Sustainable Construction TALKS CANADA
BY SAINT-GOBAIN
TORONTO
OCTOBER 15, 2025

Building a more resilient future for all Canadians through circular construction

TAKEAWAYS

The built environment accounts for the consumption of nearly 50% of natural resources. Recycling, secondary raw material, urban mining, modular and reversible buildings are some of the many ways we can transform the built environment to be more circular.

It has become increasingly clear that the construction and climate change issues Canada faces today cannot be tackled separately. Where do both challenges intersect and how can circular construction be part of the solution?

As the closing event of the 2025 Saint-Gobain Toronto Architectural Symposium on October 15, the Sustainable Construction Talk addressed the following question:

How can Canada actively work on reducing its built environment carbon footprint while continuously making buildings more adaptable and resilient through circular construction?

STRIKING FACTS

Sustainable construction is gaining recognition in Canada, as 71% of industry stakeholders consider themselves knowledgeable about the topic, a stunning 20-pts increase compared to 2024. Additionally, industry stakeholders want to takeactionas 91% say they believe we need to actively do more on the topic.

While key stakeholders understand sustainable construction, there is still a gap amongst the general Canadian population when it comes to knowledge around this concept. Only 1 out of 5 Canadians have heard about sustainable construction and know exactly what it is –compared to 2 out of 5 people globally. To further advance sustainable construction, more education is needed around this important topic.

Source: 2025 Sustainable Construction Barometer

The Sustainable Construction Observatory
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A PANEL OF CANADIAN EXPERTS IN SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION FROM VARIOUS VIEW POINTS

Moderator
Irene Galea, Reporter, The Globe and Mail and Host of City Space

Irene Galea is a reporter with The Globe and Mail, based in Toronto. Since joining the newspaper, her coverage has spanned telecommunications, real estate and corporate finance. Irene is also the host of City Space, an award-winning Globe and Mail podcast on urban design.

Interested in urban design?
Tune in to Irene Galea's podcast, City Space.

Panelist
Jo-Anne St. Godard, Executive Director, Circular Innovation Council

Jo-Anne St. Godard has served as Executive Director of Canada's Circular Innovation Council—a premier environmental (non-governmental) organization—since 2001. She has over 20 years of experience in the areas of public policy design, corporate strategy and compliance, research, and pilot innovations designed to accelerate Canada's transition to a circular economy.

Panelist
Lyle Scott, .E.Sc, P.Eng., LEED AP BD+C, Principal, Footprint

With more than 25 years of experience in sustainable design, development, and operations, Lyle has a broad (and trusted) perspective on the best sustainability strategy for his clients. A trained mechanical engineer specializing in energy efficiency, facilities management, and sustainable development, Lyle is the founding and managing Principal of Footprint.

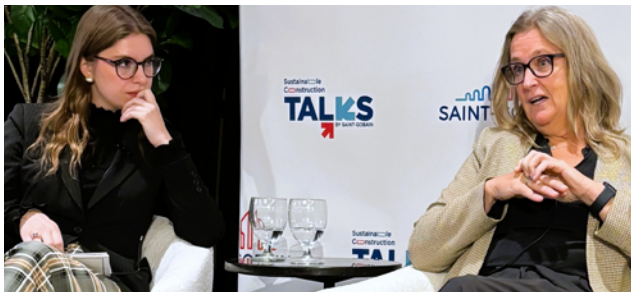
Panelist
Shoshanna Saxe, hD, P. Eng., Associate Professor, Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Infrastructure, University of Toronto

Dr. Shoshanna Saxe is an Associate Professor in the Department of Civil and Mineral Engineering at the University of Toronto, Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Infrastructure, and the Director of the Centre for the Sustainable Built Environment. Her research asks two fundamental questions: 1) what should we build? and 2) how should we build it? to literally build our way to a sustainable future.

BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT FUTURE FOR ALL CANADIANS THROUGH CIRCULAR CONSTRUCTION

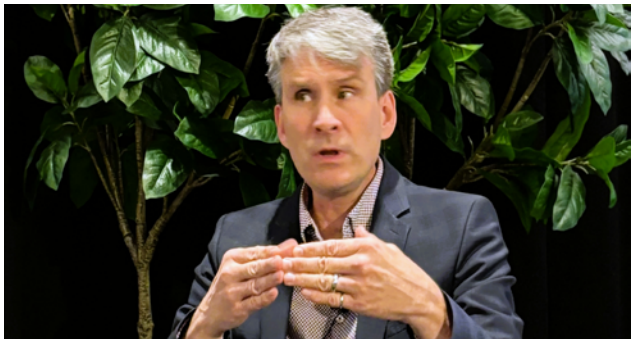
The panel of Canadian experts explored the state of circular construction in Canada, the trends and barriers for the advancement of a more circular built environment and some ways those barriers can be overcome. These thought-provoking perspectives sparked animated conversations with the audience on how industry stakeholders can shift their mindset on how they are seeing the built environment value chain and explore untapped opportunities.

Jo-Anne St. Godard, representing the Circular Innovation Council, emphasized the need for a systemic shift from a linear economy to a circular one. For her, circularity is not about recycling alone but about optimizing the use of materials and spaces across the full lifecycle of a building. She noted that recycling often leads to downcycling and rarely displaces virgin materials, which limits its impact. She called for a broader lens that considers how buildings are designed, used, and repurposed.



She highlighted the role of **outcome-based procurement,** where governments and developers are incentivized to meet sustainability goals rather than follow rigid specifications. Her vision includes using data and tools such as material banks to guide renovation and reuse strategies and embedding sustainability into planning and permitting
processes. sustainability into planning and permitting processes.

Lyle Scott, a sustainability consultant with a background in development, brought a pragmatic industry perspective to the conversation. He noted that while the term "circularity" is not commonly used in day-to-day practice, the principles behind it **—efficiency, durability, and material reduction—** are increasingly relevant.



Lyle emphasized that developers are open to sustainable solutions especially when they align with economic goals, and that early-stage design decisions are critical for achieving both environmental and financial benefits. He pointed out that many regulatory requirements, such as parking mandates, can hinder sustainable design and need to be revisited.

Lyle also highlighted successful examples of modular and repeatable design, such as Alberta's standardized school construction, which balances cost-effectiveness with environmental considerations. He stressed the importance of learning from other regions and avoiding the mindset that Canadian cities require entirely unique solutions.

Shoshanna Saxe, an academic and engineer, challenged conventional thinking around sustainability by focusing on design efficiency and sufficiency. She argued that recycling, while important, has minimal impact compared to strategies that reduce material input and extend the life of buildings. Shoshanna highlighted the inefficiencies in current housing design, pointing to examples of small, well-designed spaces that outperform larger, poorly planned ones. She called for a disruption in architectural practice, suggesting that better design can lead to significant cost savings and environmental benefits.
Shoshanna advocated for walkable cities, repeatable building forms like rectangles, and regulatory reform to allow more flexible and efficient design. She also addressed the issue of aging in place, arguing that communities need diverse housing options to avoid inefficient use of space and infrastructure.

The Talk helped the audience gain a better understanding of what sustainable and circular construction could look like in Canada.
The panelists' perspectives converged on the need for early intervention in design, regulatory reform, and a shift in mindset —from building for specifications to building for outcomes. They called for collaboration across sectors and disciplines to unlock innovation and create built environments that are not only efficient and resilient but also equitable and future-ready.

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"This is what we advocate for as an organization, we ask everybody to **take a step back and broaden your lens** to think about the word optimization. Because the more we give a building life, not only in terms of its years of service, but optimizing its service while it's in use, the less you need to extract for new building."

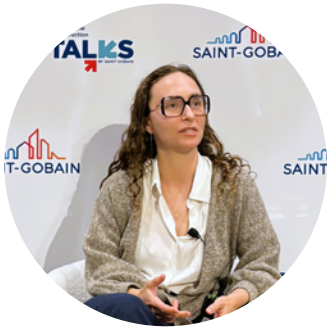
Jo-Anne St. Godard, Executive Director, Circular Innovation Council

"What I've found is that when you're looking at the **environmental impacts,** the earlier you look at it, the more things that are good for the environment and things that are good for project economics align. The later you get in the process, the more it becomes a bolt-on solution, the more it costs."

Lyle Scott, Principal, Footprint

"We have a reality where we have a massive housing crisis, a massive cost of living crisis, a massive loneliness crisis, and an economy that is falling behind in every possible metric over my entire lifetime. So we can keep doing the things we're doing and have them get worse. Or we can **face up to our reality** and say this system is not working for us and we're going to have to embrace the hard change or just continue to have degradation."

Dr. Shoshanna Saxe, Associate Professor, University of Toronto



To find out more and to read the 2025 edition of our Barometer, visit the Sustainable Construction Observatory page at:
www.saint-gobain.com/en/sustainable-construction-observatory

For a more in-depth look at sustainable construction and its acceleration levers, please visit our online media, Constructing a Sustainable Future:
www.constructing-sustainable-future.com/en/home/

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If you have any question about the Sustainable Construction Observatory, please contact us at the following address:
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