

PIBC Annual Conference *North of Normal*

Opening Keynote Speaker: **Jessie Hemphill**

/ Maria Stanborough RPP, MCIP, Editor

Jessie Hemphill is from the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nations, with Métis heritage. She is a Partner and Senior Planner with Alderhill Planning.



The PIBC Annual Conference was hosted from Whitehorse, Yukon and took place online from June 15-18, 2021.

When Jessie Hemphill accepted the offer to present the keynote on the Conference theme of “North of Normal,” she was going to speak about the future of our profession and the opportunities that are emerging through Indigenous planning in BC.

Then the remains of 215 children were found on the grounds of a residential school in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (Kamloops). Jessie changed the focus of her talk from the future to speak of the past, the historical experience of being Indigenous in BC, and how that history informs current planning practices.

Her presentation should be mandatory viewing for every planner working today.

Jessie explored the idea of what is ‘north of normal.’ This year’s conference was hosted by Whitehorse in the Yukon, and was held during a pandemic. It was definitely north, and it was definitely at a time that was not ‘normal,’ according to the dominant story of the past 70 years.

But, in an historical context, nothing has been ‘normal’ for Indigenous people since the 1700s. First contact with Europeans brought disease which killed 60-90% of the people living on these lands. In a pandemic framework, the Black Plague of the 1600s killed 50% of Western Europeans, and that seemed unimaginable. Contact was in essence a near genocide for the First Nations.

In 1876, The Indian Act was passed as part of a systematic approach to assimilate Indigenous people into “mainstream” (white) society. It contained policies intended to terminate the cultural, social, economic, and political distinctiveness of Indigenous peoples. This included the Indian Residential School system where children as young as 3 years old would be taken from their families to be trained to reject everything about their culture and communities, often through violence, punishment and shame.

More than one hundred years of child abuse was codified through the Indian Act, and continued to happen throughout the Sixties Scoop and now the Millennium Scoop, as more Indigenous children are currently in care, away from their parents, than at the height of the Residential School system.

What would change if you were to normalize Indigenous sovereignty and title?



Jessie's mother and nephew, building relationship for the next seven generations.

The Indian Act also took away the rights of Indigenous people to use their lands, and banned traditional ceremonies like the potlatch. The Indian Reserve system was created, as was the band council political system. ‘Indians’ and ‘Indian land’ came under the control of the federal government, a government that sought to erase what they saw as the “Indian problem”.

In her talk Jessie shared that her home community, Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw, was promised a reserve with housing, power, clean water and a school, only to find themselves relocated to a rocky outpost with only three completed houses. The planners working for the government who had designed the community had, in fact, never been there and didn’t know the conditions people would be moving into.

Much of this may not be new to planners, but the damage that was inflicted takes time to absorb. More importantly, the system of governance and authority that it reinforced is very much the system which many planners work within today. Near the end of her talk Jessie made reference to Paulette Regan’s work *Unsettling the*



Impromptu memorial in East Vancouver photo courtesy of the Editor.

Settler Within which quotes Dean Neu and Richard Thierren’s *Accounting for Genocide*:

Soft technologies such as strategic planning ... which combine legal framework, accounting techniques, and economic rationalizations with programming and funding mechanisms actually constitute violence, a slow form of genocide enacted over time.

Jessie emphasized that planning is not exempt. Her keynote is not a story about the past only, and these soft technologies are still being used to normalize harm against Indigenous peoples through the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land and refusal by federal, provincial and local governments to acknowledge Indigenous self-determination and title.

Despite the systematic attempts of colonial authorities to erase the presence and knowledge of the Indigenous people in BC and Yukon, Jessie is proof of their resilience.

Given this framework, what should the future of planning look like? For Indigenous communities, planning is becoming a critical tool for Nations to take back governance and chart a path forward. The opportunity exists to change their ‘normal’ to something that is more aligned with the past of self-governance and land stewardship.

For settler planners, Jessie makes the invitation to consider that there is nothing more important than to get out of the way and support Indigenous self-determination. What has been ‘normal’ is no longer good enough.

She invited settler planners (which is many of us) to consider what it would be like to fundamentally shift ‘normal’ so that the colonial system is no longer seen to serve anyone, settlers included. She invites planners to consider decolonizing our own planning practices, and to co-create a new normal that is as safe for Indigenous peoples as it is for settlers. Just imagine. And then decolonize. ■

Jessie Hemphill’s keynote, along with other reconciliation-focused workshops, are available to view on PIBC’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/PlanningInstituteBC>

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PIBC Annual Conference *North of Normal*

Keynote Speaker: Charles Marohn *"Strong Towns"*

/ Maria Stanborough RPP, MCIP, Editor

Charles Marohn is an engineer, planner and founder of the non-profit organization Strong Towns.



There's always a risk when inviting an American to speak on planning to a Canadian audience. There's the chance that the context for something regulatory like planning may be too different between the American model and the Canadian. Fortunately, Charles Marohn's "Strong Towns" presentation offered basic planning practices that translate across countries and communities.

Marohn contextualized his 'Strong Towns' theory in terms of the first communities that settlers built, places that grew incrementally over time. That was until governments decided to shift into suburbs, car culture and sprawl. This new form of community-building led to high infrastructure costs and displaced economic activity. As well-intentioned as it might have been, it is a form of community-building that doesn't allow for complex connections, adaptation, and gradual growth.

Marohn has a TED talk where he outlines much of the same principles as the PIBC keynote. If you are interested you can find it online. For PIBC he provided a bit more of the planning context and made two key points that I found especially significant.

First, he argued that communities need to plan for growth, but it can be done evenly and gradually. People don't adapt well to sudden, drastic change. The city I live in, Vancouver, could learn from this. The amount of change in some neighbourhoods and some areas (transit corridors) has left residents reeling, while other neighbourhoods seem wholly untouched by change.

Instead of dramatic, uncharted rezonings in specific neighbourhoods, Marohn suggests that change be built into planning, but gradual change. "No neighbourhood should experience radical change. No neighbourhood should be exempt from change," was a basic premise of his talk. Cities and towns can allow for the right to increase the use of a site within a measure of caution; change can happen – and without



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YLUPC thanks the PIBC'S Yukon Chapter and PIBC's Annual Conference Committee for organizing North of Ordinary, Whitehorse June 15 -18, 2021. This very successful event, held in the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün and Ta'an Kwäch'än First Nations, provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the great planning work being done in the Yukon and elsewhere.

Yukon Land Use Planning Council

the bureaucratic slowdown of rezonings – but they happen in ways that are more predictable and consistent across the community, and not just in selected pockets.

The second point that seemed especially pertinent was his view of how the unaffordability crisis has left people without an access point to enter the market, whether it be for housing or commercial space. This is evident in many communities where affordable housing and creative-commercial spaces are all but gone. People starting out – whether it be for a home or for setting up shop – have nowhere to go.

Marohn invited planners to think about how to lower the bar of entry. Throughout North America we have seen people look for solutions in the form of tiny houses, co-housing, shared equity homes, flexible work spaces, and pop-up shops. Marohn suggested that planners need to find ways to be better problem solvers rather than problem creators in order to make it feasible for everyone to thrive.

My favourite example was from Muskegon, Michigan. When its downtown was failing, the town bought sheds and rented them for start-up businesses. The cost of the regular commercial space was too much (despite sitting vacant), and the sheds let entrepreneurs test and grow their businesses. Since then the downtown has begun to thrive as businesses are able to succeed, grow and move into the once empty commercial spaces.

His model is simple and beautiful. It should be a mantra for all planners:

- 1) Humbly observe where people in community struggle.
- 2) Identify the next smallest thing we can do to address that struggle.
- 3) Do that thing right now.
- 4) Repeat.

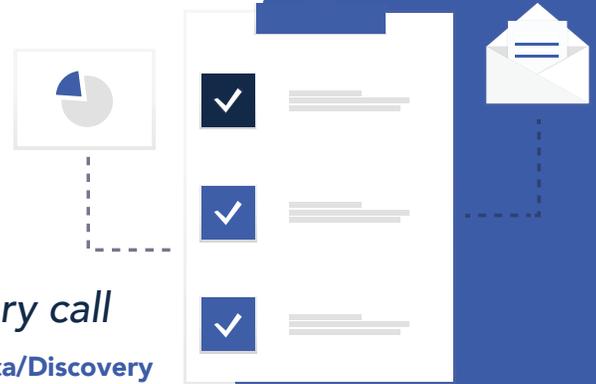
Maria Stanborough is the editor of *Planning West*, and is grateful that attendance to the PIBC Conference is a perk of her volunteer gig.

“No neighbourhood should experience radical change. No neighbourhood should be exempt from change.”



When the town of Muskegon, Michigan wanted to help entrepreneurs starting out, they made temporary commercial space available at affordable rents.

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Online Session 7

Local Governments' Evolved Relationships with First Nations

Summary by Lindsay Allman, Candidate Member

Session Speaker: Eyvette (Qwuy'um'aat) Elliott BBA, MCP Student, resident and member of Cowichan Tribes

"Our history, stories and language greatly shapes how we live and exist on the lands today"

Passion flowed through the screen during Qwuy'um'aat Elliott's presentation, proving that human connection has not been lost to the virtual platform. Qwuy'um'aat Elliott is a resident and member of Cowichan Tribes, an MCP student and owner of Ever Plan. Her presentation "Local Governments' Evolved Relationships with First Nations," explored the shifting world paradigm to re-work our present reality under the colonial system and patriarchy. Qwuy'um'aat introduced the session with the foundation, "If we take care of the Earth, the Earth will take care of us." She provided three tips to help society move forward with our journey:

1. Become a Beginner

[Take] off the knowledge hat... invite the Indigenous worldview in for how we approach planning.

2. Truth before Reconciliation

Consider what Western society identifies as "truth" in books, reports, academia research, and scientific knowledge. Spend the time to learn history, listen to Elders and re-tell the story of Canada.

3. Recognize the Paradigm Shift

Embrace uncertainty, accept newness, and allow silence.

These three tips inspire land-based learning, weaving history into the landscape to engage in Thuyt Tthu Lutem, which roughly translates to "Setting the Table." Thuyt Tthu Lutem is a concept from Qwuy'um'aat's Cowichan community based upon the emotional and spiritual importance of well-being when our community gathers to share food and engages in



story-telling. Qwuy'um'aat guided us through the four foundational ideas of Thuyt Tthu Lutem:

1. Working from the Heart

Qwuy'um'aat shared, "the greatest journey we take in our life is from our mind to our hearts." To plan for the community, we need to set our intention on the right path.

2. Slowing Down

The Indigenous worldview is to embrace conflict and work through it together, allowing community members to sit down all day if needed to say what needs to be said. This may require adaptations from the Western perspective, challenging "timelines" and allowing space for conflict and open discussion.

3. Naut'sa Mawt Sqwaluwun

Naut'sa mawt sqwaluwun roughly means "working together with one heart, one mind and one spirit." Following the first two parts of Thuyt Tthu Lutem allows for meaningful naut'sa mawt sqwaluwun to take place.

4. Incorporate Healing.

Understanding there is no timeline on grief. Each person's experience is different, and each is valuable. Qwuy'um'aat emphasized the value in Indigenous people taking up public space as people as this right was previously banned.

Qwuy'um'aat 'set the table' virtually for the room, sharing her insights as a Cowichan Member and as a planner. Reconciliation requires the gift of time, and should include informal meetings to slow down, speak from the heart, engage in deep listening, and get to know one another. Qwuy'um'aat finished the session with: "we are here to take care of our community. Take care of community, and they take care of us."

Online Session 17

Planning at the End of the Road: Lessons from the Klondike

Summary by Lindsay Allman, Candidate Member

Session Speakers: Clarissa Huffman RPP, MCIP
Stephanie Pawluk, Candidate Member

This session struck me as a reflection of what many new planners across our country experienced. During COVID-19, new planner jobs were hit the hardest so that young planners may have had to move further away from their home community to get their foot in the door. Previous Dawson City Community Development and Planning Officer Clarissa Huffman (originally from the Toronto area), and current Planning Officer Stephanie Pawluk (from the Lower Mainland) invited us into their world of planning for “the land of the extremes” - Dawson City, Yukon.

For both young planners, the idea of moving to Dawson City was one of excitement, intrigue, opportunity and growth, both personally and professionally. The opportunity to work for a smaller municipality offered a breadth of experience that a young planner may not otherwise be exposed to. Clarissa recommended to graduates when job hunting, “pick the job you want based on the description, not the location.”

Reflecting on their experiences, Clarissa and Stephanie acknowledged how new and different Dawson was compared to their previous “normal.” While overwhelming at times, the young women admired how close-knit, engaged, and devoted the people of Dawson are. In order to become a community member, the two women needed to educate themselves. They discovered to understand the heart and character of what makes a place, you have to listen and learn with an open mind.

Clarissa and Stephanie introduced session participants to four unique Dawson topics to set the stage and help us understand the context they live and work within:

1. Location & Climate

Dawson is a Northern city, and the characteristics associated with that impact the community planning. For example, due to permafrost the same methods of building further South are not always appropriate in Dawson. This can be a key issue when out-of-town architects or engineers design structures that are not practical for Dawson’s reality.

As well, the impacts of climate change are significantly more noticeable in the Northern community. The Yukon River is taking longer to freeze over in the winter, becoming problematic for residents who rely on crossing the frozen river in the winter. The municipality does not currently have a climate change specialist on staff, but the community continues to adapt and work together as the new climate change realities set in.

2. History & Heritage

Dawson City has particular design and heritage regulations in order to maintain the historic gold rush downtown. This requires “becoming a heritage planner overnight,” how the small town planner becomes the jack of all trades. And, if we are to engage in truth and reconciliation, it is imperative to take the time and effort needed to learn about the colonial history of the land and its people.

3. Patterns of Development

The two women noted that the lack of design knowledge both within the government and the community has resulted in a “wild west” when it comes to planning. For example, a site plan is rarely done by a professional and as the presenters joked, “a site plan may be submitted on a napkin!” This has created a variety of encroachment and enforcement issues. But it also makes Dawson, Dawson.

4. Mining

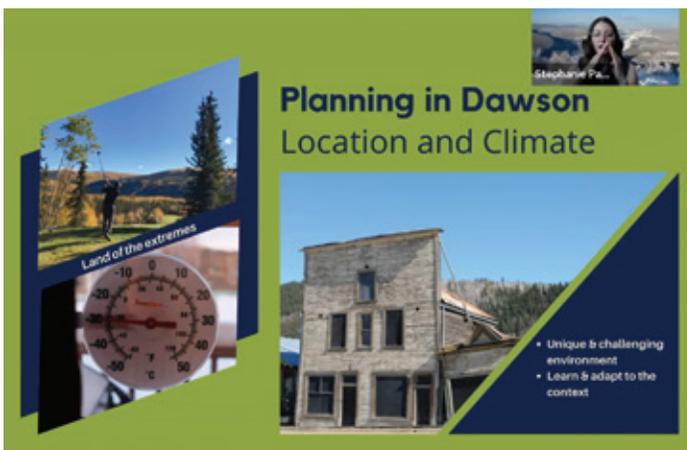
There is a large mining industry within municipal boundaries, and the Mining Act and Municipal Act often conflict with one another. Municipal regulations may be applicable to a mining interest, or not, depending on if the regulation is “in the public interest.”

Key takeaways included:

- Gain trust and respect with the public so that engagement is meaningful
- Develop local knowledge and partnerships
- Encourage creativity and open-mindedness
- Create two-way engagement to help the community understand why and what planners are doing
- Educate yourself about the role of culture in the community

Clarissa and Stephanie’s insightful and fun presentation was evidence that with the right mindset and willingness to learn, moving to a new place can open your mind to adventure and prove to be one of the best decisions of your life.

Lindsay Allman is a planner with the Westbank First Nation and a member of PIBC’s Communications Committee.



Pre-Conference Session 2

Creating the Charrette Experience Online with Urbanarium Studio

Summary by Steffi Sunny, Student Member

Session facilitators: Kristen Elkow RPP, MCIP, Elk Community Planning and Design & Amy Nugent, Urbanarium

Urbanarium is a non-profit organization run by a board of planners, architects, landscape architects, designers, developers, municipal workers, and artists, primarily based in Vancouver. At the PIBC Conference they hosted an online design charrette. Urbanarium's Executive Director Amy Nugent says that creating this studio program has been a messy and challenging process, and extremely successful with the growth of an online audience. Amy mentioned that the online studio is like "bob ross meets improvisational theatre."

The goal of the charrette was to co-design a live-work community at a block-level that could inspire and inform future planning decisions. Participants were divided into five groups

and transferred to small breakout rooms with 4-5 participants. Each breakout room had a facilitator and illustrator to walk us through the process and present ideas accurately and clearly. A generic template was used for this design project, and the final output from each breakout room was followed by a report back and closing remarks.

The discussion was divided into three topics: building, street and amenity level design. Within breakout rooms, we talked about the challenges and benefits of the live-work situation based on our experiences from the past year. We discussed the importance of green communities, the look and feel of the neighbourhood, activities within the open courtyard, street functions and design, etc.

We also discussed shifting from car-centric streets to pedestrian-oriented streets, having play streets, turning underused green space into markets, and supporting more organic community growth in the face of regulatory barriers, such as zoning bylaws, which may prohibit it. Density, coffee shops and pubs, corner stores with housing on top, more permanent food trucks - which can be an investment within the community - were other topics of discussion for the design project. Throughout, the artists in each breakout room did a spectacular job depicting all our ideas in the form of a conceptual illustration.

After the breakout room discussion, all the participants joined together for a final mural board discussion to review each group's conceptual design and planning principles. It was fulfilling and inspiring to hear each group's ideas and rationale.

I have always found design charrettes to be an engaging and powerful tool. With COVID-19 and paradigm shifts, I was intrigued by the idea of conducting design charrettes online. Urbanarium's online studio charrette event was a great example and learning experience to keep charrettes online, exciting and accessible for the community.



THANK YOU!

Special thanks to all the sponsors, presenters, participants and volunteers who helped make PIBC 2021 – North of Normal happen. Thank you all!

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Mini-Mobile Workshop 3: Story & Place, Story in Place: Yukon Narrative-based Projects Build Community

Summary by Steffi Sunny, Student Member

Workshop speakers: John Glynn-Morris & Kanina Holmes



This workshop presented two initiatives from the Yukon – ‘Stories North’ and ‘Yukon Story.’ In his presentation ‘Yukon Story,’ John Glynn-Morris shared his enthusiasm for community economic development and capacity building. John is a planning consultant who works extensively with the City of Whitehorse. He talked about the importance of developing a place ‘branding’ based on the values and aspirations of Yukoners, and by making a point of distinction on what makes Yukon special. He stressed the importance of unearthing a powerful story about Yukon that can be then translated to different sectors.

As a parallel to Yukon Story, ‘Stories North’ is an experiential learning initiative focused on bringing together young journalists studying at Carleton University with Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Yukon. Kanina Holmes is an associate professor of journalism who created a course for the purpose of learning about Indigenous cultures, histories, self-governance, and the dynamics of reconciliation. The course also covers climate change and its implications, as well as other current issues. It was inspiring to hear that ‘Stories North’ emerged as a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report from 2015. She says that this process has its messiness and challenges, but that makes it worth it.

Kanina talked about **three big ideas** in her approach to work, which I think apply to planning as well:

- Be humble - being humble means being respectful, acknowledging what you don’t know and having the confidence and humility to ask when you are unsure.
- Be ambitious - all the projects, initiatives and research that we do require us to be ambitious and aspirational because there is so much that we can do.
- Know that the stakes are high.

In her presentation she discussed fieldwork and storytelling as the future of education - it could be the future for planning as well. She talked about the importance of asking a set of questions before working with communities and encouraged planners and researchers to do the same:

It is important to ask ‘what if’ in the work we do - what if we could combine people and places and stories to create new ways of seeing and interacting and understanding.

Karina mentioned beautiful encounters with people from different communities which she refers to as, “very low key, no agenda, people getting to know each other and connecting, which highlights the beauty of community-based work.”

“What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time...”

– Richard Wagamese

A story can be, a Karina says, “a way of organizing the research into something more cohesive and more accessible to a wider audience.” In the field of community planning, ‘planning jargon’ often makes ideas inaccessible to the general public, which can be counterproductive, leading to miscommunication and lack of trust.

Some takeaways from the workshop were:

- **Commitment** – the importance of having a big commitment to do things differently.
- **Understanding your why?** – knowing your why, and being open about it with the people you work with can lead to better things.
- **Ways to give back** – the workshop stressed the importance of giving back to the community through public engagement.
- **Respect protocol** - while working with Indigenous communities, it is important to learn about their protocol and understand its implications.
- **Context and timing** – check with the people you want to engage with beforehand to make sure they are ready to host you or have your presence.
- **Understand what you are asking of the community members** – it’s important to understand that sometimes what we think as a small ask is actually a big ask.
- **Be sensitive and be nimble** – often, our agendas don’t unfold the way we want to, and that’s okay.
- **Above all, Listen!**

Steffi Sunny is a Planning Assistant with the District of Sicamous and a member of PIBC’s Communications Committee.