

STANDARDIZATION IS NOT THE ENEMY

What the World Forgot About Building at Scale

A Building Forward Series Perspective on Standardization, Industrialized Housing, and the
Recovery of Canadian Building Capacity

Patrick Norris

June 2026

The problem with modern construction is not that we build too much the same. It is that we have forgotten how to build enough of anything.

Part I — The Fear of Repetition

The Fear of Repetition

Modern North America has developed an unusual relationship with standardization.

We distrust it instinctively. We associate repetition with monotony, bureaucracy, low quality, and failed public housing experiments. In architecture and urbanism, the words cookie-cutter and mass-produced are often used as insults. Every project is expected to be unique. Every building is expected to express identity. Every development is expected to reinvent itself.

And yet, almost everything that defines modern industrial civilization was built through standardization.

The automobile did not become accessible because every car was custom engineered. Air travel did not become affordable because every aircraft was unique. Smartphones did not become universal because every device was handcrafted. Industrial society advances when systems become repeatable, scalable, and reliable enough to produce abundance.

Most people reading this that own an automobile do not own a custom handmade Ferrari or McLaren. They drive a Toyota Corolla, a BMW 3 Series, a VW Jetta, a Tesla Model 3, a Dodge Ram. A vehicle that is nearly identical to tens and hundreds of thousands with the same name but a different trim, a different colour, with different features but the same car nonetheless.

Housing once followed the same logic.

The postwar decades that built much of the modern world were not defined by architectural uniqueness. They were defined by coordinated production. Governments, builders, manufacturers, and planners understood something that modern construction culture often struggles to accept: a housing shortage cannot be solved one bespoke project at a time.

Subdivisions often only have a handful of models to build hundreds of homes, but those models have multiple elevations, almost infinite colour and material selections making them different all while still being the same house as 100 others in the same neighbourhood. Done well, with intention, the typical person walking on the street doesn't even notice.

Entire societies once organized themselves around the industrial production of homes.

Canada did it. The United States did it. France did it. Sweden did it. Japan did it. Singapore did it. Even the Soviet Union, despite all of its profound political and economic failures, understood that solving a housing crisis required building systems, not simply buildings.

The uncomfortable truth is that many of the places modern Canadians admire today were built through forms of standardization that would now be politically controversial, culturally unfashionable, or procedurally impossible.

This paper is not an argument for monotonous cities or authoritarian planning. It is an argument that modern Canada has confused customization with quality, complexity with sophistication, and process with progress.

We did not lose the ability to build housing at scale because the engineering became harder. We lost the institutional, political, and cultural comfort with repetition.

The question is, before Canada can build any ambitious housing or infrastructure agenda, can it accept the discipline that scale requires?

That discipline has a name. It is standardization.

Part II — When the World Built at Scale

The Twentieth Century Was the Century of Mass Housing

The modern housing crisis is often framed as though humanity has never encountered a challenge like this before. That is historically untrue.

The twentieth century was, in many ways, the century of mass housing construction. Countries faced severe shortages caused by industrialization, war, urbanization, migration, and population growth. The scale of these shortages frequently exceeded anything modern Canada has yet experienced. In many cases, the housing systems of entire countries had to be remade within a generation.

And yet those countries built. Not incrementally. Not cautiously. Not through isolated pilot projects or endlessly negotiated site-specific approvals. They built through systems capable of producing housing continuously and at industrial scale.

Postwar Britain constructed New Towns around London and other major cities. France industrialized apartment construction using prefabricated concrete systems to rebuild after the war. Sweden launched the Million Programme, delivering one million homes over roughly a decade for a population of only about eight million people.¹ Japan normalized standardized apartment typologies and transit-oriented urban expansion. Singapore transformed itself from overcrowded informal settlement conditions into one of the world's most functional public housing systems through the Housing and Development Board.²

Even North America once understood this logic. Levittown was not merely a suburb. It was an industrial production system applied to housing. Wartime Housing Limited in Canada produced standardized wartime communities rapidly enough to house workers and returning veterans during one of the largest industrial mobilizations in Canadian history.³ Ontario's apartment boom of the 1960s and 1970s delivered tens of thousands of units through repetitive tower construction, using standardized structural grids, repeatable mechanical systems, and construction crews that became faster through repetition.

The world did not once lack the capacity for large-scale housing production. It lacked the luxury of avoiding it.

That distinction matters for Canada now. Canada does not need to rediscover concrete, cranes, wood framing, elevators, modular boxes, district services, or apartment typologies. It needs to rediscover the institutional confidence to repeat what works, improve it over time, and protect it from being customized to death before it reaches scale.

The Scale Problem Is Not Abstract

Canada's current housing shortfall is often expressed in large numbers: millions of additional homes nationally, hundreds of thousands of homes per year, and provincial targets that exceed recent delivery patterns. Those figures are useful, but they can become too large to feel operational.

The practical meaning is simpler. A country that needs homes at that scale cannot rely on a delivery model where each project is novel, each approval is uncertain, each consultant team restarts the details, each municipality reinterprets the same questions, and each construction method is treated as exceptional.

At modest scale, uniqueness is tolerable. At national scale, uniqueness becomes a bottleneck.

This is the point at which standardization stops being a design preference and becomes a national capacity question. A country that cannot repeat cannot scale.

The Unfashionable Word: Production

Modern housing conversations often prefer safer words: supply, affordability, intensification, density, missing middle, inclusion, placemaking. These are useful words. But they can also conceal the harder industrial question.

Production is different. Production asks how many homes can be delivered, by whom, with what labour force, using what design system, with what supply chain, at what repeatable cost, and over what time horizon.

A production mindset does not eliminate design. It disciplines design. It forces design to serve a larger objective: repeatable delivery at the scale of need.

That is the conceptual line Canada must recover. A housing crisis is not solved by admiring good projects. It is solved by building a system that makes good projects routine.

Part III — The Soviet Example — Industrialization Without Romance

Why This Example Matters

No example demonstrates the raw productive potential of standardization more clearly, or more uncomfortably, than the Soviet Union's postwar housing program.

The Soviet example should not be romanticized. It emerged from an authoritarian state, a command economy, and a political culture that suppressed individual preference, property rights, and democratic opposition. Its urban results were often monotonous. Its buildings were frequently crude. Its maintenance systems were weak. Its allocation mechanisms were politicized. Its lessons must therefore be handled with care.

But the example cannot simply be dismissed either. That would be too convenient, and convenience is not analysis.

By the 1950s, the Soviet Union faced a housing crisis of staggering scale. Rapid industrialization, wartime destruction, and urban migration had produced severe overcrowding across major cities. Millions lived in communal apartments, temporary barracks, or subdivided units with shared kitchens and bathrooms. The early Soviet state had redistributed existing space, but it had not produced enough new space. By the post-Stalin era, housing was not a policy file. It was a legitimacy crisis.⁴

Khrushchev's answer was blunt: abandon architectural excess, standardize the product, industrialize the process, and build at a scale that matched the crisis.

The Khrushchyovka and the Factory Logic

The iconic product of that shift was the Khrushchyovka: the five-storey walk-up apartment block that spread across the Soviet Union from the late 1950s onward. These buildings were austere by design. Units were small. Ceilings were low. Storage was limited. Sound separation was poor. Many were designed with a planned lifespan measured in decades, not centuries.⁵

Measured as architecture, they were easy to criticize. Measured against communal apartments and barracks, they were transformative.

For millions of families, a Khrushchyovka meant a private front door, a private kitchen, a private bathroom, and a degree of domestic life that had previously been impossible. That fact does not excuse the weaknesses of the model. But it explains why the model mattered.

The key was not the apartment block alone. The key was the system behind it: standardized series designs, large-panel concrete factories, house-building combines, coordinated crane operations, semi-skilled assembly crews, and centralized resource allocation. Housing moved, at least partially, from the construction site into the factory.⁶

The Soviet Union was not building one-off projects. It was building a machine for producing homes.

The System Behind the Output

The most important feature of the Soviet program was not the individual apartment block. It was the administrative and industrial chain that surrounded it. National targets were translated into standardized design series. Standardized design series were translated into factory production. Factory output was coordinated with construction trusts, cranes, labour brigades, and municipal allocation systems.

This was not efficient in the full economic sense. Command economies generate waste, distortion, and poor feedback. But the system did concentrate resources around a single measurable objective: build housing. That clarity is one reason the output was so large.

Modern Canada has the opposite problem. It has far better technology, far better building science, far better financial tools, and far stronger legal protections. But it often lacks a clear delivery chain. Authority is fragmented. Risk is dispersed. Incentives conflict. Approvals are sequential rather than synchronized. The result is a system that can discuss housing endlessly while producing it too slowly.

The Soviet lesson is therefore not ideological. It is organizational. Fragmented systems struggle to produce unified outcomes.

What Canada Should Learn

The productive lessons are more precise.

Housing shortages at national scale are solved through systems, not isolated projects. Standardization must occur before the site-specific approval process, not after it. Factories matter when they are tied to repeatable demand, not when they are asked to survive on scattered pilot projects. A housing program must integrate design, approvals, supply chains, labour training, financing, infrastructure, and operations into one coordinated delivery model.

The Soviet program was morally and politically alien to Canada. But its core organizational insight remains uncomfortable and relevant: scale requires alignment.

Modern Canada has plenty of activity. It has far less alignment.

Part IV — Canada Once Understood Standardization

Wartime Housing and the Canadian Production Mindset

Canada's own history is more useful than it is often allowed to be.

During the Second World War and the postwar transition, Canada faced urgent housing needs tied to wartime industrial employment, returning veterans, and rapid family formation. Wartime Housing Limited was created to deliver standardized, modest homes quickly in communities across the country. The houses were not luxurious. They were not individually expressive. But they were practical, repeatable, and fast enough to meet an urgent social need.⁷

The important point is not the style of the houses. The important point is the institutional posture. Canada treated housing as part of national mobilization. Design, finance, land, and delivery were organized around a clear objective.

Canada now treats housing delivery as a unique output of dozens of overlapping systems, each capable of saying no, each adding cost, and few directly accountable for the number of homes that reach occupancy.

The Ordinary Genius of Plan Books

Standardization was not always a government act. For much of North American housing history, ordinary builders relied on pattern books, catalogue homes, standard details, familiar truss spans, repeated room arrangements, and locally understood house forms.

This was not low intelligence. It was accumulated intelligence. A builder did not need to solve the whole house from first principles each time because many decisions had already been tested by prior houses, prior trades, prior suppliers, and prior buyers.

The same principle exists in every mature construction market. Repetition allows errors to be corrected, costs to be understood, trades to improve, and supply chains to stabilize. When every project is treated as a custom exercise, that learning is interrupted.

There was a time you could buy an entire kit house from Home Hardware. In the US between 1908 and 1942 the Sears and Roebuck company sold around 70,000 homes in a kit of parts package.⁸ The homeowner could follow the instructions and build them Ikea style or hire a local contractor to build it for them.

Canada's lost building culture is not only about big national programs. It is also about the loss of humble, repeatable, ordinary building forms that once allowed small and medium builders to produce homes without needing a bespoke consultant army around every site.

The Reintroduction of Common Plans

Common plans are making a resurgence. CMHC has released their Housing Design Catalogue, a directory of region-specific plans for ADUs, fourplexes, sixplexes and stacked townhome designs.⁹ This is new and still needs development to get to a permit ready set that can take a vacant lot to shovel in the ground in 3 months but it is a step in the right direction.

The Apartment Boom and the Repetition Canada Forgot

Ontario's postwar apartment boom also depended on standardization. The concrete rental towers and early condominium buildings that reshaped Toronto, Mississauga, North York, Ottawa, Hamilton, and other cities were not bespoke exercises. They were repeatable building types supported by a developer class, trade base, financing environment, and municipal growth logic that made repetition normal.

The Housing Giants paper in this series traced the founders and companies that scaled within that environment: Tridel, Minto, Menkes, Cadillac Fairview, Kaneff, Greenpark, Mattamy, Daniels, and others. Their stories are not identical, but they share a structural truth: scale was produced when entrepreneurial builders met demographic demand, viable economics, and enough regulatory room to act.¹⁰

In that period, a builder could learn from one project and apply the lesson to the next. Trades could repeat details. Crews could become faster. Suppliers could forecast demand. Municipalities could process familiar building forms. Capital could understand the risk. Repetition compounded learning.

That is what modern construction has allowed to decay.

Part V — The Difference Between Standardization and Monotony

Bad Standardization Is Real

The case against standardization has evidence behind it. This is why the argument must be careful.

Bad standardization produces monotony. It repeats the wrong details. It imposes a single model on different climates, cultures, household types, and neighbourhood conditions. It turns cost reduction into value destruction. It delivers units without streets, density without community, and speed without durability.

Canada has seen versions of this failure. Some postwar housing estates isolated low-income households in single-use environments with weak ground-level activity, limited mixed income structure, and insufficient maintenance funding. Some suburban subdivisions repeated houses without producing civic life. Some apartment clusters delivered shelter but not neighbourhoods.

Those failures matter. But they are not arguments against standardization itself. They are arguments against lazy standardization.

Good Standardization Is a Platform for Variation

Good standardization is not the elimination of design. It is the creation of a disciplined platform within which design can operate.

A good system standardizes what should be standardized: structural grids, shafts, wall assemblies, bathroom and kitchen modules, energy systems, life-safety details, envelope performance, accessibility requirements, approvals documentation, and procurement packages.

It allows variation where variation matters: facade rhythm, material expression, ground-floor uses, public realm, unit mix, landscape, community facilities, climate response, and relationship to local context.

In other words, the best standardized systems do not make every building identical. They make every building easier to produce while preserving enough variation to create humane places.

The automobile analogy is imperfect but useful. A car platform can support multiple models. Shared components do not prevent product differentiation; they enable it. Housing requires the same discipline. The platform should be repeatable. The city should not feel mechanical.

The Real Enemy Is Not Repetition

The enemy of good cities is not repetition. The enemy is repetition without intelligence.

Streets lined with Georgian terraces, Montreal triplexes, Vancouver Specials, Toronto bay-and-gables, New York brownstones, Parisian perimeter blocks, and London row houses all rely on repetition. Many of the world's most beloved urban environments are repetitive. What makes them work is not endless uniqueness. It is proportion, rhythm, durability, adaptability, and a strong relationship between building and street.

Modern planning sometimes forgets this. It fears repetition in the building while tolerating repetition in the process: the same studies, the same delays, the same objections, the same redesign cycles, the same value engineering, the same financing gaps, the same missed targets.

A country serious about housing abundance should be more afraid of repeated failure than repeated design.

Part VI — Building Systems, Not Projects

The Prototype Problem

One of the defining characteristics of contemporary construction culture is that nearly every project behaves like a prototype.

Different consultants. Different assemblies. Different approvals. Different procurement strategies. Different zoning negotiations. Different mechanical systems. Different details. Different financing structures. Different risk allocations.

Even when two buildings are nearly identical, the system often forces them to be redesigned, re-reviewed, and renegotiated from the beginning.

No manufacturing industry on earth scales efficiently under those conditions.

The countries and eras that built housing successfully at industrial scale understood something fundamentally different: housing production is not simply an architectural exercise. It is a systems problem. The real innovation was never the apartment tower itself. It was the ecosystem around it.

Repeatable structural grids. Standardized unit layouts. Catalogued components. Prefabricated assemblies. Factory production. Coordinated infrastructure. Synchronized approvals. Predictable financing structures. Experienced crews. Known supply chains. These are not glamorous words, but they are the words out of which housing abundance is made.

The Consultant Economy and the Loss of Direct Building Knowledge

Modern development has also become heavily intermediated. Before a home is built, a long procession of consultants may be required to prove, model, justify, redesign, revise, resubmit, and defend the project. Much of this work is necessary. Some of it protects real public interests. But the cumulative result is a system where production is often subordinate to process.

This matters because housing is physical. It is not a policy statement. It is not a rendering. It is not an approval letter. It is concrete, steel, wood, glass, labour, sequencing, weather, logistics, financing, inspections, and occupancy.

When the people who understand the physical act of building are pushed too far downstream, standardization becomes harder. Details are optimized on paper but not repeated in the field. Procurement is customized but not simplified. Risk is transferred but not reduced. Complexity is documented but not eliminated.

The Building Forward series has already argued that Canada's housing history was shaped by builders who understood land, labour, cost, regulation, and timing together. That integrated builder class did not treat construction as an afterthought. It treated construction knowledge as the base of the enterprise.¹¹

Standardization requires that kind of knowledge. It requires feedback from actual building, not only from policy design.

Part VII — Industrialized Construction Is Not a Shortcut

Factories Need Systems Around Them

The current excitement around modular housing, prefabrication, panelization, mass timber, and cold-formed steel is justified, but incomplete.

Factory-built housing is not magic. A factory does not solve bad land economics. It does not solve late approvals. It does not solve inconsistent design decisions. It does not solve unpredictable demand. It does not solve lenders who treat every project as unfamiliar. It does not solve municipalities that require a factory-built project to pass through a site-built approval culture.

Industrialized construction only works when the entire system is aligned around repetition. The factory needs a product catalogue. The catalogue needs code acceptance. Code acceptance needs municipal trust. Municipal trust needs proven performance. Proven performance needs repeat demand. Repeat demand needs financing and land pipelines that do not disappear after one pilot project.

This is where Canada often mistakes a tool for a system. Modular construction is a tool. Standardization is a system. A factory is a tool. A repeatable housing delivery platform is a system.

Learning From Failed and Repeated Attempts

The Housing Giants paper identified the long arc of Mattamy's Stelumar experiment: an early Cambridge research phase, a Milton factory phase, and the modern SAMI modular initiative. The most interesting point is not whether any single factory succeeded or failed. The most interesting point is that the same industrial thesis returned across decades, with better technology and a different product target.¹²

That is how industrial learning works. Early failure is not always evidence that the idea is wrong. Sometimes it is evidence that the surrounding system, technology, market timing, or product selection was not ready.

Canada should expect a similar learning curve if it is serious about industrialized housing. Some factories will fail. Some systems will be wrong. Some details will need correction. The question is whether the country treats those failures as tuition, or as proof that scale itself was naive.

A nation that cannot tolerate first-generation failure will never build second-generation capacity.

Part VIII — The Psychology of Customization

How Luxury Logic Colonized Ordinary Housing

Part of Canada's discomfort with standardization comes from a confusion between home as shelter and home as individual expression.

At the luxury end of the market, customization is rational. Buyers pay for uniqueness, location, finish, views, brand, and personal preference. The problem begins when the psychology of the luxury market colonizes the entire housing system.

Not every home can be a signature object. Not every building can be a design event. Not every project can carry the full cost of reinvention. A society that applies luxury expectations to ordinary housing will produce too little ordinary housing.

This is not an argument for ugliness. It is an argument for humility. The first duty of a housing system is to house people well. Beauty matters. Durability matters. Neighbourhood character matters. But abundance also matters. Without abundance, design excellence becomes a consolation prize for scarcity.

The Status Economy of Uniqueness

Modern architecture and development are not immune from status incentives. Unique projects attract attention. Bespoke forms win awards. Renderings circulate. Complexity can appear sophisticated even when it makes delivery slower and more expensive.

Standardized housing rarely receives the same prestige. A repeated building type that quietly delivers thousands of good homes is less visible than a single extraordinary project. But from a national housing perspective, the repeated building may matter far more.

This is one of the cultural barriers Canada must confront. We reward novelty more visibly than reliability. We celebrate the exceptional building more easily than the repeatable system. We ask why the factory product is not more beautiful before we ask why the bespoke system is not producing enough homes.

In a housing shortage, that order of questions is backwards.

Part IX — What Standardization Should Mean for Canada Now

A Canadian Standardization Agenda

A serious Canadian approach to standardization should not begin with a single national building imposed everywhere. It should begin with a catalogue of repeatable systems matched to climate, code, tenure, and urban form.

Canada needs standardized low-rise missing-middle types: multiplexes, walk-up apartments, courtyard buildings, stacked townhouses, and small apartment buildings that can fit into existing neighbourhoods without requiring each site to restart the design debate.

Canada also needs standardized mid-rise and high-rise systems: repeatable structural grids, efficient suite modules, rational parking and servicing strategies, pre-coordinated mechanical and electrical systems, and approval packages that municipalities can review quickly because they have seen them before.

For new communities and large redevelopment sites, Canada needs district-scale standardization: street sections, utility corridors, district energy interfaces, school and childcare blocks, transit hub geometry, stormwater systems, and public realm templates that allow entire neighbourhoods to be planned as infrastructure, not assembled as fragments.

This is where the Soviet comparison becomes useful only as a warning and a provocation. Canada should not copy the Soviet city. But Canada should recognize that a housing target measured in hundreds of thousands of homes per year cannot be met by treating each building as a one-off negotiation.

Pre-Approved Should Mean Actually Pre-Approved

Design catalogues have re-entered Canadian policy discussion, and that is a positive sign. But a catalogue that merely offers drawings is not enough.

Pre-approved should mean the building has already cleared the repeatable questions: code logic, fire and life safety principles, accessibility strategy, structural concept, envelope performance, energy approach, servicing assumptions, and baseline constructability. The site-specific review should then focus on the matters that are genuinely site-specific: grading, servicing capacity, setbacks, access, stormwater, heritage, environmental constraints, and local infrastructure tie-ins.

If every catalogue design is still forced through the full uncertainty of a bespoke process, the catalogue becomes theatre. It may look like reform, but it will not deliver reform.

Standardization only saves time when the system agrees to stop re-arguing the standardized parts.

Standardization Must Include Operations

The maintenance failure of many twentieth-century mass housing programs is one of the most important cautionary lessons.

A building is not complete at occupancy. It enters the longest phase of its life. A standardized housing system that lowers initial cost but ignores operations will simply convert today's housing shortage into tomorrow's capital repair crisis.

Good standardization should therefore extend into asset management: replaceable components, accessible shafts, durable materials, predictable maintenance cycles, common equipment platforms, energy monitoring, reserve planning, and long-term operating budgets that match the buildings being delivered.

The goal is not to build cheap housing. The goal is to build housing that is cost-effective over its full life. Those are not the same thing.

Part X — The Building Forward Lesson

Innovation Often Looks Repetitive

The first paper in this series argued that Canada must recover its innovative capacity. That argument can easily be misunderstood if innovation is equated only with novelty.

In construction, true innovation often looks repetitive. The first prototype may be novel. The second is learning. The tenth is a system. The hundredth is capacity. The thousandth is national impact.

This is the paradox modern Canada must absorb: the country needs more innovation, but it also needs more repetition. The innovation is in designing the system well enough that repetition produces value rather than monotony.

The cathedral builders repeated forms across centuries and still produced beauty. The postwar builders repeated house types and still produced homeownership for millions. The apartment builders repeated towers and still produced urban rental supply at volumes today's market struggles to match. The best industrial systems do not eliminate judgment. They focus judgment where it matters most.

A Challenge to the Builder Class

This paper is also a challenge to the entrepreneurial builder class that Canada needs to recover.

Government can create conditions. It can set targets, reform approvals, finance infrastructure, and standardize code pathways. But buildings are still delivered by people and institutions with the ability, innovation and discipline to take land, capital, design, labour, and risk and turn them into occupied homes.

The next generation of Canadian builders will not be defined only by who can assemble land or navigate approvals. They will be defined by who can create repeatable delivery platforms: standardized systems that are good enough to scale, flexible enough to adapt, and durable enough to matter for generations.

That is a harder challenge than producing another one-off project. It requires builders to think like manufacturers, infrastructure planners, operators, and civic institutions at the same time.

But that is what the moment demands.

Part XI — Relearning Scale

Relearning Scale

Canada does not need to choose between quality and scale. That is a false choice, and false choices are a luxury housing crises do not permit.

The future of Canadian housing will not be solved through nostalgia for the past, nor through replication of failed twentieth-century planning experiments. But neither will it be solved through a construction culture that treats every building as a handcrafted exception and every approval as an original act of interpretation.

The societies that housed millions of people successfully did not fear repetition. They understood that standardization, used intelligently, is not the enemy of good cities. It is often the prerequisite for building enough of them.

Canada's challenge is not to become more Soviet, more suburban, more technocratic, or more centralized for its own sake. Canada's challenge is to become bolder and more disciplined in the approach.

Deciding what should be repeated, protecting quality without smothering production. Designing systems rather than celebrating isolated projects. Learning from history without becoming trapped by it to build homes at the scale required.

The question, then, is not whether standardization is the enemy.

The question is whether Canada still has the courage to standardize the right things — and the discipline to build from that foundation.

If the answer is yes, then standardization will not be the enemy of Canadian housing. It will be one of the tools by which Canada gets its builder confidence back.

Also in the Building Forward Series: How Do We Get Innovative...Again? (Paper One) examines how institutional inertia and the conflation of familiarity with effectiveness are quietly suppressing innovation in Canadian construction. Ontario's Housing Giants: From Individuals to Empires (Paper Two) profiles the founders of fourteen of Ontario's largest homebuilders and rental developers, tracing the conditions that enabled scale and the crucible moments that defined each enterprise. The Cathedral and the Condo: How Canada Confused Process With Achievement (Paper Three) argues that modern Canada has substituted procedural accumulation for the decisiveness that once defined its great building projects. The Missing Builder Class: The People Who Built Canada — and Why We Stopped Producing Them (Paper Four) examines the loss of craft knowledge, practical building intelligence, and the workforce pipeline that once made large-scale construction possible. The Consultant Economy: When Process Became the Product (Paper Five) traces how the intermediary economy displaced direct building accountability and made every project a custom exercise in liability management. Standardization Is Not the Enemy: What the World Forgot About Building at Scale (Paper Six) argues that Canada's discomfort with repetition—not the complexity of the work itself—is what is keeping the country from building housing at the scale it needs.

This paper was developed with the assistance of generative AI tools — Claude (Anthropic) and ChatGPT (OpenAI) — for source organization, structural review, and drafting refinement. AI is a tool. Like any tool, its value is determined by the judgment of the person using it. The pneumatic nail gun was resisted by carpenters who believed it would undermine craftsmanship. AutoCAD was resisted by drafters who believed hand drawing produced better design thinking. In both cases, the tool expanded what skilled practitioners could accomplish — it did not replace the judgment that made the work worth doing. The analysis, positions, and conclusions in this paper are the author's own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Norris is a Canadian construction and capital planning professional with experience in large-scale residential development and infrastructure-related projects.

This paper is an independent thought piece and does not reflect the views of any employer or affiliated organization.

ENDNOTES

1. Sweden's Million Programme is widely cited as delivering approximately one million dwellings between 1965 and 1974. See comparative housing-policy literature on postwar European housing supply programs, including Barlow & Duncan, *Success and Failure in Housing Provision: European Systems Compared*.
2. For Singapore's public-housing model, see comparative housing-policy literature on the Housing and Development Board and long-term public housing delivery systems.
3. For Canadian wartime and postwar housing production, see CMHC historical material and studies of Wartime Housing Limited.
4. For Soviet housing conditions and post-Stalin housing policy, see Steven E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin*; and A. J. DiMaio, *Soviet Urban Housing: Problems and Policies*.
5. For the Khrushchyovka, Soviet standard apartment types, and planned lifespan discussions, see Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*; Philipp Meuser, *Prefabricated Housing: Construction and Design Manual*; and Blair A. Ruble, *From Khrushcheby to Korobki*.
6. For DSK house-building combines, large-panel construction, and Soviet prefabrication, see Meuser, *Prefabricated Housing*; DiMaio, *Soviet Urban Housing*; and Blair A. Ruble, *From Khrushcheby to Korobki*.
7. See CMHC and Canadian wartime housing histories for Wartime Housing Limited and standardized wartime communities.
8. Estimates of Sears, Roebuck and Co.'s Modern Homes kit-house program vary by source. Sears reported more than 70,000 kit homes sold in North America, with most accounts citing the program's span as 1908 to 1940 or 1908 to 1942, and some estimates running as high as 100,000 units. See Sears Modern Homes historical research, including Rosemary Thornton, *Houses by Mail*, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's historical material on kit-home construction.
9. See Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Housing Design Catalogue* (housingcatalogue.cmhc-schl.gc.ca), comprising more than 50 regionally tailored designs for accessory dwelling units, fourplexes, sixplexes, and stacked townhomes, developed with regional architectural firms and pre-reviewed for streamlined permitting by a growing list of partner municipalities.
10. See Patrick Norris, *Ontario's Housing Giants: From Individuals to Empires*, May 2026, for the founder profiles and cross-cutting analysis of Ontario's large homebuilders and rental developers.
11. *Ibid.*, especially the cross-cutting analysis on embodied knowledge, demographic tailwinds, regulatory capital, recession survival, and long time horizons. See also Patrick Norris, *The Missing Builder Class: The People Who Built Canada — and Why We Stopped Producing Them* (Paper Four), for the parallel argument on craft knowledge loss and trades formation; and *The Cathedral and the Condo: How Canada Confused Process With Achievement* (Paper Three), for the broader argument on the displacement of builder decisiveness by procedural culture.
12. See Patrick Norris, *Ontario's Housing Giants: From Individuals to Empires*, May 2026, for the Mattamy Homes profile, including the three-iteration Stelumar/SAMI manufacturing arc and the repeated industrialized construction thesis.