

PLANNING INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PLANNING WEST

Fall 2025

*FORWARD THINKING
SHAPING COMMUNITIES*

**THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
OF PLANNING: THE EFFECTS ON
EFFICIENCY, TRANSPARENCY
AND INNOVATION**



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PLANNING WEST

Volume 67 | Number 4

Planning West is published by the Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC)

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Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of PIBC, its Board of Directors, or the Planning West Editorial Team

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Paid subscriptions to Planning West are available for \$65.00 (plus 5% GST). Send a request with a cheque to: Planning Institute of British Columbia #1750 - 355 Burrard St. Vancouver, BC V6C 2G8

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Find more about the Planning Institute of BC and Planning West at www.pibc.bc.ca

Planning West layout
Luna Design

Planning West is printed by BondRepro, Vancouver, BC

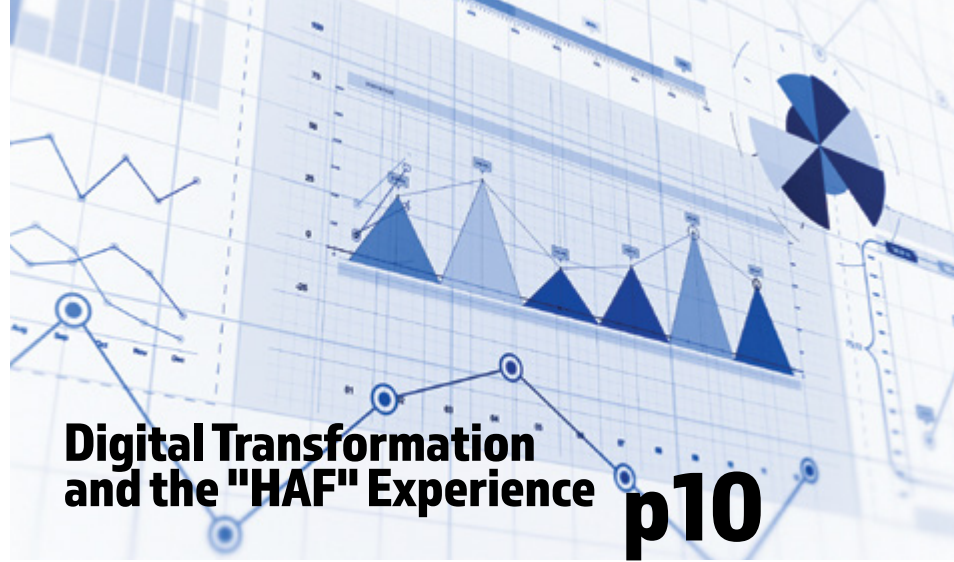
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PIBC PLANNING INSTITUTE
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

FORWARD THINKING
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The Planning Institute of British Columbia recognizes, acknowledges, and appreciates that our head office operates on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwəta (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We acknowledge the principles of truth and reconciliation and through our ongoing journey and work as an organization and profession, we continue to actively assist and advance the decolonization of the planning profession in BC and Yukon.



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ON THE COVER

Planners face an interesting time ahead with the onset of AI and other emerging technologies. We explore some of the tech tools and trends setting the pace now for the years ahead.

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President's Message



This issue of *Planning West* is dedicated to digital transformation and the effects on efficiency, transparency and innovation. Personally, I have experienced the digital transformation of planning through my own journey as a planner. When I started in the planning profession, many of the responsibilities to ensure transparency were grounded in a paper-based, multiple step process. Even with the use of computers to write reports, bylaws and permits, manual processes were still needed to complete the process to combine reports, maps and attachments into an information package, distribute those packages and have them available in hard copy for the public to view. You then relied on standard notification processes through paper and mail outs to inform residents regarding land use matters within the community. It was a lot of work.

With the introduction of more tools and software to support electronic report writing, map development and package development, paper-based processes were replaced with electronic processes. The stacks of paper on my desk started to shrink. Now, almost all the work I do is computer based, which for any new planner would seem like an expectation, rather than a journey!

In my opinion, it was more challenging to engage the public and raise awareness of land use and planning matters before the use of digital tools and resources like websites, social media, and electronic advertising. Digital tools have been embraced by the planning profession to diversify how the public is engaged. Ultimately, planners use these tools to support early and on-going engagement and to ensure that those who have interest are provided with the resources and information they need to participate. Knowing that many planners and organizations are looking to the next phases of innovation through the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI), I look forward to reading perspectives on current and future digital transformations and its potential to influence the planning profession into the future.

In other news, I'd like to share that the new PIBC Board held its orientation and strategic planning session in early July. With the election of a new Board, PIBC takes this opportunity to review and revise the Board's Strategic Priorities. These are priorities set by the Board that are intended to advance the profession and the Institute in a meaningful way and to guide the enhancement of the services delivered to members. The Board has finalized and approved the revised Strategic Priorities for 2025-2027 and you can find a one page summary and the final report on the PIBC website. The Board and Executive will work with the administrative team to ensure work plans are updated and incorporate actions to support the delivery of these priorities.

The PIBC Board also met again at the end of July to ensure that PIBC Committees continue to have ongoing Board and staff support to advance their work. PIBC has a robust number of committees that are essential in helping to guide and undertake work on behalf of the Institute and our profession. I would like to extend gratitude to all members who volunteer for the organization through committees, local chapters and other key volunteer roles every year. The work you do is essential to delivering quality services to the membership.

In late September, the PIBC Board met to consider and set the operating budget for 2026 and set member fees for the coming year. Secretary-Treasurer, Sara Muir RPP, MCIP worked with Executive Director to develop and present a draft budget that balances fiscal responsibility with Institute objectives, member programs and services. Watch for more information on the updated budget and fees.

The Board will also gather with members and others in early November in Vancouver to celebrate World Town Planning Day. We take this day to celebrate the profession, welcome and acknowledge our newest Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) and those planners celebrating the milestone of 25 years as an RPP. I hope that members are able to celebrate this day with colleagues by either attending the event or other PIBC events that may be hosted by local chapters throughout BC and the Yukon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kenna'.

Kenna Jonkman RPP, MCIP

OUTLINES

What's Trending?... Member in Focus...



What's Trending?

by **Cindy Cheung** PIBC Senior Communications & Marketing Specialist

Conversations around artificial intelligence (AI) can swerve quickly to the dark side but the following organizations have taken steps to bring light and purpose to the potential of using AI for good. Learn more about how worldwide collaborations are leading the development of global AI policies through an equity lens and how the National Research Council of Canada is working with Indigenous language experts to use this powerful technology in preserving and teaching Indigenous languages.

OECD.AI

<https://oecd.ai/en/>

Not all intelligence is artificial.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an international association of 38 member countries, with Canada being one of its founding members in 1960, committed to building better policies for better lives for all. Working closely with international policy makers, stakeholders and citizens, its overarching goal is to establish evidence-based international standards that help to solve social, economic and environmental challenges.

In 2020, OECD.AI was formed as an extension specifically dedicated to guiding the development of policies and resources for the formation of a trustworthy, human-centric AI. This website aims to become the essential resource for policymakers, researchers, businesses, and society by providing an unbiased comprehensive view of global AI initiatives, trends, and governance frameworks.

Stay Updated with PIBC e-News!

Keep up-to-date regularly with current Institute & local planning news, events and job opportunities with PIBC e-News! The Institute's electronic newsletter is emailed to members every other Wednesday. Haven't seen your PIBC e-News? Check your spam/junk email folder and be sure to add enews@pibc.bc.ca to your contacts.

The core objective of the OECD.AI platform is to enhance AI transparency, set cohesive standards for the global use and implementation of AI, and encourage inter-country collaboration so that AI policies are aligned with ethical standards and human rights.

Read more about the OECD AI Principles: <https://oecd.ai/en/ai-principles>

Bookmark the AI WONK blog for bite-size updates on current AI developments & insights: <https://oecd.ai/en/wonk>

Canadian Indigenous Languages Technology Project

The National Research Council of Canada (NRC), in collaboration with Indigenous language experts, instructors, and communities, are working on utilizing the latest technologies to preserve, revitalize and continue the learning of Indigenous languages in Canada.

Using AI and current natural language processing technology, the NCR research project is integrating AI in the preservation and sharing of Indigenous languages.

Type “NCR Indigenous language project” in your search engine to learn more about ongoing Indigenous Language Technology Projects:

Speech generation for Indigenous language education

With the guidance and input from Indigenous and educational partners, a state-of-the-art speech synthesis (TTS) system was developed and put into use in select classrooms.

Verb conjugators for Indigenous languages

This project focused on taking the unique formats of important Indigenous verb conjugations and creating an interactive teaching tool that can be used in schools to teach complex Indigenous verb conjugations.

Plug-in application for Indigenous audiobooks and videos

ReadAlong Studio is a web-based plug-in developed for Indigenous audiobooks. This software enables educators to provide an interactive “read a long” option with a wide range of languages. The technology has been applied to at least 27 Indigenous languages spoken in Canada.

Planning West Call for Submissions

Winter 2026 Issue:
World Town Planning Day & Celebrating the Planning Profession
 Submission deadline: Dec 15, 2025

Spring 2026 Issue:
Northern Horizons: Building Sustainable Communities Across the North
 Submission deadline: Mar 15, 2026

Articles should be 1000-1200 words in length in an unformatted MS Word document. Please note: not all articles may be accommodated based on editorial decisions and the number of submissions received.

What Membership Means to Me

Planners across British Columbia and the Yukon join PIBC and value becoming Registered Professional Planners for a variety of reasons. We reached out to our members to learn why they value becoming an RPP and what membership means to them.



Kali Holahan RPP, MCIP
 Land Use Planner, Urban Systems Ltd. (Prince George, BC)

“ Born and raised in Prince George, and a graduate of the Planning program at the University of Northern British Columbia, I am proud to serve as a land use planner in the region in which I call home. However, it wasn’t as straightforward as graduating in my hometown and picking up a planning job right away. Throughout my career, I have woven through several different focus areas in communities across B.C. and Alberta, including environmental monitoring, environmental planning, socioeconomics, and development approvals. This all occurred prior to becoming a land use planner.

As a land use planner, my professional planning designation has been crucial in validating my expertise and strengthening my credibility in planning and community engagement, especially when working with municipalities, First Nations, and diverse interest groups. This designation is not just a title; it represents a commitment to upholding the highest standards in the planning profession. It ensures that I am equipped with the latest knowledge and best practices, which are essential for addressing the complex challenges faced by communities today.

I have found that my planning designation has allowed me to take on more significant responsibilities and opened doors to leadership roles in planning projects, policy development, and advisory capacities. I also greatly appreciate the network of professionals and learning opportunities that both PIBC and CIP offer. Connections with my peers across the province and the nation have been invaluable for staying informed about emerging trends and collaborating with my peers.

For me, membership in PIBC and participating in the organization through its various volunteer opportunities has helped me build quality connections and stay on top of emerging trends. ”

Member in Focus

Komal (Shahista) Shaikh RPP, MCIP
Director of Lands at Tsawwassen First Nation

You might have met Komal Shaikh during the PIBC 2025 Annual Conference where, alongside Members of Tsawwassen First Nation, she guided the mobile workshop Tsawwassen First Nation (TFN) Treaty Lands Tour. We reached out to Komal to learn more about her journey from architect to planner and how her diverse world experiences led her to the role of Director of Lands with TFN during a time of immense change and technology integration.



What inspired you to become a planner? Was there a person or event that led you to explore planning as a profession?

During the final year of my architectural degree program, I was working on my thesis project on conservation of heritage precincts in high growth urban areas and I realized that the toolkit to shape, create and protect the physical realm lay largely in the hands of planners. That led to my curiosity in the field.

One of my first jobs out of architecture school was as an Assistant Editor of an architecture and planning magazine. I got to meet a wide variety of experts; it was an amazing introduction to the transformative possibilities of the profession! One thing led to another, and I was able to get not one but two master's degrees from premier universities like CEPT (Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology) in India and University of Pennsylvania in the United States!

You have studied and worked in different countries. How has your experience in these different places and cultures informed and influenced you and your professional practice?

I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunities to have these diverse life experiences across the globe. I grew up in a city of 10 million people (at that time) and currently work for a Nation with over 550 members!

Though I have traversed great distances, literally and metaphorically, I remain grounded in what I learnt growing up in India – the values of the pursuit of excellence, hard work and caring for others remain essential and focal in my work. Each place and culture has added to my worldview, be it accommodating diverse perspectives, love of the outdoors or stewardship. I started off speaking four languages fluently and, over the years, have

added a smattering of four more. My practice has also benefitted from cross-sectoral work - public, private, nonprofit, and academics – and work at different scales and paces. I find it both challenging and fulfilling to shift gears from time to time.

You joined the Lands Department at Tsawwassen First Nation over eight years ago. What are some significant shifts in planning work you have experienced or been a part of during this time working with TFN?

I consider myself blessed to have found my way here when I did. I arrived a few years after Treaty, at a time of great change and significant development. TFN was recently named the fastest jurisdiction in the Lower Mainland!

I was able to contribute to key Nation building projects like the Comprehensive Housing Strategy that led to massive investment and growth in housing along the continuum, development of the Honouring Our Ancestors Charter that is a visionary framework, designed under the umbrella of the treaty document Declaration of Tsawwassen Identity and Nationhood, to guide the TFN towards a more prosperous, sustainable, and culturally vibrant future. Building community amenities like the Elders Centre and creating the nation's cultural footprint in the physical realm through numerous community-led placemaking initiatives has been very satisfying as well.

I have immense pride in the team that I have been able to build and the great commitment in their work, along with the trusting

relationships they have built with the community. All that we do in our planning practice is rooted in mutual respect and caring while bringing our collective knowledge of best practices forward.

What opportunities or challenges do you see with integrating emerging technology (like AI or digitized planning processes) with traditional knowledge, practice and culture within communities such as TFN?

I think the opportunities are endless – we are using these tools to teach language, to map traditional plants, to identify birds and keep the connections with the land alive. Youth have used GIS (geographic information systems) to mark cultural places and digitize art pieces using cultural expressions. Elders pivoted to attending virtual planning meetings during the pandemic.

Our recent Land Use Plan update is built on extensive community engagement through not just in-person engagement but also using all the technological tools available to us. As long as we are able to preserve the traditions and protocols, while using the emerging technologies available to us, we can continue to build on our success.

What is something new you are looking forward to experiencing in the near future?

I am hoping to make more time to devote to writing – creative fiction, poetry and professional writing as well!

Planning Podcasts

Join the PIBC Communications Committee in sharing interesting planning-related podcasts!

PODCAST SUMMARIES

Kali Holahan RPP, MCIP
Communications Committee Chair

Steffi Sunny
Communications Committee Member

Got a podcast about planning you want to share? Contact us with your podcast summary at editor@pibc.bc.ca



City Space Podcast: How an Indigenous-led Development is Forcing Vancouver to Face Tough Questions on Reconciliation

Run time: 28 minutes

Host: Irene Galea

Guest: Tim Coldwell, Ginger Gosnell-Meyers, Gordon Price, Sarah Kirby-Young

Podcast link

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-city-space-podcast/>

Podcast Summary

Across Canada, more and more First Nations are turning to real estate and housing development as money makers, shaping the future of Canadian cities. This is especially visible in Vancouver with projects like Señákw, a development by the Squamish Nation, set to become one of Canada's densest neighbourhoods. It is a project that carries a lot of promise but also comes with its share of controversy. This episode looks at

how developments like Señákw are forcing municipalities across the country to face some tough questions, including how to square Indigenous sovereignty with city planning and what reconciliation looks like at the local level.

Why Planners Should Listen

What does reconciliation look like at the local level and who gets to decide? These are some of the tough questions that host Irene Galea is looking to answer. This episode dives into the complexities of reconciliation through the lens of the Señákw development, a landmark urban reserve project led by the Squamish Nation.

In 2003, the Squamish Nation regained 10.5 acres of land, now the site of the Señákw development. Señákw is a housing initiative comprised of 11 towers, 6,000 rental units, including 1,200 affordable homes, with 250 reserved for Squamish members.

The podcast highlights tensions between Indigenous self-determination and local urban concerns like those from the Kits Point Residents Association. The Kits Point Residents Association didn't oppose the development outright, but raised concerns about its scale, density, and lack of consultation. Their lawsuit challenging the city's service agreement with the Squamish Nation was ultimately dismissed.

Key voices in the episode offer powerful reflections:

- Gosnell-Meyers emphasizes the need for non-Indigenous residents to understand their role in supporting reconciliation: "It's not the residents' fault that we live in a society where consultation of Indigenous people has largely been absent. But it is our responsibility to understand why we need to support First Nations reconciliation and economic self-determination where possible."
- Coldwell underscores the importance of Indigenous autonomy: "The ability for the nation to decide and have autonomy and authority over how they use their lands... is a big part of reconciliation."
- Gosnell-Meyers also challenges fears around Indigenous empowerment: "There is this unfounded fear that the more we learn about Indigenous history... the more we will have to give up. And that's not the reality that reconciliation provides... we'll be building a better society that doesn't alienate and marginalize populations."

The episode makes clear that urban reserves like Señákw operate outside municipal control, raising questions about governance, planning, and shared responsibility. It also invites listeners to reframe reconciliation not as a loss, but as a collective gain for communities, ecosystems, and future generations. This is a great listen!

* Did you know these podcast links are available on the PIBC Planning Podcasts web page? Visit www.pibc.bc.ca/planning-podcasts to click and listen!



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National Trends in Plan Tech: Digital Transformation and the "HAF" Experience

Carolyn Gisborne, Senior Specialist, Municipal Relations Team, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

The next chapter of digital transformation is upon us, similar in scale to GIS disrupting the planning profession in the 1990's. Municipalities across Canada are increasingly using digital tools to improve planning processes and housing outcomes (aka "planning technology" or "plan tech"). While "plan tech" is an emerging term, it encompasses digital tools as divergent as e-permitting, climate adaptation modelling, digital twins and artificial intelligence. This wave of digital transformation is partly spurred by the municipal experience during the pandemic, when municipalities took swift action to keep planning processes moving by drawing on technology to address the restrictions on in-person collaborations. By rapidly deploying new processes and technologies in the face of change, planners paved the way for municipalities to take advantage of the coming wave of advancements in artificial technology and digitization. Through this experience, technology's critical role became more widely appreciated as enabling good planning practices by improving process efficiencies, transparency and collaboration.

Working with communities across Canada, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Municipal Relations team has a national view on digital transformation trends. Of the 241 communities who received Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) grants, intended to support measures to streamline the planning and approvals process, 103 have implemented plan tech initiatives. BC is an emerging leader in the digital transformation space, with 6 out of 10 artificial intelligence (AI)-based HAF initiatives being implemented in BC communities. Many smaller, rural and Indigenous communities have also benefited from implementing plan tech initiatives; some northern communities in the Yukon used HAF funding to digitize processes and implement GIS, which was previously unavailable due to a lack of resources. While municipalities are currently in the midst of implementing a range of plan tech projects, the collective HAF experience is already showing clear trends and success factors that can offer insights to all municipalities interested in gleaned the benefits of plan tech.

Some of the benefits of plan tech include more efficient processes, more informed



decisions, better data, enhanced engagement with the public and increased integration across teams. Staff from the City of Delta note the benefits they have seen from plan tech: "Delta has transformed its residential building permit process—now fully digital from start to finish. From application to review, issuance, and inspections, everything can be done online, anytime, from anywhere. This streamlined system enhances accessibility, transparency, and efficiency, while also supporting economic growth by accelerating development timelines. Expanding the system to non-residential permits is next, with the digital launch just around the corner."

Another example comes from the City of Kelowna, who created a [Housing Data Dashboard](#) using PowerBI that provides real-time information on housing indicators including new home construction, prices, rents, vacancies, and housing targets. Using a simple but powerful tool, the Housing Data Dashboard provides a single source of truth for housing data and ensures that all relevant data is accurate and readily available. Arlene Janousek RPP, MCIP, Project Manager at the City of Kelowna, notes: "We invested time up-front to ensure we were collecting data regularly, and this has paid off in terms of greatly improving the transparency of our housing data. It's also allowed us to report on

key housing metrics—to Council, internal staff, and the public—much more quickly and easily. Overall, this project has enhanced staff's ability to make informed decisions, provide valuable insight, and undertake data analysis. Because the Housing Dashboard is public, there is also opportunity for community members to explore and access data on their own."

Municipalities seeing early wins in adopting plan tech have identified several success factors, including dedicated resources, a culture of innovation, improved data, and a coordinated internal approach. From a resource perspective, municipal planners identified consistent funding and staffing as being fundamental to implementing and sustaining new digital tools. While HAF funding is one potential funding source, it is not a prerequisite for exploring plan tech initiatives. Similarly, planners identified an organizational culture that embraces innovation and is open to change as a key factor in accelerating (or decelerating) adoption of new technology. Council understanding is tied to organization culture, in that elected officials' support can drive initiatives forward, while a lack of understanding can stall progress. Regular briefings and education sessions can help bridge this gap.

Improved data is at the heart of technology adoption; accurate, comprehensive data allows municipalities to make informed decisions

and optimize their planning and housing strategies. At the same time, addressing data security and privacy concerns is critical to protect sensitive information and maintain public trust. Another success factor is a collaborative and coordinated internal approach to technology adoption, whereby different teams work together regularly to ensure that technology initiatives are integrated smoothly across a municipality. Zvi Lifshiz, Chief Strategy Officer, Director of Corporate Strategy at the City of Maple Ridge highlights the interplay of all of these factors and the role of organizational culture: “Digital transformation is never just technical. Technology changes the tools, but culture defines the outcome. In Maple Ridge, technology provides the spark, and our culture of service, adaptability, and continuous improvement working together turns that spark into lasting transformation — delivering smarter, faster, and more seamless experiences for our community.”

All of these success factors beg the “chicken and egg” question for municipalities - what should a community focus on first, creating the conditions for success or pursuing specific digital tools? The HAF experience highlights the former pathway and the success that can come from focusing on outcomes, with specific tools

following from outcomes agreed to by staff and Council. Plan tech initiatives also tend to see success where there is an internal staff champion who can promote early wins and organize teams across multiple departments. AI-based tools tend to garner a lot of attention and interest from the public; many municipalities have used interest in AI to jumpstart conversations about the benefits of other plan tech. No matter the entry point, municipalities should anticipate a highly iterative process when exploring and implementing plan tech.

For communities interested in advancing their digital transformation, the experiences of HAF communities implementing plan tech can provide some insights. Many municipalities shared that not waiting for funding, and anticipating an iterative process, were beneficial in their own process. They also highlighted that starting small and focusing on what can be done with existing tools made more sense than focusing on a specific tool. Amy Vilis, Director of the Housing Growth Innovation Program at DIGITAL (Canada's Global Innovation Cluster for digital technologies), notes that “Innovation sticks when local government leaders are aligned and supportive, when stakeholders and cross-functional teams, from business line owners to technical services, stay engaged,

and when data quality and digital skills are in place to deliver. The local governments that focus on solving real local challenges and scale thoughtfully are the ones that achieve lasting impact.”

The increasing use of digital tools in the planning and development sphere can take many forms. Whether the label is ‘plan tech’, digital transformation, digitization, or something else, the increased use of digital tools builds on the municipal experience during the pandemic and is quietly transforming the planning landscape in Canada. Municipalities report that implementing plan tech can result in more efficient development processes, better and more readily available data that informs decision-making, and a more integrated approach across teams. They also identified some of the success factors that made plan tech work in their communities, especially an organizational culture that fosters innovation and focuses on outcomes rather than specific digital tools. Communities of all sizes and contexts can benefit from using plan tech and the ever-growing number of municipalities who are in varying stages of their own digital transformation journeys. Karin Hung, Director of Strategic Initiatives with the City of Burnaby (whose team has partnered with IT to deliver plan tech upgrades including permitting enhancements, Power BI dashboards, and a pilot of generative AI zoning review) summarizes her advice on getting started: “Start now – even if it’s a small, imperfect step. Waiting is how you get left behind.”

Carolyn Gisborne has a Master of Urban Studies from Simon Fraser University and a comprehensive policy background at the Province of BC working on building codes, municipal governance, housing policy and energy efficiency. Through CMHC’s Municipal Relations team, she works directly with municipalities in BC and the Northwest Territories to deliver housing programs and advance collaboration with and between local governments. She is keenly interested in the intersection of planning, building innovation, and digital technology, and the resulting opportunities to transform the housing sector.



The Human Engine of Digital Transformation: Burnaby's People-Centred Approach to Planning Innovation

Leah Libsekal RPP, MCIP and Karin Hung BA, MA, DULE

Rethinking Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is often framed as a technology-first endeavour that promises to streamline operations, modernize and elevate customer service delivery. Yet, when tech solutions are introduced without meaningful engagement from the people who use them, friction and resistance can stall progress.

In planning practice, this paradox is especially pronounced. While digital tools promise efficiency and innovation, their success depends on how well they align with how people work, what they value and they culture they operate in.

Technology as Enabler, People as Driver

The City of Burnaby's approach to digital transformation reflects a growing recognition that people and not platforms are the true engine of change. The City's continuous improvement framework for permitting puts people at the centre of transformation. It emphasizes that while technology facilitates transformation, sustained progress depends on the people who provide context, creativity, and continuity.

A key example is the Development Approvals Process (DAP) Program, launched in 2023 to improve permit processing times, customer experience, transparency, and efficiency across five core development processes: rezoning, subdivision, preliminary plan approval (PPA), and residential and commercial building permits.

Through DAP, a Lean Six Sigma review of residential building permits, beginning with new home construction, identified three foundational drivers of people-centred transformation: early engagement, digital literacy, and a culture of adaptability.

- Early engagement builds trust and ensures technology responds to real user needs.
- Digital literacy equips staff with the skills and confidence to adopt new tools.
- Adaptability fosters a mindset of continuous improvement, where experimentation is encouraged and failure is safe.

Case Study: Residential Permitting Reform

In January 2023, Burnaby kicked off an initiative to tackle long approval timelines for new home construction. The project, named R1, initially involved a Lean review of the residential building permit process for single- and two-family dwellings. When the Province of BC introduced Bill 44, later that year, requiring municipalities to allow 3 to 6 dwelling units on lots zoned for single- and two-family uses, Burnaby expanded the review to include all Small Scall Multi-Unit Housing (SSMUH) building typologies. The City also consolidated 12 residential zoning districts into a new R1 SSMUH District.

The R1 initiative focused on three things: streamlining process, enabling projects and empowering people. The Lean review included an overhaul of business processes, including introducing a new engineering pre-application stage, updated forms, standardized requirements, and time tracking. These improvements were supported by tech enhancements and digital tools: an executive dashboard for KPI analysis and reporting, a digital submission portal, and an application information portal. The project also introduced changes in human resourcing side of the permit review process such as how files are assigned and how and when reviewers provide input. New staff roles supported greater collaboration and responsiveness, and weekly team huddles and a dedicated SharePoint site created a single source of truth, enabling consistent and confident reviews. A strong change management strategy unified process, technology, and people changes to drive impact.

The result? A sustained decline in permit processing times (Figure 1). This graph shows the end-to-end residential permitting times, from when a customer applies to when the permit is approved.

Before introducing process changes in April 2023, the 12 month rolling average for end-to-end processing times was almost 180 days, falling well below customer expectations. By streamlining application intake, refining file assignment and reviews, Burnaby

Burnaby Residential Building Permits: Speeding Up Approvals

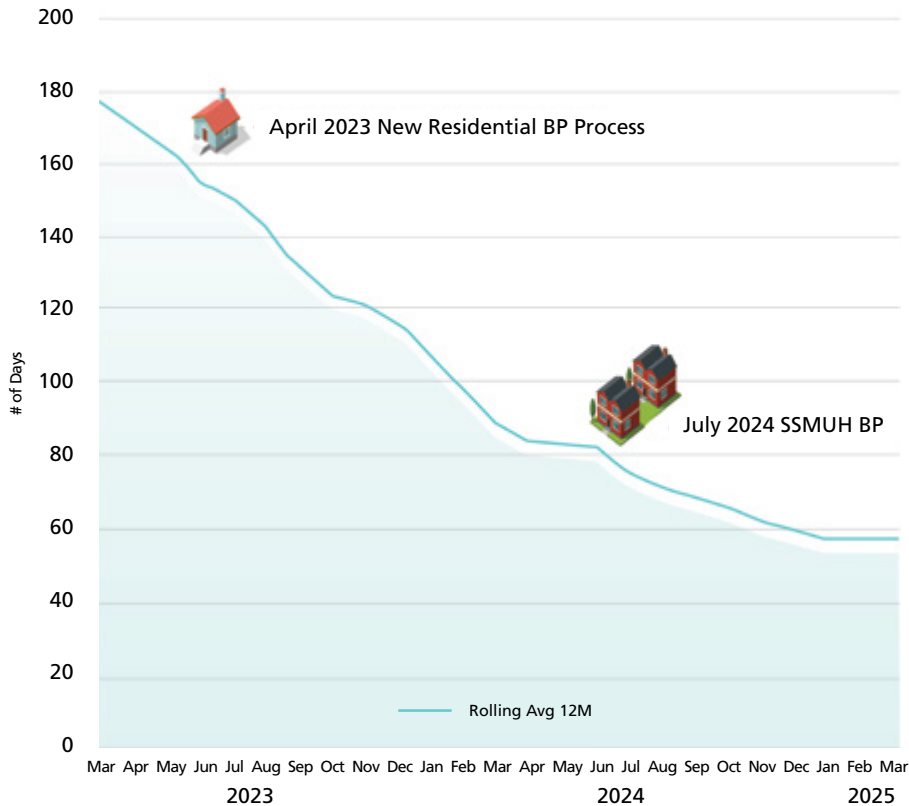


Figure 1

achieved a significant and steady decrease in permitting times.

These gains continued even after the introduction of more complex SSMUH typologies in July 2024. Permitting timelines are now stable at 53 days, a 70% decrease compared to prior to the beginning of the lean review, and 59% since April 2023.

One small but impactful technology change was the introduction of a “chess clock” for time tracking. The clock allows staff to separate review time from applicant response time, giving a clearer picture of where delays were happening. Supported by digital literacy efforts and refined data analysis, this feature boosted transparency and reporting accuracy. Through the Microsoft Power BI platform, staff are able to visualize complex development data geospatially, monitor performance metrics, and assess resource allocation in real time. More than a dashboard, it’s a decision-support tool that informs planning practice, strengthens staff development, and fosters a culture of data-driven improvement.

The R1 initiative illustrated how a culture of adaptability can lay the foundation for broader

transformation. Robust change management and early wins helped normalize new processes and smoothed the adoption of subsequent changes, including new housing forms under SSMUH zoning, new financial requirements and updates to alteration permits. By integrating process redesign, staff empowerment and technology adoption, Burnaby through the R1 initiative achieved lasting and meaningful improvements in permitting efficiency.

Sustaining Change Through People

Burnaby continues to advance technology-forward projects that support planning and business transformation. Piloting generative AI zoning compliance software and expanding real-time dashboards for internal and public use are recent examples.

But technology implementation is only the beginning. Ongoing success depends on people to maintain, iterate and adapt tools to evolving needs, ensuring relevance and impact.

Conclusion: Planning for People

Burnaby’s experience reframes digital transformation as a human-first, tech-enabled

journey. By engaging early, building digital literacy, and fostering adaptability, planners can lead change that is both effective and enduring.

At the end of the day true transformation is not about the tools, it’s about the people who use them. When organizations invest in culture, capability, and collaboration, technology becomes a multiplier and not a barrier.

Leah Libsekal, RPP, MCIP is Program Manager, Development Applications at the City of Burnaby, leading a team focused on process improvements to expedite development approvals. With over 25 years of experience in urban and transportation planning, policy, and project management, she champions people-centered, data-driven transformation in development planning and permitting.

Karin Hung, BA, MA, DULE is an urban planning generalist whose 20+ year career at the City of Burnaby has included development, master planning, and non-market housing. In her current role as Director, Strategic Initiatives, she is focused on business transformation to accelerate housing development and economic development.



When the planning ends, the ride begins: riders at Sun Peaks, BC, on trails shaped by a trail plan and detailed design.

A mountain biker is captured mid-air, performing a jump over a dirt mound. The biker is wearing a white helmet and a light-colored shirt. The background is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. The foreground shows a dirt trail with some rocks and small plants.

Dirt Meets Data: How Digital Tools are Transforming Trail Planning and Design

Mark Barsevskis RPP, MCIP

Trail planning used to start with a topo map, a compass, and countless hours of hiking. You would head into the woods, scribble notes in the rain, try to connect the dots later in the office, and hope your hand-drawn sketches lined up with reality.

Fast forward to today, and things look very different. Thanks to GIS, LiDAR, GPS, and a suite of other digital tools, trail and outdoor recreation planners can design smarter, move faster, and make stronger cases to regulators, funders, and communities. Dirt still matters, boots on the ground are essential, but data is now riding as a co-pilot.

In a world where efficiency, transparency, and innovation are reshaping every corner of planning, trail systems are no exception. Here's how digital transformation is changing the way we carve new lines through the landscape.

From Topo Lines to LiDAR: Seeing the Forest and the Trees

At its core, trail planning is about working with terrain. Planners need to know where the steep slopes are, where water flows, and which

areas are too sensitive to disturb. Traditionally, that meant poring over contour maps and doing a lot of field scouting.

Enter LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). LiDAR scans the earth's surface with laser pulses, generating incredibly detailed elevation models. For trail planners, it's like switching from blurry vision to high-definition glasses. Suddenly, subtle ridgelines, old logging roads, and natural benches pop off the screen. You can spot potential alignments from your desk before even setting foot on site.

In British Columbia, where glacial valleys and steep mountain faces define much of the terrain, LiDAR has been a game-changer. It allows planners to "see through" the tree canopy, identify areas prone to erosion, and avoid sensitive wetlands, all long before a flag line is set in the ground.

GIS: The Digital Trail Map Behind the Scenes

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are the backbone of modern trail planning. Think of GIS as the Swiss Army knife of spatial data: you can layer topography, land ownership, habitat data, existing trails, cultural sites, and more, all in one digital map.

Need to know if your proposed singletrack crosses a watershed boundary? GIS has you covered. Want to check whether that new trailhead is too close to critical habitat? Just add the layer. Beyond analysis, GIS also helps with storytelling. A map showing proposed trails overlaid on aerial imagery is worth a thousand words in a council chamber. Funders and decision-makers do not just want to hear about recreation opportunities, they want to see how the plan fits into the bigger picture. With GIS, that visual argument is clear, professional, and compelling.

GPS: Ground-Truthing the Dream

All the desktop analysis in the world cannot replace boots on the ground. That's where GPS comes in. Field crews equipped with GPS devices (or even just smartphones with high-accuracy apps) can record existing informal routes, flag new alignments, and tag environmental features in real time.

That data flows back into the GIS system, where it can be refined, compared, and tested against the broader landscape. Instead of coming home with soggy notebooks and rough sketches, planners now return with digital data points that drop neatly into the master plan.

The loop between GIS and GPS - desktop analysis to field verification and back again - is what allows modern trail planning to move quickly without losing accuracy.

Building Efficiency Into the Process

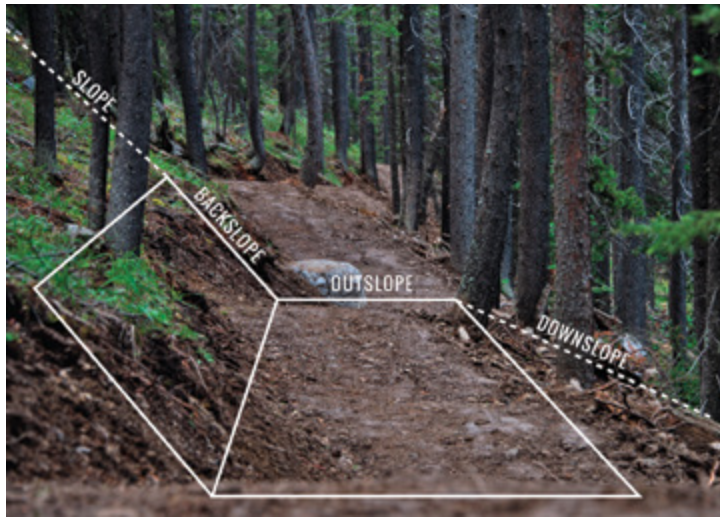
Planning trails is not just about finding the best line on the ground. It's also about navigating the approval gauntlet: environmental reviews, interest holder consultations, regulatory permits. Here, digital tools are helping planners move faster and smarter.

By tapping into open government datasets and layering our ideas into GIS before submission, we can reduce the number of questions regulators need to ask. The data puts us a step ahead and we can anticipate concerns and provide answers before reviewers even realize they have them. That means fewer rounds of back-and-forth, more confidence in the submission, and a smoother path to approval.

Digital tools do not just make the process quicker, they make it more transparent and evidence-based. Instead of reacting to issues late in the game, planners are proactively addressing them with clear, defensible data that speaks the regulator's language.



Blending boots-on-the-ground with GPS precision: trail planning in action.



Trail geometry made simple: a field sketch to align planners and contractors.

Transparency and Trust: Showing Your Work

Public trust matters in trail planning. Communities want to see that planners are listening, balancing recreation with conservation, and respecting cultural values. Digital tools make that easier.

Interactive web maps allow residents to explore proposed alignments from home, zoom in on their neighborhood, and leave comments tied to specific locations. Instead of broad statements of support or opposition, planners gain the kind of small, detailed insights that often surface during informal conversations around a paper map. These observations about how people already use the land, whether it is a favorite view, a children's play spot, or an informal route, help refine plans in meaningful ways.

Shared GIS platforms also provide Indigenous partners with a clear way to review alignments against cultural and heritage data. While this does not replace relationship building, it adds clarity and accessibility that ensures everyone is looking at the same information and can raise concerns early in the process.

Innovation in Action: Importing the Bigger Picture

Modern trail plans are never created in isolation. They need to connect with existing recreation infrastructure such as trailheads, bike parks, ski resorts, campgrounds, and transit hubs.

GIS makes this integration seamless. By importing existing datasets, whether municipal park inventories, provincial recreation sites, or crowdsourced platforms like Trailforks and Strava, planners can see how new alignments connect to the wider network.

The real power comes from the database itself. By entering trail classifications into a central system, algorithms can quickly generate inventories by type and location, eliminating

repetitive manual work. This approach highlights the bigger picture: Are there missing links? Redundant overlaps? Opportunities to create loops that distribute use more evenly across the system?

When data layers communicate with one another, planners can apply true network thinking. The result is trail systems that are not only smarter and more connected but also more efficient in how they deliver public benefit and use resources.

The Human Element Still Matters

For all the tech, it is worth remembering that trails are ultimately about human experience. Data can tell you where a trail can go, but it cannot tell you what it feels like to ride through an old-growth cedar grove or crest a ridge with a sweeping view.

That is why digital tools do not replace fieldwork, but they make it more intentional. Instead of wandering the forest with no clear direction, planners arrive on-site already knowing the likely corridors. Then they can focus on the details that data cannot capture: the flow of the line, the quality of the soil, the joy of the ride or hike.

The Future: From Digital Twins to AI

The next frontier in trail planning is the use of digital twins and artificial intelligence (AI).

A digital twin of a trail network is a dynamic, data-rich model that not only simulates user flows and forecasts environmental impacts but also provides a powerful platform for asset management. By integrating trail infrastructure and condition data into one system, planners and managers can track every bridge, sign, and section of trail, and use the model to guide proactive maintenance programs. This ensures resources are spent where they are needed most, extending the life of assets and keeping networks safe and reliable.

When artificial intelligence is layered onto this foundation, the opportunities grow even further. AI can analyze patterns in how people use trails, identify the most popular routes, and suggest where similar experiences could be created in new areas. It can also predict future maintenance needs and optimize alignments for both user experience and environmental resilience.

We are not there yet, but the direction is clear. Trail planning is becoming more data-driven, more predictive, and more effective at managing assets while delivering resilient, connected, and inspiring outdoor experiences.

Dirt + Data = Better Trails

Trail planning will always be rooted in the land. You cannot build a great trail without feeling the soil under your boots and the slope under your feet. But digital tools are changing the way we get there.

GIS, LiDAR, and GPS are helping planners see more clearly, work more efficiently, and build trust with communities. They're making approvals faster, networks smarter, and outcomes better.

Digital transformation does not take away from the art of trail planning, it brings it into sharper focus. It allows us to pair the thrill of discovery with the rigor of data, ensuring that when dirt meets data, the result is trails that are not only fun to ride or hike, but also resilient, connected, and sustainable for generations to come.

Mark Barsevskis, RPP, MCIP is a Senior Planner at McElhanney based in Whistler B.C., specializing in trail planning and outdoor recreation infrastructure. Together with his team, he helps turn plans into reality and guides projects across Canada that integrate community vision, environmental stewardship, and innovative design to create practical and inspiring recreation experiences.

A Decade of Learning by Doing: The MCP Program at Vancouver Island University

Pamela Shaw PHD RPP FCIP FRCGS and Mark Holland PHD RPP FCIP



The Master of Community Planning (MCP) Program at Vancouver Island University (VIU) opened the doors to the first group of graduate students in Fall 2015. Since then, approximately 20 to 25 students each year joined together for a cohort-based adventure that focused on “Learning by Doing” while meeting all the requirements as an accredited planning program. The Program was crafted to balance academic studies with the practice of planning: the goal was building graduates who could hit the ground running as active contributors to both public and private practice.

VIU, as a “teaching university,” was able to embrace practitioners as the core team of instructors, within the structure and credibility of a university. The VIU ethos and curriculum focused on three dimensions: a high standard of academic education and learning, a comprehensive coverage of basic practical planning knowledge and skills, and

connections to the community through speakers and projects. The high academic requirements included full semester courses in history, theory and ethics, research methods, and law, and a 100-page academic policy paper following the structure of an academic thesis.

This is written in the past tense: sometimes good things come to an end.

Planning West readers are aware that VIU is discontinuing most of the graduate programs and shifting towards a smaller range of undergraduate degrees, along with expanded opportunities for transfer to other universities. Unfortunately, this includes the closure of the MCP Program: the current 2nd-year students are completing their degrees, and then the program will sunset in Spring 2026. While this closure is an unexpected outcome for everyone attached to the Program, there remains much to celebrate:

- Over 200 graduates are out in the world as planners: from sea to sea to sea across

Canada and around the globe, MCP grads are making a difference in every area of practice.

- Several grads have chosen an academic path and are pursuing PhDs.
- Two students achieved the Governor General Award, the highest honour that can be awarded to a graduate student.
- Students have served on both the Planning Institute of BC’s Council and on the Board of Directors for the Canadian Institute of Planners.
- The MCP Students’ Association has been active from the start, engaging students in tactical planning through engagement and activism, along with the occasional social event.
- The Mentors’ Banquet was a highlight in the Program each year. The mid-Island RPP community stepped up and served as mentors for the students, providing advice,



recommendations, and cautionary tales. Some of these relationships have endured for a decade, and many have resulted in employment opportunities for students.

As to “Learning by Doing”, we have worked on projects with sixteen First Nations over the last decade, and we are especially grateful to the Snuneymuxw First Nation for opening the eyes, hearts, and minds of students to a wide variety of issues impacting the Nation. This includes the Snuneymuxw’s te’tuxwtun site adjacent to the VIU campus, a project that will reshape the mid-Island over the coming years.

And we have worked with communities across the Island – a partial list includes Nanaimo, Ucluelet, Parksville, Lantzville, Campbell River, Gold River, Cumberland, Qualicum Beach, Regional District of Nanaimo, Alberni Clayoquot and Duncan. Listing all our partners would result in an inventory of virtually every incorporated local government on the Island!

Added to this are over 200 internships, scores of Op Eds published in the Nanaimo News Bulletin, and the contributions that graduate students have made to the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (one of Canada’s 19 UN-designated biosphere reserves).

And we will take this opportunity to offer our eternal and heartfelt gratitude to our faculty, former faculty, guest speakers, thesis supervisors, committee members, colloquium presenters, instructors, and mentors who contributed significant value and time to the education and well-being of our students – a list of people that would encompass a good portion of the membership of PIBC.

I am especially grateful to our Practitioner in Residence, Pat Maloney RPP, FCIP; the bi-weekly “Coffee with Pat” was a place of debate and knowledge transfer. And finally, a thank you to Dave Witty RPP, FCIP, who was there from the start. The Planning Studio at VIU has been officially designated the Dave Witty Studio in honour of his contributions.

The recent 10 Year MCP Reunion was the social event of the decade for us, bringing everyone to Nanaimo to celebrate our decade together, and now to look ahead to the next chapter! It was a delight to connect with all 10 cohorts as well as PIBC President Kenna

Jonkman RPP, MCIP and Dave Crossley, Executive Director, along with the local RPPs. Highlights included Uytæe Lee’s stellar presentation, a high-stress round of Kahoot, late-night karaoke, and a picnic in the park.

While we celebrate the past, the focus is now on the future. Following notice of the graduate programs’ termination, the MCP leadership group immediately connected with other post-secondary institutions on their interest in the program.

Working sessions commenced immediately with UVic’s Department of Geography, and a full application is now moving forward within the university. The program will evolve to fit within UVic’s structure and protocols, and to take advantage of the broad range of other faculties, departments, and programs that offer cross-listing opportunities for courses and instructors.

A Master’s in Community Planning program at UVic can offer opportunities centered within BC’s Capital Region with 14 local governments, over 20 First Nations, and the provincial government: the geographic location offers a unique setting for studying planning theory and practice through hands-on education grounded in real-world challenges. Remaining on the Island allows the school to continue working with many mid- and north Island communities.

Conversations are also ongoing with Royal Roads University for opportunities within their focus and expertise in leadership programs.

Why is this important? Vancouver Island continues to be a popular destination for retirees, digital nomads, and others seeking a West Coast lifestyle. However, it is a finite space that needs planners who can think about these edges while addressing the range of issues that planners are facing everywhere – human rights, massive disparities, food security, equity, inclusion, justice, diversity, housing, sustainability, biodiversity, along with the social, economic, and environmental upheavals that the world is facing. Fortunately and unfortunately, this expansive list of complex problems creates many opportunities for students and planners.

The past ten years have been an amazing adventure, and the future is filled with new pathways and horizons. We’ll keep the planning community informed and look forward to what this year will bring.

Pamela Shaw, PhD RPP FCIP FRCGS
Director, Master of Community Planning Program, Vancouver Island University

Mark Holland, PhD RPP FCIP
Faculty, Master of Community Planning Program, Vancouver Island University

< Class of 2021 celebrating graduation day with a hat throwing!

^ Master of Community Planning students engaging the campus community on culture and belonging as part of their Community Engagement course

Top: Pam Shaw, Director of the Master of Community Planning (MCP) Program, at the 10-Year Reunion



< Downtown Reykjavik, viewed from the top of the Hallgrímskirkja tower

Downtown Reykjavik, small intersection play area >



PlanGirl Travels: Lessons from Reykjavik, Iceland

Emilie K. Adin RPP, FCIP

I take a deep breath, my eyes half-closed in joy. Reykjavik means “smoky bay” but it’s anything but smoky. The air is fresh and crisp, with a trace of salt, a trace of sea. The whispering birch trees smell faintly leathery. Reykjavik—along with Stockholm and Helsinki—was ranked the cleanest European capitals for air quality this year.

Yet the streets are startlingly still. We’re past peak tourist season and the day is hot by Icelandic standards, but in a national capital I expect more life. Few people, no strollers, no cyclists. A trickle of cars. A café spills tables onto the sidewalk, but the sun-dappled chairs are filled mostly with tourists. We join them.

From the café I can see Hallgrímskirkja, the vast Lutheran church built in memory of a great Icelandic poet. Stark and beautiful, it stares down at the city. Twenty-nine bells peal every fifteen minutes, but otherwise the scene is hushed. This quietude at the centre of Reykjavik is no small feat. We sit at the top of one of Iceland’s oldest retail streets.

Where are the Icelanders?

A fluorescent pink graffiti on yellow paint offers one clue: “Tourists Go Home.” My husband grins. “Wait— isn’t that what tourists do?”

Reykjavik’s Urban Story

Reykjavik is the world’s northernmost capital and likely Iceland’s first permanent

settlement. But for centuries its population remained tiny.

The Industrial revolution arrived late, 150-200 years after it began in England. In 1901, the city had only 6,000 inhabitants, just 8% of Iceland’s population. The garden-city ideals of the 1910s barely registered.

In the 1960s Denmark imported its Euclidian, car-oriented zoning. Denmark soon reconsidered; Iceland did not. By the time environmental ideas gained traction in the early 2000s, Reykjavik’s population was surging and sprawl was entrenched. Today 248,000 people—two-thirds of all Icelanders—live in the capital region.

Talking with the City’s Top Planner

Haraldur Sigurðsson, Reykjavik’s longtime Head of Municipal and Regional Planning, greets me with a wry half-smile; as if he knows the punch line to a joke that no one else in the room even heard. He’s dressed in black like Johnny Cash. I wouldn’t be surprised if he pulled out a guitar and started crooning. I’m in thrall. He literally wrote the book on Reykjavik planning.

“There’s no history of public transportation in Iceland,” says Haraldur. He sounds a bit defeated, but matter of fact. Decades of car-first zoning hardened a culture of “freedom of mobility” and long commutes. Many residents

start the day driving from far-flung homes to office districts with few restaurants—they generally have their lunches delivered—then head straight home at day’s end, perhaps with a stop at big-box retailers.

“There’s no tradition of going out for a drink with your colleagues after work,” bemoans Haraldur. With segregated land uses, and little to no public transportation systems, people generally expect to socialize, drink and host in their own homes. They have little expectation of an active street life, small-box retail frontages, spill-out cafés, or outdoor amenity spaces.

A European city with land use patterns that rival those of Texas? Hard to imagine. While Iceland is European in culture, Reykjavik is actually situated on the North American continental plate, while the east side of the island is on the European tectonic plate. Many Icelanders think of themselves as more American than European. When you look at their land use patterns, that seems apt.

Reykjavik is now trying to retrofit what it never had: fine-grained retail, small cafés, lively streets. As BC and Yukon planners well know, a car-centric built environment is hard to retrofit. However, achieving this aim has been Haraldur’s great focus. He has a vision for significant change ahead, and he sees progress.



Reykjavik, climbing Njarðargata towards the Hallgrímskirkja church.



The Sæta Svíníð Gastropub on Vesturgata, in Reykjavik

All photos by the author

Tourism as Catalyst

Iceland's 2008 financial crash and the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption vaulted the island into global headlines. Tourism skyrocketed—up 400% between 2010 and 2018—so that today more than two million visitors arrive annually, in a nation of 375,000. Put another way, if you add up all the residents that have ever lived in Iceland for the past thousand years, it's still less than a million; and twice that number of people visit the nordic country every year.

Tourism drives 42% of Iceland's economy and pressures housing supply. But Haraldur points out a paradoxical benefit: "Icelanders watch tourists and immigrants using outdoor public spaces. They see them seated outside restaurants, cafés, and bars. They start to copy them."

Reykjavik's Green Turn

Efforts to curb car culture date to the 1990s, with real momentum in the city's 2030 Municipal Plan adopted in 2013. Key targets include:

- 90% of new homes built on brownfield or infill sites (compared to the previous goal of 50%).
- Iceland's first parking-management policy and a new Bus Rapid Transit line.
- Mixed-use neighbourhoods where shops and services sit near homes.

- More housing in the city centre.
- It sounds visionary—but unlike many visions, construction is underway.

So Why So Quiet?

If policy is shifting, why does the downtown still feel deserted? It appears that tourists have largely emptied out of much of the downtown in daytime, perhaps on day trips across the island to see puffins, whales, horses, glaciers, geysers, waterfalls, fjords, lagoons, parks, mountains, caves, volcanoes, lava fields, and whatever a "lava tunnel" is. But the local residents, where are they? It turns out locals still flock to suburban malls and big-box clusters. Reykjavik is learning to love street life, but slowly.

Late in my stay, though, the silence breaks. Residents emerge from a downtown festival I hadn't known about (that's where they were!) The sidewalks buzz. "You left me the best chairs," I think, "but you'll reclaim them after I'm gone."

Lessons to Bring Home

A dramatic rise in tourism and immigration has brought with it some resentments, but I appreciated Haraldur's take: visitors and locals are inspiring one another on different fronts. Tourists and residents, it turns out, are teaching each other. Visitors and

migrants showcase walkable pleasures. Locals see that a good quality of life includes enjoying stellar outdoor amenity areas, including vibrant main streets. Reykjavik may lag many Canadian cities in transit and urban density, but it is moving quickly now.

In turn, Icelanders model something just as transformative: geothermal ingenuity and a hard-won resilience in the face of a shifting climate. Their approach to winter city living—heating sidewalks with volcanic energy, treating cold as a design partner rather than an obstacle—is winter planning at its apex. It's a reminder that the best urban ideas aren't always imported from big metropolises; sometimes they rise from lava fields. As the Icelandic (and Canadian) saying goes, there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes. A planning corollary might be: cities are never still; they only change at a pace we sometimes mistake for stillness. Reykjavik's next chapter will unfold in the open air, proof that climate challenges can spark urban creativity rather than freeze it.

Emilie K Adin, RPP, FCIP, is an Adjunct Professor at the UBC School of Community and Regional Planning and PIBC's Immediate Past-President. She works as a consultant, speaker and writer. She can be found at emiliekadin.com



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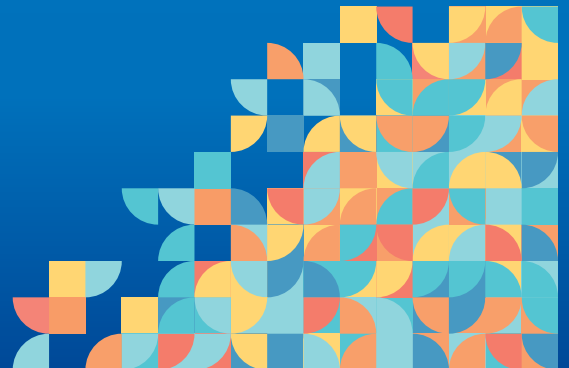
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REMEMBERING NEIL GRIGGS 1939 - 2025

While you may not recognize his name, you will likely know the places he helped shape — including Whistler Village, False Creek, and Sanctuary Cove in Australia — and how these places became model communities that influenced urban planning and resort development across Canada and around the world.

Neil Griggs passed away in June 2025, yet his impact endures in the legacy of the communities he helped create.

Neil was born in India in 1939 to Frank and Betty (née Scarlett) Griggs. His father was a medical doctor and lieutenant colonel in the Indian Medical Service and Neil's early childhood was marked by travel throughout India and the Far East. These early experiences helped shape his global awareness and adaptability. As the eldest of four boys, Neil shared many of these early adventures with his younger brothers Beverly, Russell, and Mark, forming a bond that would grow personally and professionally throughout their lives.

Neil's parents returned to England in 1946 and Neil and his brothers were educated at Hillstone School in Malvern, Worcestershire, and at Wellington College in Berkshire. After graduating from college, Neil spent the first part of his career in Edmonton and Victoria before eventually settling in Vancouver.

While skiing at Mount Baker, Neil met his future wife, Jean. The couple married and made their home in Vancouver's Dunbar neighbourhood, raising two children, Leah and Paul, in a tight-knit community on West 26th Avenue.

Neil earned an undergraduate degree in Urban Geography and a Master's in Urban Planning from the University of British Columbia (1970). While at UBC, he was inspired by urban visionary Walter Hardwick,

whose ideas Neil often referenced throughout his career — particularly in his commitment to community-oriented planning.

Neil began his professional life in the 1970s, a time when cities were reimagining how communities could live, grow, and thrive together. Together with visionaries like Doug Sutcliffe, Michael Geller, Walter Hardwick, and Mayor Art Phillips, Neil played a central role in the planning and development of False Creek South, one of Canada's most ambitious and socially progressive planning projects of its time. Emerging from the ideals of the 1970s, the neighborhood combined mixed-income housing, co-operatives, parks, schools, and community spaces on a former industrial waterfront — setting a global precedent for inclusive urban design.

In the late 1970s, Neil began a project that would forever shape the identity of Whistler. As the project manager and planner for Whistler Village, he helped create a pedestrian-focused village that balanced community needs, tourism, and long-term sustainability — all while honouring what drew people there in the first place: some of the best skiing in the world. It was a fitting project for Neil, who himself was an avid skier.

Working alongside Doug Sutcliffe and Jim Moodie, Sutcliffe, Griggs Moodie Planning Consultants was formed and, in 1978, after an official groundbreaking ceremony, the company led the development team with preparation of a master plan for Whistler Village. The plan prioritized pedestrian access, mixed-use zoning, and long-term livability. Ultimately, Neil held the responsibility for translating the evolving vision into a buildable and enduring reality. Later, as President and General Manager of the Whistler Village Land Company, Neil oversaw the planning, infrastructure, and land sales that laid the foundation for what is now one of the most celebrated all-season mountain resort communities in the world.

Whistler Village would go on to host countless world events, including the World Cup Downhill and 2010 Olympics, as well as receive multiple design awards and praise for its pedestrian-first layout, view corridors, mixed-use zoning, and integration of tourism and community needs.

Following the success of Whistler Village and False Creek, Neil found his next major project through rather unusual circumstances — one that would take him halfway around the world to a muddy swamp in Australia.

In the early 1980s, Australian entrepreneur Michael Gore had been traveling the globe in search of a new kind of community design. When he visited Vancouver and was inspired by the design of False Creek and Whistler Village, he reached out to Neil with an opportunity that would become one of the most ambitious resort developments in Australia:

Sanctuary Cove.

In 1991, after returning to Vancouver, Neil was contracted by the BC Building Corporation through his firm, Griggs Project Management, to lead the redevelopment of the former Oakalla Prison site, located beside Deer Lake in Burnaby. Working with his brother Mark, the project transformed the 64-acre property into new roads, parkland, and residential townhouse sites, seamlessly integrating it into the expanded Deer Lake Park community. The former Oakalla Prison site is now part of the Oaklands neighbourhood and received an award from the Urban Development Institute (UDI) for Best Planned Communities in 1996.

Neil continued his work through the 1990s on various local projects, but perhaps his most personally meaningful initiative came in his later years — one focused on giving back to communities both locally and around the world.

In 1997, Neil Griggs founded the nonprofit Builders Without Borders. The organization is a Vancouver-based foundation that partners with local and international NGOs to deliver housing, schools, and medical facilities in communities affected by poverty or disaster. Builders Without Borders brought together a group of like-minded professionals — architects, engineers, and planners — who were equally dedicated to making a meaningful difference. Today, Builders Without Borders helps strengthen communities through a range of expertise and services to create safer housing and essential community facilities.

Across a career spanning nearly 50 years, Neil Griggs brought together people, ideas, and places — creating communities that prioritized human connection, livability, and long-term resilience. He had a gift for navigating complex projects with both vision and pragmatism, and for building strong, respectful collaborations rooted in thoughtful, people-centered design.

He was a devoted and loving husband to Jean, his first wife who sadly passed away from cancer in 1999, father to Leah (Fladgate) and Paul, brother to Beverley, Russell, and Mark, and proud grandfather to Leah's children Taylor (Juliette) and Courtney (Jeremey).

Neil found love and companionship again with his second wife, Enda, with whom he shared many meaningful years. Through Enda, Neil's family grew to include her children, Lance (Sandy) and Anita, and grandchildren Lauren, Theo, Cole, and Justine.

He remained active and engaged in the lives of his brothers, children and grandchildren well into his later years. For his family, friends, and colleagues, Neil's legacy lives on not only in the communities he helped shape, but in the love and enthusiasm he shared with those closest to him.

Contributors to this piece: Paul Griggs (son) and Michael Geller RPP, FCIP (Ret. Architect)

PIBC's Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project – In Full Swing!

Deborah Jensen RPP, MCIP (Chair, RPP Regulation Sub-Committee of PIBC Policy & Public Affairs Committee)



Please note: this image is a depiction of a general focus group and not one from the current project.

Please stay up to date with the web page and take every opportunity to provide feedback through the engagement activities.

We look forward to hearing from you!

www.pibc.bc.ca/professionalgovernance

Author's Note: this is the fourth article in *Planning West* reporting on the status of PIBC's Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project.

If you are a diligent reader of *Planning West*, then you'll know that the Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC) has been trying to actively engage with its membership on the topic of professional governance. In December 2023, the PIBC Board approved direction to undertake outreach and education about the *Professional Governance Act* (PGA) and its possible opportunities and implications for PIBC and its membership. The RPP Regulation Subcommittee has been overseeing this project through educating and engaging PIBC members about professional standards and the PGA, presenting research and analysis on issues identified, and addressing potential opportunities and tradeoffs.

The primary purpose of the PGA is to set out a governance framework for self-regulating professions that protects the public interest from, and reduces the risk of, unethical and incompetent practice. To date, six professions have been regulated under the PGA, including architects, engineers, agrologists and forestry professionals. The PIBC membership is not currently regulated under

the PGA, and at this time no action has been taken by either PIBC or the provincial government that would lead to planning professionals being regulated by this legislation. The current project is in no way intended to result in a decision on whether the planning profession should be regulated under the PGA, but rather to gather and analyze information regarding the pros and cons of such a move should it occur, and to provide a comprehensive review to the Board in order to further inform future decision-making.

The Work Plan for the professional governance project presents a comprehensive approach to engage and educate the membership. To date, the following activities have been completed:

- Initial engagement survey with the PIBC membership;
- Discussions with other organizations operating under the PGA or similar legislation;
- Publication of articles in *Planning West* (see Fall 2024, Spring 2025 and Summer 2025 issues);
- Initial webinar to introduce the Project; and
- Session at the annual PIBC conference.

Over the summer months, the RPP Regulation Subcommittee and PIBC staff have been working to retain a consultant to further assist with this project. In April, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued to retain the services of a consultant to undertake a strategic assessment of professional governance for the planning profession in BC. After an extensive review process in July, the Subcommittee endorsed the retention of The Regulator's Practice, a consulting firm that focusses on providing advice and services related to professional governance matters. Their work with the project will include background research, preparation and facilitation of nine focus groups, and the overall synthesis and integration of all research and information gleaned from the membership and elsewhere.

The focus groups currently underway are an integral component of this project, providing PIBC members and opportunity for in depth discussion on a variety of topics related to professional governance. A request for participation was issued to the PIBC membership in September, for which we received a high level of interest. The fulsome discussion resulting from these focus groups has been quite valuable, and greatly contributes to the final analysis of this project.

Additional engagement opportunities are still forthcoming. A second member engagement survey will be offered to the membership, and an online discussion forum will be launched to provide an opportunity for further discussion around the research findings. In the end, a strategic discussion paper will be prepared that evaluates the high level pros, cons, and tradeoffs of professional governance options – with an expected completion date of early 2026.

The project webpage (www.pibc.bc.ca/professionalgovernance) continues to be updated to make information available to the membership, providing FAQ resources, PGA information, the project Work Plan, Planning West articles and more. So please stay up to date with this web page and take every opportunity to provide feedback through the engagement activities. We look forward to hearing from you!

Deborah Jensen RPP, MCIP is the Principal and Senior Planner of PlanningWorks Consulting, and a regular consultant with JRTW Planning Services. With over 25 years of volunteer experience with PIBC, Deborah is currently the Chair of the RPP Regulation Subcommittee.



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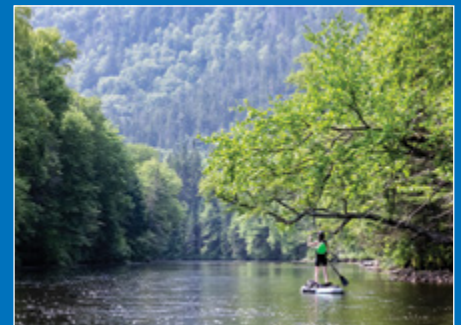
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FEATURED COURSE

TCA 420: Water Futures: Collaborative Responses to Climate Impacts*

Jan. 5 – April 2, 2026

Online Asynchronous

This course explores how governance is evolving to address the impacts of climate change on freshwater regimes, including cycles of drought, fire and floods with a particular emphasis on collaborative governance.

*This course is approved by the Planning Institute of British Columbia as an eligible Continuous Professional Learning activity.

PIBC BOARD NOTES

On **June 10th, 2025**, the PIBC Board of Directors met in Vancouver, BC.

It was acknowledged that the meeting was taking place on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

MEETING MINUTES

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meetings held on March 7th, 2025 and May 12th, 2025.

PRESIDENT

Emilie K. Adin RPP, MCIP provided an update on various activities as President.

BOARD & GOVERNANCE

The Board discussed the update relating to internal tracking and monitoring Board resolutions and actions.

ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

Executive Director Dave Crossley reported on the ongoing and key projects, initiatives, and activities at the PIBC office.

The Board reviewed the 2025 unaudited financial statements to April 30th, 2025, for information. The Board also reviewed the 2024 Annual Report and 2024 Audited Financial Statements, as prepared for the 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The Board received and reviewed an update from the national Professional Standards Board (PSB) – Standards Advisory Committee.

INSTITUTE REPRESENTATIVE REPORTS & BUSINESS

Brief updates on the activities of the university planning programs at UBC and UNBC were provided by the Student member representatives from these programs.

The Board also discussed the planned closure of the VIU Master of Community Planning program, noting its support for the program and the value it brings to the profession. The Board directed staff to consult with the program Chair for guidance on appropriate next steps to express and provide support for the program.

COMMITTEE REPORTS & BUSINESS

Governance and Nominating Committee: The Board reviewed and approved revised terms of reference for the Professional Conduct Review Committee (PCRC), as recommended by the Governance & Nominating Committee.

Professional Conduct Review Committee: The Board also reviewed and approved revisions to the PCRC Policy & Procedures Manual.

Policy & Public Affairs: The Board also received an update on the Peer Learning Network (PLN) and endorsed the proposed post project transition strategy for the PLN as the project winds down in Spring 2026. There was some further discussion on potential research work of the Housing Task Force.

The Board received and discussed a report on government relations and referred the matter to the Policy & Public Affairs Committee for further work on the development of a government relations strategy and work plan.

The Board also received an update on the implementation of the Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project by the RPP Regulation Subcommittee of the Policy & Public Affairs Committee, noting the recent session on the on the project at the annual conference.

JEDDI Working Group: The Board discussed and approved a recommendation from the Justice, Equity, Diversity, Decolonization and Inclusion (JEDDI) working group regarding the budget and direction for the planned equity audit process.

The Board also received a report on initial work and discussions around raising the profile of the Institute and profession, and noted that further discussion would take place as part of the strategic planning process with the commencement of the new Board term.

The Board reviewed and discussed a report on Operationalizing Climate Change from the Climate Action subcommittee and directed the subcommittee to explore the identified potential actions to reduce the Institute's carbon footprint, with the goal of reaching net zero.

Planning Practice and Reconciliation: The Board discussed a proposal from the committee to advance the next phases of their work, with further consultant support and work. The Board expressed overall support

for this work and requested further follow up, including the organization and implementation of a learning session with the Board on the work to date and next steps.

Professional Standards & Certification: The Board approved the admission or approval of a number of new members including 30 Certified, 28 Candidate, 6 Pre-Candidate, 3 Retired, and 9 Students. The Board also noted a number of membership transfers, resignations and other changes. The Board also approved a small number of membership revocations related to unpaid membership fees and non-compliance with Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) reporting requirements.

Member Engagement: The Board discussed the Member Engagement Committee's planned engagement with members at the annual conference.

NEXT MEETING(S)

It was noted that the next regular meeting would take place on July 11, 2025, in Vancouver, in conjunction with the Board's orientation and strategic planning retreat.

Marine Building in 1947



MEMBERSHIP REPORT

JUNE 10, 2025

Welcome New Members!

Congratulations and welcome to all the new PIBC Members!

At its meeting of June 10, 2025, it was recommended to and approved by the Board to admit the following 30 Certified, 28 Candidate, 6 Pre-Candidate, 9 Student, and 3 Retired individuals to membership in the Institute as noted:

CERTIFIED:

Emma Adams
Michael Angrove
Jasmin Basi
Felipe Canavera
(Transfer from APPI)
Evan Chorlton
Bryce Deveau
Jamie DeWeese
(Joint with OUQ)
Brandon Djordjevich
Scott Dutchak
(Transfer from OPPI)
Qwuy'um'aat (Eyvette) Elliott
Joanne Fitzgibbons
Desiree Givens
Kristen Harder
(Joint with APPI)
Isabelle Kim
Seamus McConville
Mark McNaughton
Joseph Nethery
(Joint with OPPI)
Peter Ohm
(Transfer from APPI)
Phillip Prell
(Transfer from OPPI)
David Purcell-Chung
(Transfer from APPI)
Afia Raja
Jonathan Reitsma
Alex Rowley
Lisa Schumacher
Lily Shields-Anderson
Ashley Thandi

Kacia Tolsma
Lise Townsend
Kiera Vandeborne
Holly Yee

CANDIDATE:

Devon Armstrong
Aishwarya Thabitha Ashok Kumar
Pablo Beimler
Carlos Eduardo Campos de Oliveira
Tiago de Souza Jensen
(Transfer from APPI)
Julia Dewijn
Hussein Elhagehassan
Andrew Figueiredo
Christopher French
Mariane Frizzi
Mark Gledhill
Vidhi Kyada
Jodie Laborde
Srushti Modi
Neha Nair
Shaun O'Dea
Tira Okamoto
Jiwon Park
Christian Parr
Eric Post
Santiago Rodriguez
Bobby Sanghera
Heather Sherlock
Jasmeen Kaur Sidhu
William Siegner
Helen Stanton
Vanessa Sun
Nadine Wieping

PRE-CANDIDATE:

Eliabeth Brazier
Peter Hanson
Phoenix Khattap
Amy Needham
Daniella Smith
Sarah Summers

STUDENT:

Jenny Choi (SFU-B)
Brooke Euloth (VIU)
Finn Jackart (SFU-B)
Connor Lewis (UNBC)
Cameron Miller
(McGill – Joint with OUQ)
Emma O'Reilly
(Waterloo – Joint with OPPI)
Alexandra Petracca
(Queens – Joint with OPPI)
Landon Reeves (UBC)
Ellen Watters (SFU)

RETIRED:

Elaine Anderson
Patricia deMacedo
Robert Price

Member Changes

It was further recommended to and approved by the Board to grant or acknowledge the following status changes for 6 Certified and 3 Candidate members as noted:

FROM CERTIFIED TO MEMBER ON LEAVE:

Rhiannon Barbour
Sarah Bingham
Emily Gray
Jessica Hallenbeck
Allison Lasocha
Victoria Venner

FROM CANDIDATE TO MEMBER ON LEAVE:

Phil Kehres
Emily Notley
Loretta Pellegrino

SAVE THE DATES!

It was also noted by the Board that the following 5 Certified members had returned to active practice, thus returning to active membership:

FROM MEMBER ON LEAVE TO CERTIFIED:

- Chee Chan
- Janae Enns
- Brianne Labute
- Peter Ohm
- Maureen Solmundson

It was further noted by the Board that the following 18 individuals ceased to be members of the Institute.

RESIGNED:

- Jack Anderson
- Gail Anestad
- Patricia Bell
- James Bottomley
- Andrew Burns
- Marlaina Elliott
- Torill Gillespie

- Sharon Hvozdzanski
- Brad Jones
- Ann MacDonald
- Teresa Mahikwa
- Patrick Marples
- Catherine (Kate) Miller
- Gary Noble
- Jennifer Paton
- Meredith Seeton
- Lorne Tangjerd

DECEASED:

- Kenneth Denike

Membership Renewals & Removals

At the PIBC Board meeting of June 10, 2025, it was also reported and confirmed that the following individuals had not renewed their membership in the Institute for the current year (2025) and in accordance with the Institute's bylaws ceased to be members effective as of June 10, 2025:

- Ashley Bellwood
- Paulina Csicsai
- Joseph Erceg
- Tracey Heron
- Leah Irvine
- Alix Krahn
- Kathleen Lemon
- Meaghan Overton
- Anne-Marie Paquette
- Sophie Perndl
- Benjamin Ricketts
- Hannah Walsh

At the PIBC Board meeting of June 10, 2025, it was further reported and confirmed that, in accordance with the Institute's bylaws, the following individual had ceased to be a member of the Institute effective as of July 1, 2025, due to non-compliance with continuous professional learning reporting requirements for the most recently completed (2025) reporting year:

- Stephen McGlenn



JOIN US FOR THESE PIBC CPL WEBINARS!

PIBC's Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) webinars are eligible for 1.5 CPL units each. Register and join us!

November 26
Balancing Density, Good Design & Community Health

December 3
Annual Free Webinar – Ethics & Professionalism for Planners

January 28, 2026
Annual Planning Outlook for 2026

Visit the PIBC Webinars webpage www.pibc.bc.ca/pibc-webinars for information on current webinars, registrations and the latest available recordings.

PIBC Peer Learning Network (PLN) Webinars

Peer Learning Network webinars are eligible for CPL units.

December 10
Standardized Housing Designs

Visit the PIBC PLN website www.pibc.bc.ca/pln for past webinar recordings and the latest peer learning network resources.



SUPERKILEN PARK – COPENHAGEN, DENMARK



Photo by Daniele Salutari (left) and mininedaisy (right) on Unsplash

We all need a happy place to embrace our playful side and Superkilen Park in Copenhagen's Nørrebro district was designed with elements from joyful places around the world. What will you find here? How about fountains from Morocco, swings from Iraq, benches from Brazil and a giant black octopus slide from Japan? There is something for everyone here.

Superkilen Park was officially opened in 2012 in Nørrebro (named one of the world's coolest neighborhoods). The core vision of this park, developed by the art group Superflex (in collaboration with architectural firms BIG and Topotek 1), was to embrace and celebrate diversity. With input and engagement from residents, three areas make up this unique public space.

If you are looking to enjoy some music, maybe stop by a café, visit the modern and urban Red Square. If you are looking for more classic and quiet elements, visit the Black Market to relax by fountains. You can also enjoy open areas for sports and picnics in the Green Park.

Listed as one of the must-visit spots in Copenhagen, planners and architects will especially appreciate the attention given to the allotment and function of the open spaces along with the smooth and visually pleasing flow of shapes, including the park's iconic wavy lines.

Superkilen has won various global design awards and the hearts of many visitors (locals and tourists alike). This inviting and fun public park beckons us all to always find time for play.



Sources:

<https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/planning/superkilen-park-gdk707822>

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