A Pathway to Community Impact: UVic's New Master of Community Planning Program

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A new graduate planning program is coming to the west coast. With growing demands across the South Island in housing, climate adaptation, and stewardship, the University of Victoria's Master of Community Planning (MCP) Program will help to address the "wicked problems" shaping the future of our region.

Situated within the Geography Department at the University of Victoria (UVic), the MCP Program is currently accepting student applications up to December 1st for the first cohort of students who will begin their planning adventures in September 2027. The program will achieve all requirements of the Professional Standards Board and will benefit from UVic's strengths in interdisciplinary learning, Indigenous engagement, and sustainability.

UVic's proximity to 13 municipalities, the Capital Regional District, a wide range of community organizations, the provincial government, and more than 20 First Nations spanning the South Island is also a key feature of the program. Students will have opportunities to learn from partners and contribute to planning initiatives, bringing their energy and new ideas into plans and projects.

The UVic program grew out of conversations over the last few years on building connections between UVic's Geography Department and Vancouver Island University's (VIU) Master of Community Planning Program. Unfortunately, VIU's program was sunsetted in June 2026 as part of the refocusing efforts at the university. However, there is much to celebrate: over the last decade, approximately 220 bright-eyed and brilliant MCPeeps "learned by doing" and then moved out to successful planning careers from the west coast to the east coast, north of 60 and south of the 49th, and beyond. These alumni are out in the world, creating positive change.

Keeping a planning program on the island was important. As finite places, islands add a layer of complexity to core planning issues like sustainability, density, and growth. Limited space and fragile ecosystems shape every planning decision. While many "wicked problems" in planning are ubiquitous across Canada, several issues are more pronounced on an island:

- Growth and housing pressures in constrained geographies, along with related transportation trade-offs
- Water security and watershed planning, both to protect water for humans and ensure adequate supplies for all species
- Coastal risk and adaptation, with flooding, weather intensity, and sea-level rise already an issue
- Food systems and land use, from perspectives of resilience and food security.

The "DNA" of the new UVic program is rooted in the experiences at VIU while also bringing a distinctively UVic focus on people, place, and the planet through building community partnerships for a shared future. Students at UVic will be engaged in community-based applied research through the Community Planning Collaboratory, a centre that brings students together with community partners to tackle real-life planning questions. Relation-based learning and community-informed practices will be embedded into all projects. The courses will cover "what a planner needs to know" to thrive in the profession, and there will be a wide range of electives, allowing students to choose their own adventure and focus area(s) for the degree. Engagement in co-op is a strongly recommended option, and all PIBC members are encouraged to think about how many co-op students they will need for Summer 2028. Capstone projects will also engage students in local issues, and a range of field experiences will round out the program.



UVic students learning about urban planning in European cities.
Photo Credit: Cam Owens

A key aspect of the program will be the involvement of the local planning community as mentors, guest speakers, instructors, scholarship benefactors, co-op sponsors, and community partners on research projects and activities. Engaging students in the Vancouver Island South Chapter of PIBC along with PIBC and CIP opportunities will also be a key aspect of student life: the upcoming PIBC/CIP Momentum 2027 Conference (highlighted as "the most anticipated event of the year" on CIP's website) will be a first point of contact for available students from the Fall 2027 cohort.

Ideally, the new MCP Program at UVic will be a trusted partner for private and public sector planners, municipalities, First Nations, and all levels of government. It will create a "pipeline" of talent with local knowledge, bring energy and capacity to addressing planning priorities, and offer graduate-level expertise to support planners in the work they do.

As we worked together to develop UVic's new MCP program over the past year, we engaged with many different people – from faculty, staff, administrators, and prospective students to potential co-op employers, community partners, and planning professionals – and the excitement for the launch of this program has been off the charts. With the closure of VIU's planning program, UVic's new MCP Program is well-positioned to fill an important gap in graduate planning education on the Island. At a time when public trust in higher education has declined, UVic's entrance onto the scene of planning education underscores the important role that universities play in shaping the next generation of planners to help solve the complex challenges of the 21st century.

The program's website is located at:
UVic MCP Program www.uvic.ca/socialsciences/geography/programs/master-of-community-planning/index.php

Application information can be accessed at the Application Portal: www.uvic.ca/graduate/admissions/how-to-apply/index.php

Deadline: Dec. 1, 2026

For more information about UVic's MCP Program, reach out to geog2@uvic.ca.

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Hearing Green: A Visual Language for Urban Soundscape Conversations

Yuhan Liu and Aphrodite Bouikidis

Planning decisions shape our sonic experiences in the city, changing not just how a space functions but also how it feels. Every project, whether a building, bike lane, row of trees, concrete plaza, commercial strip, or rain gardens, leaves an invisible footprint on our urban soundscapes. Each change affects what is present, absent, amplified, or diminished in our everyday environment.

This summer, I designed a method to capture and convey how City interventions influence our experiences of urban acoustic environments. As a BCIT New Media student, this was a unique opportunity to apply visual design skills to a city planning challenge. The project was part of my internship with CityStudio Vancouver, an urban innovation lab that has spent the past 15 years connecting students and faculty with City of Vancouver partners on projects that make cities more sustainable, equitable and joyful. The idea came from staff members of two City of Vancouver teams: Green Rainwater Infrastructure (GRI) and Electrification. CityStudio Vancouver framed this internship as an opportunity to develop innovative ideas addressing these questions about sound environments and experiences:

- What sounds are amplified or diminished in neighbourhoods with Green Rainwater Infrastructure (GRI)?
- What does an electrified city sound like?
- How do we communicate the relationship between infrastructure, sound, and people's sense of place among residents, planners, decision makers, and others?

Together, they raise a fundamental question rarely discussed in planning: What does it mean to build a city of healthy sound environments?

Beyond Quiet, Beyond Noise

Discussions, reports, and policies on urban acoustics are typically preoccupied with noise mitigation, and for good reason. Research has consistently linked chronic noise exposure to cardiovascular disease, disrupted sleep, and stress-related illness, while health reports scarcely focus on positive aspects of urban sound. (Van Kemp & Woudenberg, 2025) Cities regularly monitor decibel levels,



An image of Rainbow Park in downtown Vancouver Credit: Yuhan Liu