

Building an Association Roadmap for the Future

As you know, our industry is undergoing rapid change, making it a pivotal time for the Association and its membership. The land surveying profession has to deal with a number of broad social issues, including the retirement of senior professionals and developing a new generation of practitioners. Technology is changing rapidly, which creates challenges – such as the emergence of new sub-disciplines and the management of the cadastre. Our industry is also changing, with a significant shift away from smaller individual practitioners to more engagement of larger, diversified firms. Our challenge in this environment is to stay relevant to the future needs of our members and the people who use our services.

In June the AOLS began a process of examining these changes and updating its strategic plan. The overall purpose of this process is to identify the future direction and priorities for the organization over the next five years. Some of our members have noted that this process has been undertaken several times previously by the Association, and that the outcomes have been somewhat disappointing. This time, there will be as much, if not more focus on implementation and follow-up as on putting the plan together. The Council, Regional Group and Committee Chairs, and management of your Association are determined that this process will not be a one-time event, but the creation of a live blueprint for the future of the Association.

Peter Richardson and Erik Lockhart from the Queen's School of Business, who have broad experience in strategic planning, have been assisting with the development of our strategy. A number of senior members will remember Peter from the workshops on strategic planning that he ran for the Association several years ago. Peter also assisted Mike O'Sullivan, the former Surveyor General for Canada, and his executive team with strategy development and implementation from 1997 until Mike's retirement.

The process has already included broad stakeholder consultations, including focus groups, one-on-one interviews, an online survey and some interactive strategy workshops. Members have been deeply involved in this process. So far, Peter and Erik have received over 40 survey responses from members (more are welcome). Erik has led four focus groups and over 30 interviews have been conducted with industry leaders, government policy makers, academics and association members.

Many challenges and opportunities have been identified. These were summarized and discussed at the first strategy workshop in Peterborough on September 13-14, attended by Council members, Regional Group Chairs and a few other members from other AOLS committees. The goals of this meeting were to scan the broad business environment for significant trends, opportunities and threats, highlight the

forces driving competition in the industry and conduct an objective and candid assessment of the current state of the Association.

There were some very lively and candid discussions, with five key priorities emerging. These are:

- *Improving quality service - implementing mandatory continuing education / enforcing standards within the profession*
- *Improving entry into the profession – recruitment / revising entrance requirements*
- *Expanding the profession – building a brand for the GIMs within the profession (including the possibility of opening up grandfathering)*
- *The feasibility of the Association spearheading the development of an accurate digital cadastre for Ontario*
- *Member support – understanding our customer needs / statistics*

These are not the sole areas requiring our attention. Other important areas of opportunity include possible alliances with other provincial surveying associations, and affiliation with larger associations. However, even with our high member engagement on committee work, the Association has limited resources, and choices have to be made on which should be our high priority areas of focus over the next 2-3 years. We welcome the views of our membership on these priorities.

Task forces are now working on resolving some of the issues identified and developing options and detailed plans on how to move forward in each of these areas. Over the next two months a variety of discussions will take place across the profession in Ontario on these matters.

The Task Force findings and recommendations will be presented at a second strategy workshop in November when the key elements of our future strategy will be articulated, including a concrete vision of what we want our Association to look like in five years, a prioritized, focused mission for the next 1-2 years, as well as specific implementation plans for implementation. The strategy will then be approved by the Board and rolled out through a broad communication activity and specific actions that will be taken during the first quarter of 2011.

Stay tuned, and if you wish, get involved, as the future direction of your Association takes shape.



If you would like to make your views on specific topics known to the Association, contact Executive Director **Blain Martin** by email at blain@aols.org.

If you wish to share your views on our future strategy in confidence with **Peter** and **Erik**, please send an email to elockhart@business.queensu.ca or call **Erik** at 613-533-6681, or **Peter** at 613-382-1819.