



THE **BIG SHIFT** →

SUMMARY REPORT | 2025

The Built Environment & Stakeholder Communities

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*“The built environment isn't just where we live and work
—it's where we create our future.”*



WHERE ECONOMICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT MEETS

Rethink Sustainability Initiatives (RSI), the publisher of this report, is a trusted accelerator that employs foresight, collaboration, and systems thinking to shape a thriving future. The event upon which this report is based supports our mission to bring together leaders, experts, and communities to discover and implement scalable sustainability and resiliency solutions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 27, 2025, RSI held its second event in The Big Shift series: The Built Environment & Stakeholders Communities, hosted by TELUS at their offices at 25 York Street in Toronto.

Peter Love, President of Love Energy Consultants and a prominent voice in Canada's decarbonization movement, set the tone for the day with reflections on society's capacity for transformation when faced with urgent challenges. Drawing on recent shifts in public sentiment, Love emphasized that while broad social movements often take years to mature, there are moments when change can accelerate rapidly, especially when the stakes feel personal and immediate.

Framing this transition from belief to behavior, Love encouraged participants to see momentum not as something to wait for, but as something to help build. His message struck an optimistic chord: meaningful progress toward sustainability is entirely within reach if we can mobilize our collective will and begin, wherever we are, with whatever tools we have.

The group of 120 attendees represented diverse and broad perspectives: post-secondary institutions, tech corporations, AI and smart-tech experts, CRE and multi-residential developers, REITs, constructors, energy producers and distributors, professional services (e.g., engineering, climate-positive energy, architecture, urban planning, HR), financial services, and next-generation leaders (students).

PART I:

STAGE SETTING: NAVIGATING DISRUPTION THROUGH COLLABORATION



Peter Love

*President, Love Energy Consultants,
and Chair of the Toronto 2030 District,
and CCET (Founding RSI Director)*

OPENING REMARKS: THE CAPACITY FOR RAPID CHANGE

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“When we are faced with a challenge we view as serious and important, we have the capacity to make significant change quickly. We are working to make the change towards an attitude of conservation—currently in the belief stage—and we will get to action together.”

*- Peter Love, President,
Love Energy Consultants*

Land acknowledgment: We are hosted on the lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy peoples. This land is home to many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.



PART I:

STAGE SETTING: NAVIGATING DISRUPTION THROUGH COLLABORATION



Yasmin Glanville

CEO, Futurist and Chief Strategist,
CTR Inc. (Founder & Director, RSI)

FRAMING THE CONTEXT: DISRUPTIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES

Yasmin Glanville, Futurist and Chief Strategist at CTR Inc. and RSI Founder, opened the roundtable by challenging participants to approach disruption as an opportunity and not an obstacle. Alongside William MacGowan, Principal of Rowan Build, Glanville framed the day's discussions, emphasizing the power of collective intelligence and the need for bold, future-ready thinking. She called on participants to take an #elbowsup approach- an attitude of grounded resilience and determination in the face of rising external pressures on Canada's economic and social systems. It's a rallying reminder to stay strong and lead forward when it feels like others are imposing constraints. Glanville described the current context for Canadian business and society as a "tsunami of converging disruptions," pointing to trade wars and global economic tensions, affordability issues, climate change, rapid technological advancement (particularly AI), an aging population, skilled talent shortages, and growing cybersecurity threats.

These forces, she argued, are reshaping the landscape of the built environment – and with them, the expectations of professionals, institutions, and communities.

She illustrated this approach with tangible examples: underused real estate assets, visible social inequities, and rising loneliness- framing them not as signs of failure but as signals of where new ideas are urgently needed. Glanville encouraged attendees to start by "plotting the dot" of where they are now, imagining the world in 2035, and connecting the two through bold, collaborative strategies that centre people, prosperity, and the planet.

"Canada has the potential to become a global thought leader if we seize this opportunity. Although things seem to be moving in the wrong direction, this presents the opportunity to reflect inward and prioritize Canada first."

- Yasmin Glanville

Rather than viewing these disruptions as insurmountable, Glanville offered a four-part approach to harness the energy of disruptions:

1. Explore disruptions thoroughly to understand their dimensions.
2. Identify the specific challenges and their real-world impacts.
3. Reframe those challenges as opportunities for innovation.
4. Accelerate future-ready solutions and coordinated actions.

PART I:

STAGE SETTING: NAVIGATING DISRUPTION THROUGH COLLABORATION



William (Bill) McGowan

*Founder and Principal,
Rowanbuild*

SMART BUILDINGS: PEOPLE, SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY

William (Bill) MacGowan, Founder and Principal of Rowan Build, expanded the day's framing by calling for a fundamental rethinking of how we design and use space. With deep experience in energy management and smart building systems, MacGowan emphasized that buildings can no longer be treated as static, single-purpose assets. Instead, we must begin designing programmable real estate spaces that can evolve and adapt as needs shift over time. "Buildings in the past have been built very static," he noted. "We're seeing a shift to real estate being programmable; easy to shift the feel and use of the building. We can front-end load this work instead of relying on retrofits."

This shift requires embedding resiliency into the built environment, not just in terms of climate risk or infrastructure, but operational and functional flexibility. In a world of converging disruptions, MacGowan argued that adaptability is no longer a luxury; it's a baseline requirement. He also proposed that the built environment can—and should—serve as a platform for broader economic transformation.

"Innovation plus desperation equals economic change. Can we use innovation as an economic engine?"

- William(Bill) McGowan

Central to his remarks was the smart building frameworks, which positions people, space, and technology as interdependent components. Too often, he observed, technology leads prematurely introduced for its own sake rather than to meet a clearly defined need. In a truly smart building, design begins with people: their goals, their behaviors, and their wellbeing. Space then becomes the platform to support those needs, and technology is the responsive layer that enables them to thrive.

"What drives the creation of new solutions is uncovering your customer's North Star," he said. "This means design thinking at the convergence of customer desirability, technological feasibility, and business viability." MacGowan cautioned that even the best ideas can fall short if they don't land in that intersection: "You could have the best idea in the world, but does the customer truly want it? You might possess a product that people desire, backed by promising technology, but you can't develop it if it isn't financially viable. Alternatively, you could encounter strong market demand, but the technology may not be ready yet. Discovering this critical intersection is vital for meaningful innovation."

MacGowan closed by encouraging participants to define their "one thing"—the central driver that motivates their work, their organization, and their customers. This clarity, he explained, becomes the North Star that guides innovation.





PART I:

STAGE SETTING: NAVIGATING DISRUPTION THROUGH COLLABORATION



Yasmin Glanville

CEO, Futurist and Chief Strategist,
CTR Inc. (Founder & Director, RSI)

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN INNOVATION

A recurring theme throughout the opening session was the gap between available clean technologies and public trust in their performance. One participant offered a comment that struck a chord:

“When you speak to people about clean energy, customers are not unwilling because of cost- it's because of a lack of confidence. Efficient lighting seems to be an area of confidence. What can we do to expand confidence in innovation in other areas?”

- Yasmin Glanville

This question opened up a wider reflection on how trust is built or eroded across the clean technology landscape. Participants acknowledged that while incentives exist for high-impact upgrades like HVAC systems, building envelopes, or advanced controls, these technologies often remain out of sight and misunderstood by decision-makers. As a result, adoption stalls not because the solutions don't work, but because people don't see them, don't understand them, or aren't sure they can rely on them. The challenge, then, is not purely technological, but also communicative and cultural.

In closing the session, Yasmin Glanville reframed this lack of confidence as a strategic opportunity. She emphasized that accelerating innovation depends not just on stronger performance metrics, but on building emotional resonance and practical familiarity. People need to see solutions in action, understand how they benefit them directly, and feel supported in making change. She also pointed to a broader structural gap: many Canadian technologies struggle to scale at home, not due to shortcomings in design or ambition, but because domestic investment and procurement systems have yet to catch up.

Yasmin stated that, if Canada is to lead in the clean economy, she argued, we need to visibly back our own innovators through funding, policy stability, and clear pathways to market.

Confidence, she reminded participants, is built through consistent support, shared success, and a culture that believes in its own solutions.



PART II:

KEYNOTE: FOUR LESSONS FROM THE REVITALIZATION OF REGENT PARK



Heela Omarkhail
VP, Social Impact
The Daniels Corporation

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN INNOVATION

Heela Omarkhail, gave a keynote focused on social sustainability—how redevelopment can be shaped by, and for, the communities it affects. Drawing on the multi-decade Regent Park revitalization project in Toronto, she offered a deeply practical case study in transforming a stigmatized public housing area into a thriving, mixed-use neighbourhood. Her message: the social fabric of a place is just as important as its physical infrastructure, and success depends on listening, adapting, and building together. She framed her talk around four key lessons for sustainable built environment transformations:

1. EMBRACE A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH BY LISTENING TO LOCAL VOICES

The revitalization's strongest outcomes came from listening to the community—not just through consultation, but through co-creation. Residents, especially women in the neighbourhood, were central to shaping what Regent Park would become. They advocated for real, daily-life features like green space, dog parks, and safe places for kids to play.

Their input led to guiding principles like mixed-income housing, employment opportunities, and the right of original residents to return. This grassroots foundation helped create a sense of ownership and reduced pushback to change.

“Despite isolation and challenges, a strong spirit of community had grown. When you engage in a meaningful way, you foster success. If we had ignored the community voice, the revitalization would not have been nearly as successful.”

- Heela Omarkhail

2. PLANS COULD AND SHOULD CHANGE –BE FLEXIBLE

Omarkhail emphasized that rigidity is a threat to success in any long-term, multi-phase development. Over the course of the Regent Park project, the team had to adapt to 13 different CEOs at Toronto Community Housing Corporation, changes in political leadership, funding shifts, and evolving community needs. When residents expressed a desire for athletic grounds, Daniels pushed back on the original phasing plan to make space. The design evolved to reflect feedback on density, amenities, and public space.



Heela Omarkhail presenting at the event.

Heela reminded attendees that changes weren't easy; they required new approvals, zoning amendments, and funding arrangements. But for Daniels, adaptability wasn't a compromise but a necessity.

“Plans will evolve—and that's okay. The best-laid plans should allow for change.”

- Heela Omarkhail





3. PRIORITIZE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

The revitalization succeeded not because of one stakeholder, but because of strong, sustained partnerships across the public, private, and community sectors. Daniels worked with Toronto Community Housing, the City of Toronto, and local organizations to create jobs, support inclusive leasing, and build shared infrastructure. More than 600 jobs were created for local residents, and commercial tenants were selected based on their potential to support local economic growth. The MLSE Foundation contributed \$2.5 million to a multi-sport facility and later added \$1 million to fund community programming for youth.

These relationships created a foundation of trust and accountability; qualities that helped the project weather political and operational changes.

4. FORGET THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX; REMEMBER THERE IS NO BOX

Heela challenged attendees to let go of conventional approaches to innovation. “Forget thinking outside the box,” she said, “remember there is no box.” For Daniels, this meant rejecting advice to rebrand the neighbourhood, even when facing market skepticism. Instead of distancing the new development from Regent Park’s past, they embraced it, choosing to build units before launching sales as a tangible demonstration of change.

“Forget thinking outside the box—remember there is no box.”

- Heela Omarkhail

One standout example of this philosophy in action was Daniels’ collaboration with a local quilting group, whose work now hangs as permanent art in their buildings. Rather than sourcing from commercial galleries, they chose to uplift creative voices already rooted in the community.

This commitment to local authenticity paid off: despite early doubts about the neighbourhood’s reputation, the first condominium development became the fastest-selling project in the Greater Toronto Area that year.

APPLYING THE LESSONS TODAY

Omarkhail closed by emphasizing that these principles aren’t confined to Regent Park. Daniels is applying the same social-first approach across the GTA, including in new developments at the University of Toronto and in municipalities like Mississauga, Oakville, and Brampton. Their recent completion of a geo-exchange building reflects how social and environmental sustainability can align in practice. Ultimately, Omarkhail’s keynote highlighted that honouring community voice, building adaptive systems, and fostering deep partnerships are foundational to creating built environments that truly work-for everyone.

“Partnerships are about more than financial resources—they bring expertise, shared vision, and mutual success.”

- Heela Omarkhail



Attendees watching the keynote event.







Ener3 Solutions Inc. is dedicated to enhancing building efficiency through advanced energy solutions and building automation systems. Their expertise lies in optimizing HVAC systems—including pumps, chillers, and boilers—to reduce energy consumption and operational costs.

Ener3 emphasizes that the most sustainable energy is the energy not used. By prioritizing energy efficiency and reducing overall demand, the transition to cleaner energy sources becomes more feasible. They advocate for comprehensive monitoring of energy consumption, enabling clients to identify and address inefficiencies effectively. Additionally, Ener3 underscores the importance of education in overcoming skepticism about the significant paybacks and cost savings that energy efficiency measures can deliver.



PART III:

GREEN TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE - PANEL: 675 KING STREET WEST

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: THE VISION AND APPROACH

The panel discussion was focused on 675 King Street West, a new mixed-use development in Toronto, showcasing what is possible when sustainability is embedded from the outset.

Aiden Sweeny, who moderated the session and leads the development firm behind the project, positioned 675 King as a case study in how sustainability, profitability, and livability can work together—not as trade-offs, but as co-benefits.

“One of the big hurdles I face often is convincing my partners to really look at more sustainable practice within the building itself. I focused this conversation on four key aspects: longevity, marketability and livability, cost, and keeping it Canadian.” - Aiden Sweeny

Though the project is still in the zoning phase, it’s being approached with a long-term ownership horizon, which allows for investment in higher-performance systems that pay off over decades. Maurits Sels, representing the ownership group, emphasized that sustainability isn’t a luxury but a practical, forward-looking strategy.

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Panel Participants (left to right):

Aiden Sweeny,

President, The Six Real Estate Developments (Moderator)

Rozalia Rajewski,

Architect, Sweeny&Co Architects

Maurits Sels,

President, Colonia Treuhand

“We can defend against higher utility costs, defend ourselves against carbon taxes now and whatever’s coming down the road, as well as hopefully create a building that is marketable to tenants, not just in ten years, but in fifty years.”

- Maurits Sels, President

OCCUPANT COMFORT CHALLENGES

Rozalia Rajewski, lead architect on the project from Sweeny&Co, identified occupant comfort as a frequently overlooked but essential aspect of high-performance buildings. She explained that many conventional developments suffer from poor building envelopes, particularly excessive window-to-wall ratios and thermal bridging which drive up energy use and reduce comfort for occupants.

“One of the biggest challenges that we see is low occupant comfort, and that’s really related to poor-performing envelopes.”

- Rozalia Rajewski

Rather than reducing windows and sacrificing daylight, the team at Sweeny&Co opted for a high-performance glazing system that maintains livability while significantly improving energy performance.



The glazing system approaches the thermal efficiency of solid walls and has an estimated 60-year lifespan, far exceeding the typical 10–15 years of standard curtain wall systems.

MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE WORK

A key discussion point was the misconception that high-performance buildings are prohibitively expensive. While there is a modest cost premium (a few percentage points above conventional construction), the long-term benefits—lower operating costs, greater tenant appeal, and insulation against future carbon pricing—more than offset the initial investment. The development team made clear that these choices only make sense if sustainability is factored in from the beginning and not bolted on at the end.

THE VALUE OF MIXED-USE DESIGN

The project’s mixed-use program—retail, office, and residential—supports sustainability not just through energy efficiency, but also through urban form.

With dedicated work-from-home office space for residents, ground-level retail, and direct transit access, 675 King is designed to reduce transportation demand and contribute to a more walkable, compact city fabric. The panel highlighted this as a model for community-responsive development that aligns environmental and social value.



A Member of the Audience Asks the Panel a Question

CANADIAN TECHNOLOGIES ARE LEADING THE WAY IN HIGH-PERFORMANCE BUILDINGS

The project incorporates two major low-carbon energy systems, both developed in Canada:

1. GEOEXCHANGE SYSTEM

- **25 boreholes (each borehole is 850 feet deep)**
- **Provides 100% of cooling, 95% of heating demand**
- **Estimated to last 100 years**
- **Supports full electrification of heating and cooling**

2. WASTEWATER HEAT RECOVERY

- **Captures energy from greywater**
- **Preheats domestic hot water**
- **270% efficient (vs. 90% for gas boilers)**
- **Based on SHARC Energy’s technology**

The technologies are supported by a high-performance building envelope. They preferentially sourced from Canadian firms such as Edmonton-based Lightzone (glazing) and SHARC Energy (wastewater heat recovery). The panelists emphasized that these systems aren’t speculative but reliable, local, and scalable.

LOOKING AHEAD

The panel concluded with reflections on what it means to future-proof a building.

Questions from the audience covered a range of design considerations, from solar energy feasibility (limited by site conditions) to the role of modeling for future weather. While energy modeling for climate projections hasn’t yet been included, the team expressed interest in exploring this as Toronto’s Green Standards continue to tighten.

The 675 King Street West case study demonstrates how Canadian-led innovation and forward-thinking design can result in buildings that are livable, resilient, and economically sound. It illustrates a shift from piecemeal upgrades toward fully integrated, future-ready development.

PART IV:

BREAKOUT: FUTURE READINESS WORK GROUPS

Following the keynote and panel discussions, participants broke into themed breakout groups designed to shift the conversation from insight to action. These Future Readiness Work Groups brought together professionals from across disciplines to address pressing challenges and opportunities in the built environment.

EACH WORK GROUP FOCUSED ON A DIFFERENT THEMATIC AREA AND WAS TASKED WITH:

- **Identifying key disruptors**
- **Defining drivers of change**
- **Proposing two big ideas/solutions**
- **Reporting back highlights**

The sessions were highly interactive, drawing on participants' diverse expertise, from developers and energy consultants to architects, policymakers, and community stakeholders.

Together, these groups surfaced key tensions and opportunities that cut across sectors and pointed to the actionable pathways needed to build a future-ready built environment.

Decarbonization

tackling emissions reductions through building retrofits, policy tools and financing models

Green Technology & Transformation

Exploring the adoption of innovative technologies, overcoming skepticism, and building confidence in new solutions

Social Impact

Examining the built environment's role in well-being, equity, and community resilience in a post-pandemic world.

Accelerated Innovation

Addressing barriers to scaling new ideas—from procurement reform to workforce readiness and risk culture



PART IV:

DECARBONIZATION WORK GROUP

The Decarbonization group focused on how to unlock emissions reductions at scale—and what’s holding that back.



Decarbonization Work Group

The conversation opened with a frank identification of current disruptors: policy instability, which leads to swings in priorities with each election cycle; institutional risk aversion, which makes many owners hesitant to adopt new systems; and a shortage of financing mechanisms to support deep retrofits beyond the pilot stage.

They noted a misalignment between the pace of climate urgency and the education and training pipeline, which continues to produce professionals underprepared for retrofit and electrification demands. These disruptors don’t reflect a lack of technology, they reflect a system that isn’t yet set up to deliver it.

In response, the group proposed two major shifts. First, a national research-to-adoption pipeline, linking Canadian climate innovation to funding, pilots, and procurement. Second, a public retrofit delivery model similar to an Energy Service Company (ESCO) that could support building owners with planning, implementation, and ongoing performance management.

Disruptors

*Political instability
Institutional Risk Aversion
Shortage of Finance
Mechanisms to Support
Deep Retrofits*

Drivers of Change

*Climate Emergency
Energy Transition
Shortage of Trades*

Proposed Solutions

*National Research-to-
Adoption Pipeline
Public Retrofit Delivery Model
Performance
Management*

“We need stability in government around energy efficiency. Both left and right support it—but one party builds it, and the other tears it down.”

Participants also called for embedding decarbonization skills in education systems from skilled trades to engineering, and for reforms that would make existing building codes align more clearly with national climate goals.

The group reinforced that climate action is not just about innovation—it’s about systems, trust, and accountability.

PART IV:

GREEN TECHNOLOGY & TRANSFORMATION WORK GROUP

This breakout group tackled the question: how can we move promising green building technologies from the fringe to the mainstream?



Green Technology & Transformation Work Group

Participants identified several disruptors hindering that transition: high perceived cost, limited awareness of long-term value, lack of trust in unfamiliar systems, and the fragmented way responsibilities are shared between building owners, tenants, and service providers. Despite increasing urgency around decarbonization, many decision-makers still view sustainable tech as risky or unproven.

The future, they said, is distributed, not centralized.

Barriers were framed as symptoms of a broader cultural gap. They emphasized the need for data-backed value propositions that speak the language of business and not just environmental benefit.

Another insight from the Green Technology and Innovation Group was the role of decentralized energy and storage systems in urban resilience. Drawing parallels to the evolution of computing from mainframes to personal devices, participants argued that energy systems are undergoing a similar shift.

Disruptors

*High Perceived Cost
Limited Awareness of Longterm Value
Lack of Trust
Fragmented Sharing of Responsibilities*

Drivers of Change

*Climate Emergency
Urgency to Decarbonize
Shortage of Trades*

Proposed Solutions

*Data-backed Value Propositions
Address Risk Directly
Measurable Outcomes*

"Trust rises when risk is addressed properly. You need a metric to prove it."

People are prepared to pay for Canadian technology because they want to keep jobs and innovation here.

Pilot programs, case studies, and demonstration sites were flagged as critical to change perception and build momentum. Equally important: Canadian innovation should be championed domestically, through procurement reform and financial incentives that prioritize homegrown technology.

PART IV:

SOCIAL IMPACT WORK GROUP

This breakout group explored how the built environment impacts social wellbeing, cohesion, and community identity especially amid rising disruption. Participants began by identifying several destabilizing forces affecting how people relate to place: the post-pandemic migration away from cities, growing economic stratification between and within communities, and a sense of disconnection or disengagement in many urban environments.

Some group members noted how policies and design values imported from other jurisdictions, particularly the U.S., were beginning to erode distinctly Canadian approaches to community.

What emerged from this discussion was a shared recognition that while we measure what we build, we rarely measure how people actually experience it. The group proposed the creation of a "social baseline"—a consistent way to assess community wellbeing, emotional connection, and civic participation. Unlike traditional economic indicators, a social baseline would offer insight into how safe, supported, and connected people feel where they live.

"We don't really have a way to set a social baseline—not just from an economics perspective, but from a quality-of-life standpoint and how people are participating in the community."



Social Impact Work Group



"Part of our solution was to social baseline adjacent communities or find a community that makes sense—and replicate what works. That's putting people first."

Participants discussed how tools like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) might be adapted for the Canadian context, and how partnerships between developers, municipalities, and local stakeholders could help bring this type of assessment into early-stage planning and long-term evaluation.



PART IV:

ACCELERATED INNOVATIONS WORK GROUP

This group explored how to remove the structural and cultural bottlenecks slowing down climate-aligned innovation in the building sector. The discussion focused on deep systemic disruptors: slow-moving policy, conservative corporate cultures, academic resistance to non-traditional pathways, and lack of equitable funding access for new solutions.

“There are lots of problems in the world we can’t solve—but there are solutions that address them directly and effectively.”

Participants emphasized that innovation doesn’t fail from lack of ideas, it stalls when systems aren’t built to reward experimentation.

They noted that even in academia, students are often trained to avoid risk and default to legacy approaches. Meanwhile, many early-stage technologies, especially Canadian ones, struggle to access grants or gain visibility at home.

A key opportunity is to rethink how grants and government support are distributed. Participants praised recent trends toward wider access and called for continued democratization of innovation funding, especially for those working outside conventional institutions.



Accelerated Innovations Work Group

The Accelerated Innovations Work Group also stressed the need to elevate success stories, simplify messaging, and show how specific innovations address pressing global problems. Doing so would help move the conversation from theory to action and support the ecosystem of leaders willing to take the first leap.

“Slow adoption of new technologies... slow policy momentum... complex regulations and need to educate buyers.”

Disruptors

- Slow-Moving Policy
- Conservative Corporate Cultures
- Academic Resistance to Non-Traditional Pathways
- Lack of Equitable Funding

Drivers of Change

- Climate Change
- Systems Not Built to Reward Experimentation
- Students Trained to Avoid Risk

Proposed Solutions

- Rethink Grants and Government Support
- Decentralization Funding
- Innovation Case Studies

PART V:

BRINGING IT TOGETHER: OPEN DISCUSSION

As the breakout groups shared their ideas, the room shifted from exploration to reflection. The open discussion that followed brought forward candid observations, sharp tensions, and shared questions about what it will take to move from intention to implementation.

“The tech isn’t the problem. The structure is.”

One clear through line was the gap between known solutions and systems that support them. Technologies like high-performance glazing, wastewater heat recovery, and geoexchange are already viable, but uptake remains limited due to fragmented incentives, institutional risk aversion, and a lack of alignment across public policy and procurement. Several participants noted that structure, not science, is now the limiting factor.

“Trust is built when problems are solved effectively—and visibly.”

- Bill MacGowan

Yet participants also spoke to a broader challenge: the way innovation is framed and understood.

Many observed that siloed thinking between technical and social outcomes, or between environmental and economic interests—continues to limit collaboration and slow adoption.

“We need a coherent story across all levels of leadership. Right now, it’s fragmented and people don’t know where to look for direction.”

Amid frustration, there was a clear current of optimism. Several participants described a growing openness to new ideas—particularly among professionals who, just a few years ago, were hesitant to engage with sustainability at all. What’s changing, they said, is not just the technology, but the story we tell about it.

“We’re stuck between knowing what we should do and not seeing a clear way to do it. That gap is exhausting.”

Canada is uniquely positioned to lead, not just in green building tech, but in developing integrated approaches that balance environmental performance, economic resilience, and social wellbeing. It was a belief that was shared across the room. That leadership, however, will require reframing disruption as opportunity and working across boundaries to build trust and momentum.

“You know the conversation is changing when the financiers in the room are talking about human-centered design.”

In the final reflections, participants returned to the power of human-centered design—not as a trend, but as a guiding principle. Building systems that people understand, trust, and benefit from was described as essential to unlocking action at scale.



PART V:

BRINGING IT TOGETHER: CLOSING REFLECTIONS

The event closed with a call not for perfection, but for integration. Across sectors, across scales, across disciplines, the path forward will require courageous leadership, collective intelligence, and practical collaboration.

There's an opportunity to lead, and Canada should take it.



Group Photo of the Attendees of the BIG SHIFT: Built Environment Stakeholders & Communities

“Together we can achieve so much more than on our own.”

- Yasmin Glanville



Stay Tuned for Our Next Event in the Series:
Big Shifts: AI, Sustainability Innovation Roundtable



PART VI:

RSI 2025 BIG SHIFT PARTNERS & SPONSORS

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



ABOUT RETHINK SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES (RSI)

Rethink Sustainability Initiatives (RSI) is a trusted think-do accelerator that uses foresight, collaboration, and systems thinking to shape a thriving future. We bring together leaders and experts from business, institutions, and communities to discover and use scalable sustainability and resiliency solutions. We convene and partner with leaders and experts across all sectors, to rethink, discover, and use innovative and scalable strategies and actions for shaping a more positive, sustainable, and resilient future, together.

RSI is a not-for-profit organization, incorporated in 2011 to discover, unlock, and shape scalable solutions to the sustainability and resilience challenges facing our world. www.rethinksustainability.ca



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION

If you are interested in discussing this report, learning more about future proofing challenges, solutions, and opportunities for collaboration, sharing your own action-focused insights or other action partnership opportunities, send us a note at:

Communications@rethinksustainability.ca

For more information about RSI: www.rethinksustainability.ca

Thank you.



Where Economics and the
Environment Meets