

The Profession We Want

by

The Task Force on Continuing Education and Professional Development

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In May 2000 PIBC Council established a Task Force on Continuing Education and Professional Development. The Task Force had two aims:

1. To investigate trends and directions in continuing education and professional development; and,
2. To prepare a discussion paper on the subject of continuing education and the profession, outlining research findings and setting out alternate courses of action, for consideration by the membership at the June 2001 Annual General Meeting

The results of the Task Force's work on these two subjects have been published on the PIBC web-site at www.pibc.bc.ca/profdevt.htm. (in three separate reports):

- Mark Hornell's overview piece, *What Should a Planner Know?*
- Steven Dang's research report, *Current Trends in Continuing Education and Professional Development*; and,
- The Task Force's interim report, *Continuing Education for PIBC Members: Mandatory vs. Voluntary Certification*, presented to the AGM in Prince George in June 2001.

The AGM received the Interim Report and authorized the Task Force to seek the response of the membership to the interim report, and to develop recommendations for a PIBC policy on continuing professional development, for presentation to the 2002 AGM in Vancouver.

The Interim Report contrasts the *pros* and *cons* of a voluntary continuing education program (which CIP currently has in place) with a mandatory program. Underlying this contrast however are two different visions of the planning profession:

- A traditional vision of planning as a quasi-profession with mandatory standards for education and conduct, but without a demonstrable commitment to mandatory standards of professional competence (two of the three legs of the professionalism stool); and,

- A vision of planning as a full profession with mandatory standards for education, conduct and professional competence (all three legs of the professionalism stool). Pursuing this vision would position PIBC to work toward provincial licensing with a statute-based domain of practice if desired by the membership.

In the traditional vision, continuing education would remain at most a program of voluntary self-reporting with no Institute review of the ongoing educational activities and standards of practice of its members. In the full-profession vision, the Institute would maintain a mandatory professional development program, where members would be required to monitor and report on their professional development activities on a regular basis. Adding this third leg of the stool could establish the groundwork for future Institute efforts - if this is a direction the membership wishes to explore - to obtain statute-based professional recognition, including perhaps statutory licensing and re-certification requirements.

The Task Force has met with a number of other professional organizations over the past year. Many if not all of them have instituted or are pursuing mandatory professional development requirements for their membership. The Architectural Institute of BC has recently introduced a mandatory continuing education program for its membership summarized below (for more information, refer to the short program guide published on the AIBC website - www.aibc.bc.ca/architects/prof_dev/ces.pdf). The Task Force believes that PIBC needs to adopt a program of mandatory professional development similar to that adopted by the AIBC, and will be introducing a proposal to this effect at the upcoming annual general meeting in Vancouver.

As planners, how we feel about the subject of mandatory versus voluntary certification of continuing education is largely a reflection of our personal visions of planning. Is being an association of quasi-professionals what we want? Or do we want to become a more fully professional institute with a commitment to continually raising the standard of professional competence?

The Task Force believes we need to move in the direction of greater professionalization, with a mandatory program of continuing education that would allow the Institute to demonstrate that its members are committed to continuously improving their knowledge and skills. This would allow us to assert with confidence standards of professional competence in a market that is becoming increasingly crowded with competitors, not only for areas of practice planners traditionally think of as their own, but for emerging fields on which planners have an opportunity to stake claim. More importantly the Institute could show proof, to an increasingly skeptical public, of its members' commitment to serve the public interest at the highest standard of professional practice. Ultimately, this could lead to MCIP having real content, signifying not just a group of people with a common interest and background, but a profession in the fullest sense of the word.

What kind of profession do you want? The Task Force on Continuing Education and Professional Development wants to know.

The AIBC Continuing Education System (CES) in Brief

A Continuing Education System (CES) for the PIBC could be modelled after that adopted in 2001 by the Architectural Institute of British Columbia (AIBC). The AIBC CES was "developed in response to not only the profession's recognition of its own needs but also the public's growing need for assurance that licensed professionals... remain current with current technology, business practices, methods and materials of their profession"(AIBC website). The AIBC system is modelled after a CES program instituted by the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

Within the AIBC system, continuing education credits are recorded as Learning Units. A Learning Unit is one full hour of approved educational activity. AIBC members are required to earn 18 learning units (8 minimum core) over an annual reporting period. To gradually phase in the system, AIBC has provided for an initial 36-month reporting period to earn and record learning units.

AIBC members are provided with a CES start-up information kit that, among other things, describes core and non-core educational topic areas, as well as the different kinds of learning and educational activities that may qualify for CES credit. Some of these activities include computer software upgrade, academic credit courses, distance education, lectures, seminars, workshops, and conferences, and writing articles for publication. Either the AIBC or external providers would provide accredited learning and educational activities. AIBC Members are notified of all AIBC CES program offerings.

The program also includes provision for self-reported learning and education activities, including structured self-reported activities such as seminars by construction trade associations, and independent self-reported activities such as participation in civic and professional committees including advisory design panels, AIBC task forces, and teaching and research. Many other learning and education opportunities for members of the institute are outlined in the AIBC's Continuing Education System program literature.

Further information and details about the AIBC Continuing Education System are available on the AIBC website at: www.aibc.bc.ca/architects/council/council-set.html.