's sensitivities and constraints early.

ities and constraints early.

Dada said a big shift for the development industry is the coming consolidation of conservation authorities. One of the goals is to have one portal for all applications.

"Each conservation authority can have slightly different rules and interpretations so I think it would be good to see that simplified and made more consistent across the board."

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## Two other resolutions

Two other resolutions that were approved call for the OPVG to promote Ontario-grown, processing vegetable crops, to educate consumers about their value, and to develop a promotional strategy that will be periodically reviewed.

Other resolutions related to the processing cucumber crop, crop insurance program, the Farm Products Marketing Commission, and providing improved access by growers to research findings.