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January 8, 2013

Mayor Steve Pellegrini  
Township of King  
2075 King Road,  
King City, ON  
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**Re. Richard Serra's *Shift* and the Report of the Conservation Review Board (CRB)**

Dear Mayor Pellegrini,

This is a letter of support for the Friends of Shift regarding the effort to designate Richard Serra's land artwork *Shift* under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. As a unique cultural landmark and important precedent in the culture of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, *Shift* represents a significant heritage resource that merits formal recognition as a site of cultural significance.

Having consulted the October 17, 2012 decision of the Conservation Review Board (CRB), ERA Architects Inc. wishes to respectfully document and report some concerns we have with the CRB findings.

**Regarding the requirements for designation:**

In the October 17 decision, the CRB determined that, based on the evidence presented to them in the proposed Statement of Cultural Heritage Value, the *Shift* property does not appear to be of cultural heritage value to any part or aspect of a "community," as intended by Regulation 9/06 of the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA). On this basis, the CRB posits that the property does not meet the criteria for designation.

The OHA Regulation 9/06, "Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest" states that "a property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more ... criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest..." The nine criteria defined in the regulation fall under the categories of design or physical value, historical or associative value, and contextual value. A property is not required to meet all nine criteria to meet the requirements for designation.

The Statement of Cultural Heritage Value for the *Shift* property proposed that it be designated on the basis of its design value, its associative value, and its contextual value. Since a property is required to meet only a single criterion to be eligible for designation, however, its design value alone could be used as justification. *Shift* is a rare, unique, representative and early example of a style, type, expression, material and construction method. Moreover, it displays a high degree of craftsmanship and artistic merit. These assertions are substantiated through testimonials from a wide range of national and international art experts, and institutions.

### **Regarding the associative value of the *Shift* Property:**

The CRB has called into question the associative value of *Shift*, which the Statement of Significance justifies on the basis of its association with Richard Serra, a world-renowned artist (criterion 2.1), and because it reflects the “work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community” (criterion 2.3). In its decision, the CRB has taken the position that *Shift* has not been shown to contribute to an understanding of a community or culture – a reference to criterion 2.2, which was not part of the rationale for the designation.

*Shift* clearly demonstrates or reflects the work and ideas of Serra, an artist who is significant to the local, national and international art community and audience. The “community”, for the purposes of the designation, can be defined as the broader art world, comprising local, national and international experts, citizens, and museums, including countless people who have made pilgrimages to see the work and the various individuals who have written articles written about the future of *Shift* in local, national, and international publications.

### **Regarding the contextual value of the *Shift* Property:**

*Shift* has demonstrated significant contextual value as a cultural landmark due to the prominence of its author, the importance of the work itself within the artist’s body of work, and its importance to an international community<sup>1</sup> of followers.

Serra is considered by some to be the world’s “greatest living sculptor”<sup>2</sup>; his work is internationally exhibited and can be found in many public and private collections around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Tate Museum, and the City of Paris.

*Shift* also represents a unique and important place in the development of Serra’s practice as an artist: “For me,” he says “it’s one of those breakthrough pieces.”<sup>3</sup> As the work has been included in virtually every major catalog or monograph published on Serra, it has clearly entered the discourse of his practice and become and respected by an international community of followers.

Due to its reputation, *Shift* has become a destination for travelers and researchers and an item of significant discussion in the media. Evidence of public interest in protecting the work can be found in recurring articles published by the Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, MacLean’s, Border Crossings, Spacing, Huffington Post and many other publications.

### **Benefits of Designating the *Shift* Property under Part IV of the OHA:**

The expert witness, Wendy Shearer, proposed that the “Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan” provides an adequate stewardship framework for the conservation of *Shift*. Although the conservation plan, which defines land uses for the area, may play an important role in the protection of *Shift*, it does not explicitly recognize the cultural heritage value of property, nor does it regulate alterations to the property or the demolition of the structures on it. Moreover, a formally adopted Statement of Cultural Heritage Value would provide direction to the property owner and community on where value lies and how this value is expressed in the work through its heritage attributes. As a formal point of reference, it would help to ensure consistency in decision-making about issues that affect the authenticity and integrity of *Shift*. For these reasons, we would argue that there is a strong rationale for the designation of the property under Part IV of the OHA.

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<sup>1</sup> Community defined as “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.” We believe the work of Richard Serra unites a community of millions.

<sup>2</sup> O’Hagan, Sean. “Man of Steel.” *The Guardian Observer*, London, UK. Oct 5, 2008. Online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/oct/05/serra.art>

<sup>3</sup> Timm, Jordan. “It’s art history hidden in a field.” *MacLean’s Magazine*. Oct. 1, 2007. Online: [http://www.macleans.ca/culture/media/article.jsp?content=20071001\\_110048\\_110048](http://www.macleans.ca/culture/media/article.jsp?content=20071001_110048_110048)

**Further Thoughts:**

Serra has an important role in the history of art in Canada. He participated in events at NSCAD University in the late 1960s and early 1970s that have shaped artistic practice in this country and abroad. In 2004 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by NSCAD and he donated five prints to the University's permanent collection. He continues to live part of the year in Cape Breton. *Shift*, as Serra's only exterior land work sited in Canada, is an important part of telling Serra's history of influence in this country, and of allowing that legacy to carry forward for future generations.

*Shift* is also a site-specific work, meaning that it has been designed to collaborate with the local rural landscape: "What I'm interested in is revealing the structure and content and character of a space and a place by defining a physical structure through the elements that I use..." The work was made exclusively for the site in which it resides. In this sense it is creating a highly specific sense of place that cannot be found elsewhere in the world.

**Conclusion:**

On the basis of the above points, we hope the Council will move forward to designate the *Shift* property under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. We strongly believe that Shift meets the technical requirements for designation, and would urge Council to honour this site in a manner befitting the spirit of the Act, which aims to recognize, protect, and learn from the wealth of built and cultural heritage resources available to us in Ontario.

Sincerely,

Michael McClelland, Principal OAA FRAIC CAHP  
Victoria Angel, Senior Heritage Planner MA  
Josh Thorpe, Communication Manager BFA MVS

ERA Architects Inc.