

ASKING TOUGH QUESTIONS: USING AN EQUITY LENS IN SOCIAL PLANNING AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Conference session summary by Steffi Sunny, PIBC Candidate Member

Speakers from LevelUp Planning:

Dr. Victoria Barr – Principal

Lavleen Sahota – Community Health and Equity

Celeste Zimmer – Community Engagement

Dr. Victoria Barr began the session by presenting the difference between equality and equity. Equality means to give everyone the same because we assume that everyone has the same needs, but in reality everyone's needs and wants are not the same. Victoria highlighted that people have different lived experiences and listening to their unique experiences is the first step towards integrating equity.

We all know the golden rule (treat everyone the way you would like to be treated), but Victoria shared a **platinum rule**, which is treat everyone the way *they* would like to be treated. She further defined intersectionality as a complex and cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (race, sex, class, etc.) combine, overlap and intersect the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. Without considering intersectionality, an action that aims to address justice towards one group may end up inflicting systems of inequity experienced by other groups, says Victoria.

She emphasized the importance of reflecting deeply on who gets to engage in planning processes and who gets left out. Finally, she encouraged all of us to recognize the biases and privileges we bring into our everyday interactions and planning work.

Lavleen Sahota presented the approach the consulting team took for poverty reduction plans through the engagement, data collection, reporting and implementation phases. The consulting team formed a Steering Committee consisting of individuals and organizations who had already

built a foundation of trust with individuals who would be hard to reach otherwise. Innovations in their approach included how the team put in the effort to connect with the Punjabi international student community in Delta by going to the Sikh temple (Gurdwara), cricket fields and to other community locations.

Some of the key learning points that were shared by Lavleen, Celeste and Victoria were:

Community engagement:

- Do intentional outreach.
- Use an equity lens for meeting people where they are at.
- Start by building trust in relationships with those people who have already established those relationship.
- Provide honoraria as a token of appreciation for people's time.

Data analysis

- Centre voices of those who typically are not represented
- Recognize that at the end of the day, data numbers represent real people
- Be critical of data, how it is collected, and how it is presented

Reporting

- Make sure to bring equity issues to the forefront of any reporting, despite stigma or how uncomfortable that may make people feel.
- Emphasize quotes as much as possible, but get people's permission before sharing

- Find balance between being true to the data you are collecting and presenting it in a consumable way.

Relationships

- Take time to check in with one another before working or setting an agenda
- Honour the relationships made and the time taken to build them. Remember that building trust and relationships is not necessarily a straight road and that's okay.

Language matters

- 'Visible minority' is an offensive term – be specific as to ethnocultural representations
- Be aware that your non-reaction to something that someone else may react to is a sign of your privilege.

Being intentional

- Ask who is going to benefit from a policy, program, initiative or service and who might be excluded or harmed
- Bring your whole self to work. Your personal identity shapes the world that you experience

Balance upstream (root causes) and downstream (impacts) actions

- Offer a wide range of actions that address immediate needs as well as the root causes
- Focusing too heavily on tangible quick wins (e.g. a food bank) has the potential to solidify something that could be problematic in the long term (e.g. dependence on external 'saviours') ■

“We need to walk with people on their journey, not to get too far ahead of them or push them from behind.”

– Dr. Victoria Barr

LET'S JUST MAKE IT A PILOT!? AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION AND DIALOGUE

Conference session summary by
Lindsay Allman RPP, MCIP

Speakers:

Spencer Croil – Land Development Manager with City of Lethbridge

Melanie Messier – Planner with Town of Coaldale

Calling all planners who are struggling to implement new ideas, fighting with their excel project budgets, lacking motivation in their planning practice, or burnt out from their stale routine: this session is speaking to you!

Planners Spencer Coil (City of Lethbridge) and Melanie Messier (Town of Coaldale) presented their interactive session, “Let’s Just Make it a Pilot!?” with the same enthusiasm as the punctuation in their presentation title. Together the duo created a dialogue with lively energy, starting the room off by initiating a group “woooo!” and Spencer admitting that he is “convinced we’re all living in a big experiment.” Have Spencer and Melanie piqued your interest yet?



So, what is a pilot project? According to the Project Management Institute, “fundamentally a pilot often means a leading effort intended to determine viability.” Melanie simplified this on a practical level, explaining that a pilot project is testing out your ideas with a limited budget. Some common examples that you may have heard of include food trucks; allowing backyard hens or bees; permitting alcohol in parks, parklets, street patios; and installing temporary bike lanes.

As planners, we all know that securing a reasonable project budget can be frustrating. Other departments are fighting for money from the same bucket and sometimes we have to admit defeat and let the engineers take more from the funding pool for their flood mitigation project (which arguably IS more important, so we will accept it). So, how can we get our projects that will create healthy, happier communities off the ground? Pilot projects are your friend – it is always easier to say “yes” to a small budget of perhaps under \$10,000!

When planning your pilot, you must outline 3 important pieces to move forward and show to your boss and to your Council why this is a project to support:

1. **Geography:** Where do you want the pilot project to occur? How much space will it take up? What time of the year do you plan to initiate the project?
2. **Time:** How long will the pilot be operating? Is it 24/7, or only during a certain time of the day?
3. **Money:** How much money do you need to get this test off the ground? Try to utilize relationships as much as possible – local high school students may be able to provide more assistance as part of a school credit than you think.



Once you get the green light and initiate the pilot, your work is just beginning. Whether you are aware of your inner creativity or not, the design thinking process which you are undertaking in your pilot project is a loop:

Identify/empathize with stakeholders → define problem/opportunity → identify/design solutions with stakeholders → design pilot and present to decision makers → launch pilot and record results → repeat → repeat → repeat → hopefully permanently implement.

For the remainder of the session the presenters showcased several pilot projects that they had successfully implemented. These included improving accessibility, developing wayfinding, creating a healthy community toolkit, and gamifying the downtown to activate the streets. Attendees were scribbling away ideas that they could take back to their own employers and thoughts were popping out across the audience.

Spencer and Melanie finished their presentation with several key takeaways:

1. “The proof is in the pudding.” The pilot being the delicious pudding, of course.
2. A successful pilot project relies on four things: relationships (old and new), empathy, willingness to fail, and a good pitch.
3. Failure is part of the creative process. If your pilot is cancelled or a hilarious disaster, try not to be dissuaded – your ideas are appreciated and needed in the community. Chances are, residents WANT you to try something else for pilot 2.0 or even 5.0.

So, are you ready to plan your next pilot project? ■

DECOLONIZING PLANNING THROUGH CULTIVATING SAFE SPACES

Conference session summary by Lindsay Allman RPP, MCIP

Speakers from Alderhill Planning Inc:

Elaine Mackensie Alec – Partner & Operations

Kate Davis – Planner

telxnitkw (“Standing by Water”), also known as Elaine Alec, is a Syilx and Secwepemc woman and an author, political advisor, women’s advocate, spiritual thought leader and teacher. Elaine is one of the founding partners of Alderhill Planning Inc., and is a leading expert in Indigenous community planning. Her session “Decolonizing Planning through Cultivating Safe Spaces” invited the room to pause, reflect, and begin to decolonize ourselves and our space through two important strategies: listen with discipline and speak from the heart.

What does this mean? Listening with discipline means actively listening when someone is talking to you. Rather than working up a response as they share their thoughts, stop and truly listen – even if you disagree with the person in front of you. Speaking from the heart is a reminder to be authentic, real and honest. Colonized society often frowns upon displaying emotions in professional settings; Elaine encouraged us to remove this stigma so

that we may embrace and understand our raw human emotions.

“Decolonization is an act,” and decolonization IS cultivating safe spaces. Elaine explained that colonized systems are based on fear and control, and decolonization aims to break this narrative down by fostering safe spaces. Elaine also noted that decolonizing requires trusting yourself and recognizing that, as individuals, we must create our own safe spaces. This might seem like an unpopular notion in our current media environment, but Elaine explained that creating your own safe space is empowering yourself to take control of your life.

How can we cultivate safe spaces?

Four key points were:

Understand self:

- Two big questions you should ask yourself are “Who am I?” and “What’s on my heart?”.

Foster a love-based practice (trust):

- Frequent ask yourself the question, “how do we decolonize?”. Listen to your gut feelings – they exist for a reason. For example, if enforcing a policy feels bad, then what are we going to do about it?

Ask yourself if you are making decisions from a place of fear or a place of trust?

Patience:

- Patience for ourselves and for others. Forgive yourself and others because you do not know their past traumas.

Discipline:

- Not listening is a tool of colonization to allow people to assert dominance through fear and control. Work to listen without judging despite whether what a person says is good or bad. Do not focus on trying to change someone’s opinion. This allows everyone to feel heard and seen.

Elaine’s presentation was riveting, thought provoking, and emotional. Her unapologetic guidance to create inclusive, safe spaces for others while taking responsibility to create safe spaces for ourselves resonated with the crowd. As Elaine reflected, “Reconciliation can only happen when we become accountable.”

To learn more about Elaine and her story, be sure to check out her podcasts and her book *Calling My Spirit Back*. ■

Traditional drumming procession by members of the Skwxwú7mesh and Lilwat Nations leading delegates to the welcome reception.





IMPLEMENTING CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL – LESSONS FROM ONTARIO’S MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE REVIEWS

Conference session summary by Alison McNeil, PIBC Retired Member

Speakers:

Jacyln Hall – Senior Consultant with Hemson Consulting

Russell Mathew – Partner with Hemson Consulting

Laura Taylor – Principal with Laura Taylor Designs and Associate Professor with York University

Reaching the federal target of net zero emissions by 2050 will require significant action by municipalities. In the words of speaker Laura Taylor, cities have to make the most change and focus on the highest emitting sectors within their boundaries – buildings and transportation.

Regions and municipalities in southern Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) area in particular have a major challenge and role to play given their collective population size, density and growth rate. Currently this area is home to 10 million people (26% of Canada’s population and economy) and will increase to 15 million by 2051.

From their experience as consultants working with GGH municipalities, the three speakers provided reflections on how municipalities and regions are meeting this challenge through land use planning. For those in the audience not from Ontario, the session also provided a crash course on Ontario’s labyrinthine planning framework and hierarchy.

The Province of Ontario has set a 2051 planning horizon for Municipal Comprehensive Reviews (MCRs) for the GGH Regions of Peel and Halton, the County of Simcoe, and City of Brampton. Plans at both the regional and local levels must be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement and Provincial Growth Plan.

The Provincial Growth Plan sets population and employment targets that these municipalities must plan to meet, while also achieving the federal target of net zero by 2050. Speaker Jacyln Hall noted that these requirements pose almost competing objectives, given to date that growth has co-evolved with use of fossil fuels.

Laura Taylor noted that Municipal Comprehensive Reviews, which are major multi-year undertakings, will at best, result in good growth management. This will bring more compact urban form, greater building efficiencies (e.g. through green building codes), and low carbon infrastructure.

How are southern Ontario municipalities in the GGH doing? Through her work with municipalities for their MCR process, Laura Taylor sees three types: those that are proactive, those that are reactive, and those that are “otherwise preoccupied.”

Proactive municipalities, such as the City of Brampton, embrace reduced energy use as a part of spatial planning. They go beyond the basics by integrating GHG reductions in all planning tools and all phases of development review and approval. They support policy implementation, and the regional and local municipalities are in sync and working together.

Reactive municipalities in Greater Golden Horseshoe, such as the Region of Halton, started the MCR process but have not completed it due to shifting priorities including, ironically, declaration of climate emergencies.

Otherwise preoccupied municipalities, such as Simcoe County, are meeting the minimum compliance with provincial requirements. However, energy and emission reduction strategies have been punted to subsequent planning exercises and the

roles of upper and lower tier municipalities are still to be worked out.

The final speaker, Russell Mathew, provided another perspective on efficacy of municipal action on climate change. He observed that results from planning to achieve climate change goals vary by scale. At the local scale, we know how to deliver practical measures at the subdivision level, including greener building codes, and regulation and easements for new utility models.

At the larger and longer-term scale, community and regional plans provide less certainty that planning will result in the change we need. Getting large infrastructure built takes a lot of aligned resources, and in the case of transportation, just because we have more public transit doesn’t guarantee that it will be used. In his view, the biggest source of uncertainty is us, the public, and how we will support change through our own actions.

Russell pointed out that we have done a quick energy transition before, following the first oil crisis in 1974. Within five years, a large share of buildings converted to natural gas from oil heating. Additionally, most vehicles in North America were twice as fuel efficient by 1980. These are concrete examples that we can move quickly if we have to, which is good news given we are running out of time to meet 2050 emission targets.

Through their work as consultants, they have learned that planning can be proactive, innovative, and that good planning is as important as ever. They have also learned that regional and local municipalities must be in sync, and that public education, participation and political champions are all essential to meet our climate change goals. ■

OTTAWA'S NEW OFFICIAL PLAN: APPLYING A CLIMATE LENS & CANADA'S FIRST TRANSECT-BASED PLAN

Conference session summary by Alison McNeil, PIBC Retired Member

Speakers:

Don Herweyer – Director, Economic Development & Long Range Planning with City of Ottawa

Melissa Jort-Conway – Planner II with City of Ottawa

City of Ottawa planners Don Herweyer and Melissa Jort-Conway teamed up in this engaging session to give us two angles on Ottawa's new Official Plan (OP).

Don focused on the use of the “transect-based” approach while Melissa focused on applying a climate lens.

A “transect-approach” is a response to the sheer size and variability of Ottawa's planning area, which is comprised of rural, suburban and urban environments. Don explained that transect planning is a new urbanism concept focused on “form and function” and identifies key patterns of development from the core moving outward. As such, it provides a better approach than Ottawa's previous 2003 Official Plan which was an amalgamation of a dozen smaller plans.

In 2001, Ottawa became the largest city in North America after amalgamation of 11 surrounding municipalities. This makes Ottawa bigger in area than the five largest cities in Canada combined.

The City is expected to grow from a population of 1 million to 1.4 million by 2046. This population growth will be accommodated within six transect areas,

with most intensification in the downtown core, followed by the inner urban area, described as mostly residential and primed for more density.

“Growth Management” – seeking higher density in existing developed areas – and “Sustainability Mobility” – aimed at a majority of trips to be by public transit – comprise two of the Plan's five ‘big moves’ or main goals.

One of the primary transportation objectives is to connect the suburbs to the downtown core by light rail transit (LRT), shifting away from reliance on buses and cars. It would have been interesting to hear more about how public transit planning and governance is coordinated with land use plans, given the Ontario government's call in November 2021 for a public inquiry into the Ottawa LRT.

Another big move is focused on economic development. This goal will require coordination with multiple actors, including the National Capital Commission and Ottawa airport, as well as focusing on different economic sectors, including local food production.

In the session's second half, Melissa Jort-Conway focused on the how and what of including a climate change response in the OP, the Plan's third big move. City Council's adoption of Ottawa's Climate Change Master Plan in 2020 paved the way for integration of its key goals and

actions in the OP, with direct links to specific greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and adaption strategies to build climate resilience. Melissa noted that the City's land use plan *is* its Climate Plan, an important take-away for any planner.

As the only planner in the Climate Change unit, Melissa described how she brought together professionals from other agencies, including Ottawa Public Health. These partners contributed vital resources such as heat maps to show the predicted impacts of climate change in the Ottawa area. The collaborative approach was vital for the development of the Climate Change Master Plan and its subsequent integration into the OP.

The session ended with plans for implementation and monitoring of Ottawa's new OP. Among these are future policy studies on inclusionary zoning around transit stations, and adding new metrics to monitor progress, such as the number of ‘15 minute’ proximate neighbourhood amenities.

Melissa and Don provided final reflections on their lessons learned and successes. Through the process “intensification” became a target for push-back from some in the community. This showed the need to emphasize a balanced approach to growth management and the need for political champions, all good reminders for planners engaged in similar work. ■



ALL PLANNERS ARE ADAPTATION PLANNERS

Conference session summary by Alison McNeil, PIBC Retired Member

Speaker:

Megan Gereghy – *Climate Change Adaption Planner with Climate Risk Institute*

This session provided by Megan Gereghy from the Ontario-based non-profit Climate Risk Institute was both highly educational and inspiring. Megan provided concrete resources and examples of how planners can help their communities adapt to climate change. She also reminded us that planners have an ethical obligation to consider climate change, noting the Canadian Institute of Planners' (CIP) Climate Change Policy “calls planners to action to create communities that are resilient and contribute to climate stability”. (see cip-icu.ca/climatechange).

Megan began by providing a primer on climate change – what it is, the evidence and key facts, including that Canada is warming at double the global rate. She also provided an overview of the international context and Canada's response to the Paris Agreement. Megan referenced the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change as a key resource for planners and noted that the National Adaption Strategy is currently under development (consultation was open until July 15, 2022).

If the “why” of climate change adaptation is found in CIP's policy and our professional obligation as planners, the

primary goal, or “what”, is to build community resilience. This may sound simple at first glance and overwhelming at second. Either way, planners are in a key position to make a difference given our skill set, robust networks, and role with public plans and policies. Paraphrasing Megan, we don't all need to be experts, but by educating ourselves and identifying our role, we can incorporate adaptation actions in our work, one policy, one conversation at a time.

How do we as planners go about this? Megan described the adaptation planning process, starting with first visualizing your community and what your role could be, as well as identifying key parties that should be involved. Next, risks and vulnerabilities for your community should be assessed; she recommended the Climate Atlas of Canada, developed in part by CIP, as a key resource in this regard (see climateatlas.ca).

Megan described three types of adaptation action to consider: grey (human-made infrastructure), green (natural assets) and soft (legal, socio-cultural, political, policies, etc.). To build knowledge of the entire process, she advised that climate adaption training be available to planners. The Adaptation Resource Pathway for Planners (ARPP) and BRACE resource library were identified as valuable resources (see climateriskinstitute.ca/arp).

Megan concluded her interactive session with the underlying message that climate change isn't going to stop and planners can be part of the solution. She encouraged us to:

- **Investigate** opportunities and challenges for our communities.
- **Connect** with others.
- **Incorporate** climate change adaption into everything we do.
- **Be bold!**

In the final Q and A session, a couple of key points were emphasized that provide valuable take-aways for planners:

- Look for co-benefits of adaptation actions and link them to other municipal priorities (e.g. job creation). This can help get the reluctant on-board and also move multiple priorities forward simultaneously.
- Declaring climate change emergencies in communities is important but has to lead to big picture master planning.
- Look for resources for municipal capacity building in your province and from agencies like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.
- Overwhelmingly, adaptation planning will be less expensive than reacting to extreme climate events. ■

