

Commentary-Dave Pasolli-Western Wood Truss Association of Alberta

Are Plant-Based Buildings the Future?

I was recently reading where the Government of Canada gave a company a grant of one million dollars to commercialize plant-based single use coffee pods. Wouldn't that just be some sort of paper product? Was not the cone filter in my old Mr. Coffee plant-based?

The new environmentalists obviously like the term plant-based as opposed to paper. Just like referring to electricity produced through biomass sounds better than electricity produced by burning wood. Ironically it was the new environmentalist's parents that were trying to save the life of every tree, but now it is OK to burn these trees to produce renewable energy, you just have to call it biomass. There is a great documentary "Planet of the Humans" if you want to see an objective look at how the environmental movement has lost the battle through well-meaning but disastrous choices.



Biomass Power Plant



Plant-based coffee pod

Remember Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth movie in 2006 where we were told that we could combat climate change simply by changing our light bulbs to ones that used less electricity, now we are told to fill our cars with electricity. This allows lazy environmentalists to feel like they are solving climate change while only 10% of the US electricity is produced by solar or wind. I guess they believe that electricity is still produced by Thor the god of lightning.

Perhaps our industry may have to get away from the term wood and replace it with plant-based structural products. Does that not sound far more climate friendly?

Instead of calling Vancouver's Brock Commons the worlds tallest mass timber building. How about calling this achievement the world's tallest plant-based building? As opposed

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to using the term engineered wood products, what about structural bio-based products? After all, trees are still considered plants.

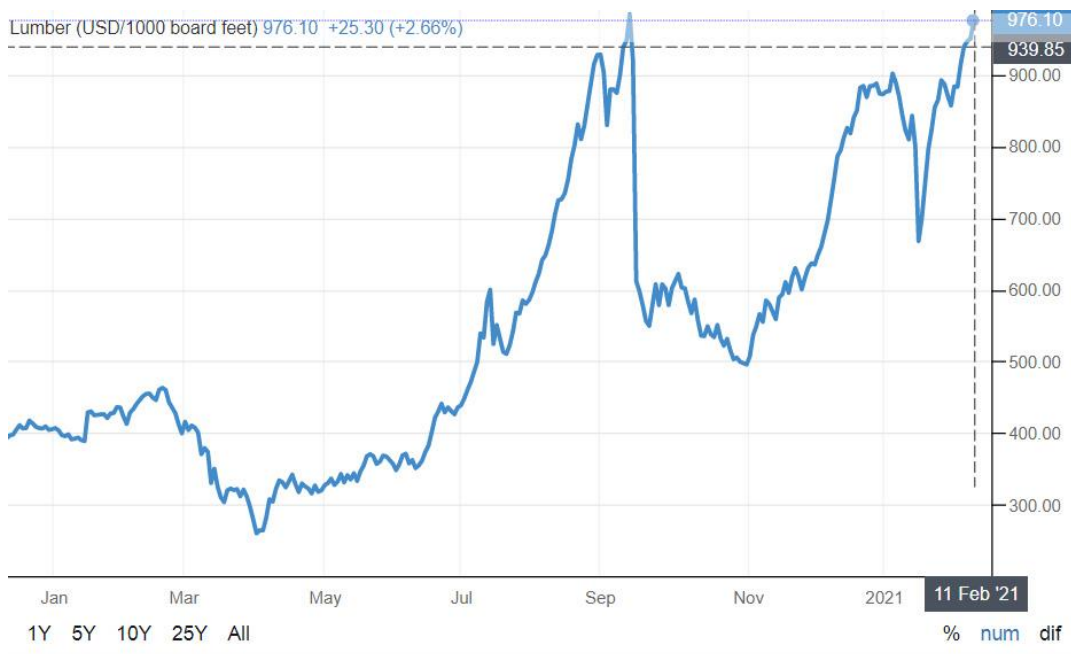
The story of using plant-based structural products is a great story to tell the new climate changers, we just have to use the terms they love to here. Certainly the steel and concrete industry could not describe themselves with these terms.

Yes, ma'am the structure of your new house is going to be completely plant-based and you are doing your part to stop climate change.

If you have an idea for a commentary or would like to submit your own commentary for a future newsletter please let me know at dave@wwta.ab.ca

Economic Update

December 2020 housing starts came in at 2439 units down 21.3% down from December 2019. Total starts for 2020 finished at 23,042 down 11.2% from the previous year number of 25,960. 2021 started strong with 2070 housing starts in Alberta compared to 1414 in 2020.



Lumber was on the rise again hitting levels from last September.

Here is an interesting interview with John Duncanson, Timber Analyst at Corton Capital on BNN.

<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/commodities/video/we-re-seeing-a-real-scramble-to-build-up-inventories-timber-analyst-on-lumber-price-forecast~2101357>

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I found the following report from John Greene from forest2market interesting regarding housing in the United States.

Record-high lumber prices have now begun to impact builder confidence levels, which dropped 3 points in mid-January to 83 according to the [NAHB/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index](#) (anything above 50 is considered positive). For reference, the index hit a record high of 90 last November; in January 2020 (before impacts from COVID-19), it was 75.

“Despite robust housing demand and low mortgage rates, buyers are facing a dearth of new homes on the market, which is exacerbating affordability problems,” said NAHB Chairman Chuck Fowke. “Builders are grappling with supply-side constraints related to lumber and other material costs, a lack of affordable lots and labor shortages that delay delivery times and put upward pressure on home prices. They are also concerned about a changing regulatory environment.”

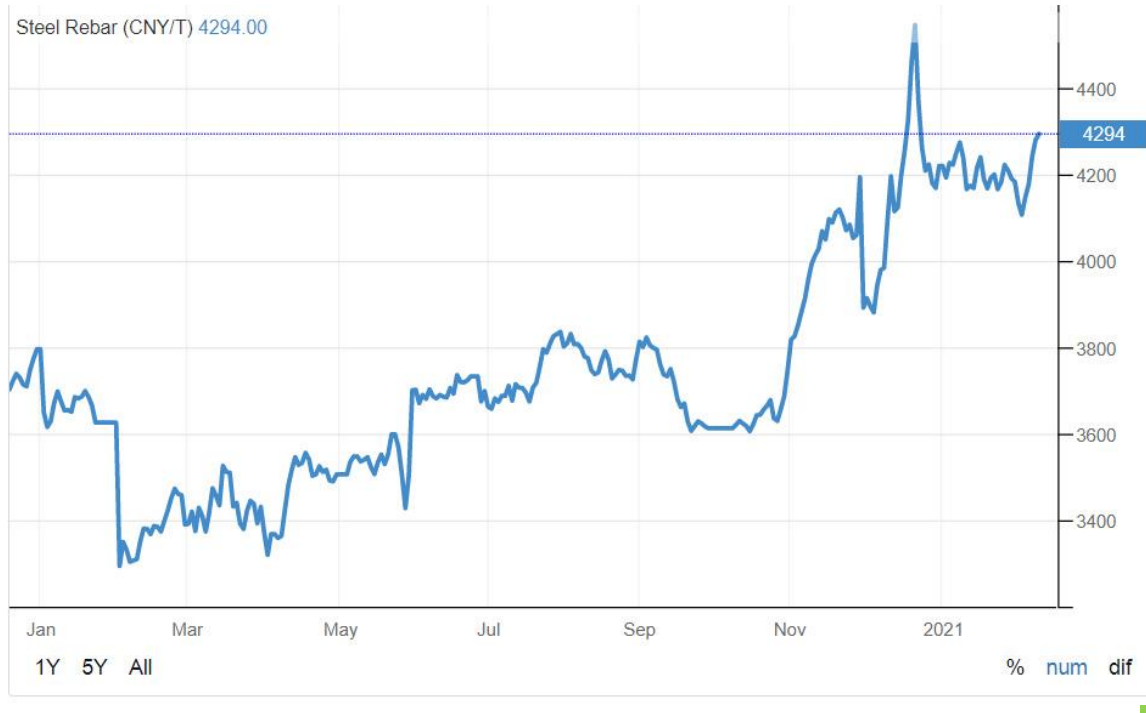
An old saying in economics states that “the cure for high prices is... high prices.” Which is to say, in a market relatively free of regulatory and other barriers to entry, record profits will attract more supply—which, in turn, lowers prices. The US housing market could hardly be regarded as regulation-free, however, the COVID-19 pandemic (to cite just one example) has made starting new construction firms—not to mention staffing existing firms—much more challenging.

Pent-up housing demand could continue outstripping available supply in the near term, which will keep upward pressure on lumber prices. [Housing starts](#) were up 5.8% in December and 2020 starts were up 7.0% over 2019 starts, which suggests there is momentum behind the trend. Given the backlog of sold-but-not-started units (since January 2020, an average of 28% of new homes had not been started when sold), it is safe to conclude the ongoing building boom is likely to continue for several more months, which should be good news for prospective home buyers and lumber manufacturers alike.

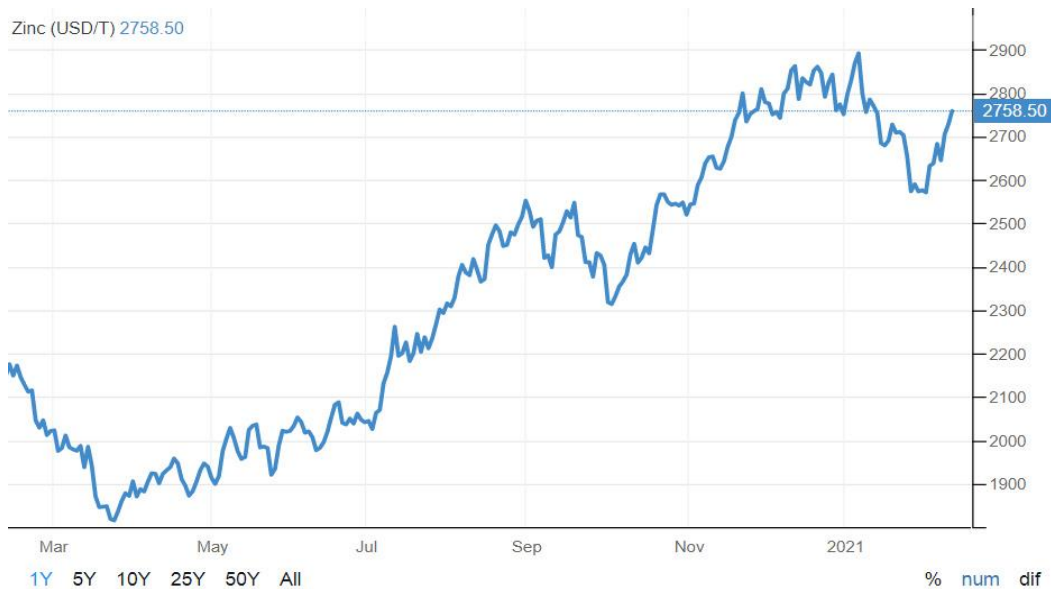


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I had some feedback from the last newsletter to look at the price of steel. Although steel prices are a factor in our product it is generally good for us if steel prices are higher as they affect competitive products more directly.



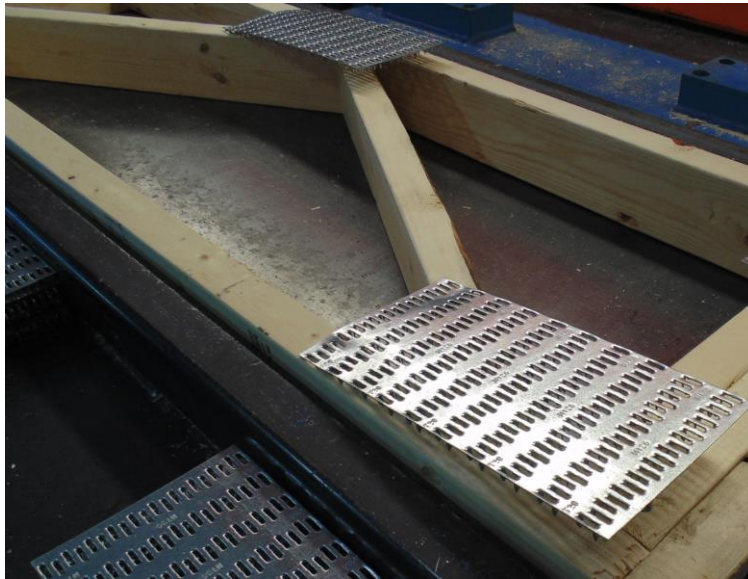
You can see that steel prices have also been on the rise in the chart above. As the steel you buy as connector plates is hot-dipped galvanized it may also be helpful to look at the price of zinc. Someone once told me a long time ago that this reflects about 30% of the cost of plates. As more electric vehicles are produced that have batteries that also use zinc this may be something to keep an eye on as shown in the 1-year chart below.



Quality Control

This month I would like to put a focus on one of the behaviours I still find too often at truss plants, over hammering the plates. If the joints are tight plates should only have to be tacked with a hammer on one corner and be imbedded by the truss press. Workers should rarely have to hit the plate more than once or twice in the corner.

The picture below is what I like to see.



You can see the difference in how the teeth are imbedded below with over hammered teeth bent on the left and correctly imbedded teeth on the right. To obtain the design values of the plate the teeth have to be imbedded correctly.

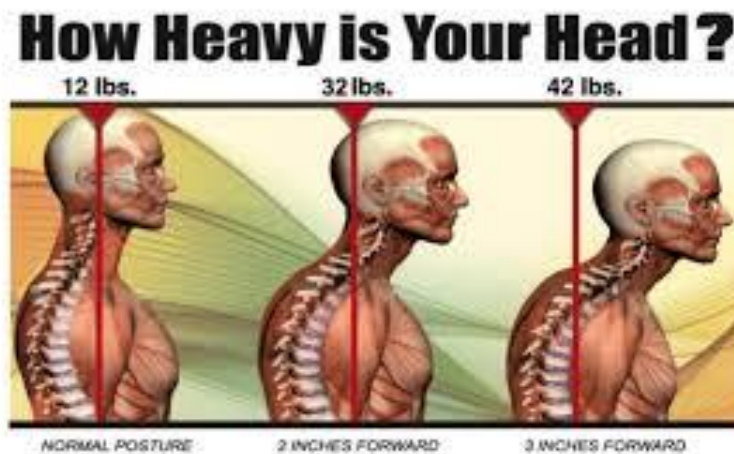


Remember when using a roller press tack the plate in the corner from which the roller is coming. This can be a bit tricky on a floor truss press or if you are alternating the direction of the press for each truss.

Health and Safety Toolbox

Similar to the Quality topic the WWTA would like to give you a monthly item you can discuss when doing your Safety Toolbox meeting. This month we are going to focus on one of the Alberta Governments Prevention Initiatives- Musculoskeletal Disorders and specifically your head.

Over the course of evolution we have become more upright and it is important to keep your ears over your shoulders as much as you can. The weight of the head is about 12 lbs. when balanced properly but can increase to as much as 60 lbs if it is facing down looking at a cell phone, a computer, or especially when lifting something. Eventually your body will adapt to this position putting increased strain on your lower back.



It is important not to get into a habit of having your head forward doing your regular activities by doing things like moving your screen, getting glasses, or the right desk setup. It is also important to keep your head up while lifting or carrying something.



Sitting in the wrong position 8 hours a day 5 days a week and eventually your body will adapt to this posture affecting all those nerves, muscles, and organs inside.

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Also, during this cold spell it is important to remind your outside workers how to work in cold weather. The WWTA has a poster available about working in cold weather.

The Alberta Government has a new format OHS eNews you can subscribe to with all kinds of good material at: <https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/>

News and Events

Annual General Meeting

The WWTA Alberta Annual General Meeting is scheduled for March 19, 2021 and the virtual invitations have been sent out. If you have not received yours or accidentally deleted it drop me an e-mail. Your attendance as a member is valued.

I will also be sending out a package with the 2020 financials and motions for members to vote on prior to the meeting in February. We are also looking for your company to join the Board of Directors, so if you are interested please contact Dave at dave@wwta.ab.ca

Wage Survey

The 2021 wage survey was e-mailed out to the managers the last week in January and I would ask you to get them back to me by the end of February. As per usual only those companies that contribute will receive the results.

Virtual Meetings

The Canadian Wood Council is doing a virtual meeting on Low-Rise Commercial Buildings on Friday Feb. 19 at 12:00 mtn. time and I would encourage you all to participate if you can. This project has been going on for the last couple of years with a lot of input from the truss association and will hopefully follow up to the success the CWC has had with Mid-Rise Residential Buildings.

You need to register through Eventbrite, but there is no cost to attend the presentation.

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/opportunities-for-low-rise-commercial-wood-buildings-tickets-141056524863>

One day we will get back to meeting in a room I hope, but in the meantime if you have any topics you would like the WWTA to hold a virtual meeting on please let me know.

WWTA Online Training

If you have not yet taken a look at the WWTA online training program I would encourage you to, as no doubt you will be hiring new workers in the near future and it is a good method to get them productive earlier and safer. If you want an overview of the program go to the WWTA website at: <http://www.wwta.ab.ca/truss-training-online.html>

Did You Know?

There is an excellent brochure that was produced by the BILD Alberta with the participation of the WWTA on fall arrest and anchorage to trusses. It can be found on the WWTA website at:

<http://www.wwta.ab.ca/builders.html>

If you have any items you would like in the newsletter please send them to me at dave@wwta.ab.ca

Make sure to bundle up and plug in your car!

