



Making Your Podium Deck a Priority

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By Matthew Bradford

Given the costs and construction logistics, a podium deck project can be intimidating. With the right team and a strategic approach, however, work on this critical asset can yield lasting benefits.

“Podium deck jobs add significant value to the property,” says Jeremy Horst, Principal, Building Science and Restoration, with RJC Engineers (RJC). “You’re not only improving your waterproofing system, which saves money and headaches later on, but these projects are an opportunity to enhance your curb appeal, which benefits residents and building owners.”

How do you determine when a podium deck needs work? Check your calendar. Typical deck lifespans run 25 to 30 years, after which waterproofing systems can begin to fail. Leakages through slab crack locations can also be a telltale sign but are just one of the less visible indicators.

For a full view of a podium deck’s health, consider a condition survey assessment. These are useful in looking beneath a property’s hard and soft landscaping features to assess the true state of a podium deck and its working parts. They are also critical in determining how effective the waterproofing system is at keeping water and salts out of the structure and, therefore, preventing deterioration.



“By taking test cuts of the podium deck landscaping and waterproofing system at targeted locations, you’ll get a much better idea of the as-built condition of the podium deck and the underlying condition of the waterproofing system and structural slab,” Horst explains. “That being said, podium decks can span thousands of square feet, so it’s a challenge to know where to test. That’s where we rely on our experience and a knowledge of how the underside of a slab provides information on how well the podium deck structure is performing as a whole.”

The fix beneath your feet

Podium deck issues can pose significant risks if left unchecked. Not only can the deterioration of the slab soffit result in falling concrete, but unaddressed damages can add up to more costly repairs in the future.

As Horst warns: “The longer you allow leakage to occur, the more structural deterioration you allow to carry on. And the more work you need to do on the concrete, the greater amount of noise and construction disturbance there will be to the people living in your building when you finally decide to undergo that replacement.”

In short: it’s important to take action. Depending on the age of the waterproofing system, it might be possible to conduct localized repairs. This entails digging into specific areas, unearthing the existing membrane, and patching it at the known leak locations. If the system is older, though, it might be time for a full replacement.

Fortunately, a full podium deck rehabilitation/replacement doesn’t have to be stressful. Instead, these projects present an opportunity for condo owners to reshape their landscape by adding new amenities or enhancing existing features. They are also an opportune time to make changes to meet “barrier-free” building requirements in applicable regions.

Herein, Horst says, RJC makes it a habit of collaborating with landscape designers when called in to consult on podium deck projects: “Design trends and regulations are constantly evolving. Design professionals and landscape architects are in tune with these changes and can provide timeless landscaping designs over repair work that will last the full design surface life.”

It’s important that all parties are involved in planning these designs. That includes consultants like RJC who can map out needed work, condo owners who can communicate their visions for the space, and contractors who can work with landscapers to make those landscaping features a reality.



Moreover, Horst notes, involving all parties from the start is key to construction planning: “Phasing is critical because podium deck jobs have a significant impact on ground floor access and egress for people who live and site servicing vehicles like delivery vans, moving trucks, and garbage and recycling vehicles. The right partners will walk you through these challenges and help create a plan to maintain access and minimize the overall disruption to the building during construction.”

After all, he adds: “Like every other project, you have to remember that you are working within a living building.”

Jeremy Horst is a Principal with RJC Engineers. Learn more at www.rjc.ca.