

Progress Update on the Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project

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Planning is one of the few professions dedicated to thinking about the future and actively working to shape it for a broader public interest. For more than 60 years, the Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC) has been doing exactly that. And its membership has regularly provided direction to improve its operations and governance. For example, in 2012 PIBC adopted new bylaws that restructured the standards for membership and professional conduct, and updated the Institute's governance structures. Those changes were the result of interaction with PIBC's more than 1600 planners in British Columbia and the Yukon.

PIBC is again looking at the various avenues for steering the planning profession in British Columbia. This review is in response to the Province of BC implementing the *Professional Governance Act* (PGA) in 2018. The primary purpose of the PGA is to set out a governance framework for self-regulating professions in order to protect the public interest from, and reduce the risks of, unethical and incompetent practice. To date, the Province has included six separate professions under the PGA (agrolologists, applied biologists, architects, engineers and geoscientists, applied science technologists and technicians, and forestry professionals).

The Registered Professional Planners (RPP) who form part of PIBC's membership are 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. However, the PIBC Board wanted to fully understand what regulation under the PGA might mean for PIBC and its members; and so, in December 2023 the Board approved direction to undertake outreach and education about the PGA and its possible opportunities and implications for PIBC and its membership. This process is in no way intended to result in a decision on whether or not 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.

Satisfaction with the Current Regulation of the Planning Profession in British Columbia

Source: PIBC Professional Governance Research & Engagement Survey, February 2025.



This project was assigned to the Policy and Public Affairs Committee (PPAC) in 2024, and a new RPP Regulation Subcommittee was founded under PPAC. The Subcommittee comprises six volunteer members, living and working in diverse parts of the province – Northern BC, Central Okanagan, Vancouver Island, and Metro Vancouver in order to provide leadership and guidance for the work being undertaken.

In November 2024, the PIBC Board endorsed the Phase One Work Plan for the Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project (pibc.bc.ca/professional-governance). Phase One focuses on educating and engaging PIBC members about professional standards and the PGA, undertaking and presenting research and analysis on issues identified, and addressing potential opportunities and tradeoffs. To date, we have completed the initial engagement survey that was designed to gauge member awareness about

the topic of professional governance and the PGA, and to identify any areas of concern and / or specific research and engagement needs that should be addressed.

Running from December 2024 to February 2025, the survey was well received and garnered 323 responses, approximately 18% of the PIBC membership. Most respondents said they had some knowledge of the PGA, and were interested in further engagement on this project. They also indicated they were generally satisfied with the focus of the planning profession today, but were interested in learning more about the broader strategic issues facing the profession, the advantages and disadvantages of transitioning to the PGA, and further discussion of defining reserved practice for planning professionals.

Addressing the comments received through the survey includes not only looking at the larger strategic issues, but also delving into some of the other responses received.

Therefore, a comprehensive review of professional governance will also take into consideration items such as advocacy, membership retention, operational costs and membership fees, reconciliation, and labour mobility.

So what's next? Research has been underway to engage with other organizations, both within and outside of BC, to gauge their experiences with governance regulations. This has included planning organizations across Canada, as well as all the professions regulated under the PGA. While this work continues, the project webpage (www.pibc.bc.ca/professionalgovernance) is regularly updated to make information available to the membership. Here you can find FAQ resources, PGA information, the project Work Plan, *Planning West* articles and more.

Within the next few months, the RPP Regulation Subcommittee and staff will also be working to develop additional opportunities

for engagement with the PIBC membership. A number of focus groups are being designed to cover a variety of topics related to PIBC and professional governance, for which we will be looking for participation from our membership. A Strategic Discussion Paper will be produced that evaluates the benefits and costs of professional governance options, including for example, maintaining the existing self-regulating planning organization, and options for transitioning to the PGA regulator. This evaluation would also analyze the efficacy of a new allied organization, independent from the PGA regulator, that would provide other member services and advocacy functions.

Additional offerings in the near future include a series of free webinars, a conference session at the upcoming PIBC Annual Conference in June 2025, more articles in *Planning West* magazine, and an online

discussion forum to empower members to exchange ideas and perspectives.

All of these activities will be designed to provide ample opportunities for the PIBC membership to gain a common understanding of professional governance, to stay up-to-date on current discussions happening within PIBC, and to be a means to provide feedback on the issue. So please stay up to date with the content as it becomes available, and take every opportunity to join the conversation!

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 of the Institute's Policy & Public Affairs Committee.

Areas of Interest for Considering Professional Governance and the Professional Governance Act

Source: PIBC Professional Governance Research & Engagement Survey, February 2025.

