

When it first became public that the Government of Ontario intended to move the Ontario Science Centre (OSC), Moriyama Teshima Architects (MTA) released a public statement regarding our firm's position on that decision. The substance and sentiment of that letter still stands for MTA.

The government's recent decision to abruptly, rashly, and permanently close the OSC was a shock. We have never swayed from our belief that this institution must be preserved and is a critical part of the province's identity—a place of wonder and discovery for Ontarians and visitors alike. We have, behind the scenes, maintained a persistent commitment to ongoing explorations for keeping the doors open at the Don Mills Road location—ways to revitalize both the site and building. We see this as imperative to preserve and improve the OSC as a much needed and loved cultural and educational asset serving communities in this time of population growth. Additionally, rejuvenating the building is the only pathway to the necessary reduction in carbon associated with new building materials. Preliminary analysis has identified a new building at half the size, such as the one proposed for the Ontario Place site, to have 7 times the embodied carbon impact compared to reusing the existing building. Regenerating and revitalizing this remarkable building and its site is the only responsible approach in the climate emergency. Preservation rather than erasure of our cultural heritage is the only responsible approach to evolving our cultural identity.

The Ontario Science Centre was one of many architectural projects initiated by the federal government in the lead-up to the Centennial of Confederation in 1967—collectively known as the Centennial Projects. This is not the only reason that the OSC is extraordinary. It stands as one of the first hands-on, interactive, science-based museums in the world and as such, it represents a facility of significant cultural heritage and value to our city, province, and country. Its ravine setting was deliberate and makes it a unique building in the province and relevant to its place in Toronto, the city of ravines. It was, and remains, an educational institution aimed at sparking the imagination of our youth and is pivotal to the Ontario curriculum that was revised less than 2 years ago to ensure that all students see themselves as confident and effective science and technology learners and practitioners. That revision to the provincial curriculum specifically named the OSC as a key partner and education stakeholder in the provision of new resources and training to support the implementation of the STEM curricula.

Our position remains that a relocated science centre on a significantly smaller scale and with the reduced program being contemplated for the tight Ontario Place site does a disservice to the people of Ontario, and to the educational mandate of both the Government of Ontario and the OSC. We believe that the existing building on Don Mills Road should be rejuvenated and retained as the Ontario Science Centre—a function for which it was purpose-built. There is considerable potential for the existing building to be further augmented to continue to serve as an essential community anchor for this growing neighbourhood. With multiple new housing developments being planned, this area is fast becoming a major urban node in this city, supported by the coming intersection of the Eglinton Crosstown and Ontario Line subway. More than ever, this is the right location for a significant cultural asset that recognizes the potential of areas of Toronto outside of the central core.

We agree with the assessments by our trusted colleagues, including Alex Bozicovic of the Globe and Mail and Elsa Lam of Canadian Architect Magazine, who have called out the government for their hasty closure of this much-loved institution. The Rimkus engineering report makes it clear that closing the OSC is not a necessity. Repairs are needed, but on a manageable scale and with potentially minimal impact on the public experience of the building. We offer our architectural services pro bono to the Government of Ontario to realize the necessary roof repairs and we encourage the structural and building science community to similarly offer pro bono services for this scope to accomplish the recommended repairs immediately. The offer of our services, combined with funding that has been generously offered by members of the community, should leave zero barriers for the province to reverse this decision and pursue a path that will keep this vital resource safely operating for years to come. We are optimistic that the government will listen to the voices of our community and move forward with a revised plan for the OSC.

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