PROFESSIONAL SURVEYORS CANADA
GÉOMÈTRES PROFESSIONNELS DU CANADA

Office of the Right Honorable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada,
Langevin Block, House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

March 23, 2020

RE: COVID-19 Social Distancing Initiatives and the Economic Role of Professional Surveyors

Dear Prime Minister,

We appreciate the difficult decisions that need to be made to protect the public health, safety and welfare when dealing with the Coronavirus. Certain prudent measures are needed to prevent the spread of the virus, such as limiting or prohibiting large gatherings, as well as events, activities and businesses that attract congregations of people.

I am writing to respectfully urge that any order limiting business activities be mindful of the unique characteristics of the engineering, surveying, and geospatial profession and that these activities not be closed or limited.

Many survey firms already are, or are capable of, working remotely. Professional surveyors, office technicians and administrative staff can work remotely from their respective homes, ensuring that social distancing measures are adhered to. However, an office is only one component of a survey firm. Data must be acquired on site through physical measurements. This field work can continue with low risk. Field crews are often only one person, they do not have to work in close physical proximity to other technicians or engage with the general public. In many circumstances, survey technicians can do their work quicker and more efficiently in the current environment due to reduced traffic on our streets.

Aerial data acquisition, such as aerial photography for mapping and airborne LiDAR collection, is time sensitive. Such projects must be flown in the coming days and weeks when there is no snow on the ground, the sun is high enough in the sky so as to not cast long shadows, and the leaves have not yet come out on trees. This activity cannot wait and resume later this year. An entire season/year would be lost. From a public health and safety perspective, surveyors across the country perform deformation surveys of critical infrastructure. Such as monitoring the walls of an excavation site for slumping or verifying the structural integrity of a hydro-electric dam.

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Any stop-work or work from home order can and should exempt such surveying-related activities. Such an exemption would not create a risk of persons being infected or spreading the virus. A shelter in place order similar to that being imposed in areas of the United States will prevent surveying firms from continuing to work, exacerbating a long term economic slowdown, with no positive impact on the Coronavirus pandemic. No amount of working from home or telecommuting can change the need for surveying work in the field.

Under a shelter in place scenario, an exception for these types of activities would alleviate the impact on surveying business, as well as planning, design, construction, and other downstream businesses and industries that are dependent on surveying for their livelihoods. As an example, the Canadian Real Estate Association forecasted sales of 529,900 residential homes within Canada for 2020. Real estate underpins the Canadian economy. Even a short-term limit on surveying-related services will have a long-term negative impact on our economy.

For the reasons stated above, these activities can be carried out with low health and safety risk, are vital to keeping our economy moving forward, and should not be limited or curtailed.

We respectfully urge you to implement policies that are mindful of the unique characteristics of our profession and the long-term impact a limitation on surveying will have on our economy. Please permit us to continue working in a safe and responsible manner, to serve our fellow citizens.

Yours sincerely,

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