



January 29th, 2024

TO: BC Ministry of Housing

FROM: Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC)

RE: Peer Learning Network – Priority Actions

Introduction:

On January 26, 2024, the Housing Task Force (a subcommittee of PIBC's Policy and Public Affairs Committee) met with the PIBC Board of Directors and Ministry of Housing representatives to discuss immediate Peer Learning Network (PLN) actions to support practitioners and local governments in implementing the Province's new housing legislation.

The following actions were identified for immediate implementation:

1. Provision of peer support at the regional level, including sharing information and approaches specific to each region across the province.
2. Access by local governments to targeted legal guidance to support the revision of their zoning bylaws and other regulations.
3. Development of a digital knowledge centre to centralize information delivery and sharing, and to facilitate timely access to emerging and best practices.

Priority Actions:

1. Regional Peer-to-Peer Learning Events

Description of the problem

Local governments across the province are required to update their zoning bylaws by June 30, 2024, to comply with the Province's new housing legislation. Local governments often share regulatory, environmental, site, and demographic characteristics with their regional neighbours, however, given the tight timeline, many jurisdictions are responding to the legislation independently, resulting in a duplication of efforts at the regional level. There is a need to provide peer support at the regional level, including sharing information and emerging approaches that apply to a variety of regions and communities across the province.

Approach

To support local governments in building regional peer-to-peer learning networks, PIBC will organize regional peer-learning events and support the development of working groups that will include communities of similar size and regulatory complexity.

Priority Actions

To support the creation of regional peer-to-peer learning networks, PIBC will take the following priority actions:

1. Organize and facilitate at least six (6) regional housing forums in collaboration with PIBC's Chapters, including the Lower Mainland, Interior, Kootenays, Okanagan, Island, and Northern regions. These regional forums will be open to all local government staff and other housing professionals working on implementing the new legislation and will include focus areas based on legislative deadlines. The forums will provide local governments with the opportunity to pose specific questions to their colleagues about technical aspects of implementing the new housing legislation, and collaboratively work through solutions. It is anticipated that ongoing, regional working groups may emerge from these learning forums.
2. Further peer-to-peer learning events may be developed after evaluation of the successes and challenges of completed forums, as well as additional needs identified. For example, PIBC will explore whether an additional housing forum is needed for regional districts and local governments with populations under 5,000.
3. Immediately connect with PIBC Chapters and canvas PIBC members to understand the most critical needs of local governments in implementing the legislation and to identify the most appropriate format for the delivery of peer-to-peer learning. This information will be used to expedite the design and delivery of the regional forums and ensure that the workshops are tailored to meet the immediate needs of the local communities, in future cycles of PLN implementation.

Timeline

PIBC will ensure at least six regional forums are completed before **March 31, 2024**. The schedule and delivery of each forum will depend on the specific needs of practitioners in each region. PIBC is working toward launching the first regional **workshop before the end of February**. It is anticipated that forums for bigger municipalities will be prioritized due to the complexity of Provincial legislative changes in their jurisdictions. Mid-to-small local governments often have less complex regulations, but PIBC is aware that they might require additional support due to smaller staff sizes and less access to in-house resources (e.g., legal support).

A preliminary survey of PIBC members and other interest holders will be completed before **February 9, 2024**. This survey will clarify the desired format, structure, and content of the initial peer-to-peer learning events.

Anticipated Outcome

PIBC will address the need for regional peer-to-peer support to implement the Province's new housing legislation through the development and facilitation of regionally focused, peer-to-peer learning workshops and subsequent working groups. It is anticipated that this approach will enable local governments to share information and resources, and decrease the duplication of efforts between communities.

2. Legal Guidance

Description of the problem

Local governments across the province are required to address many legal considerations when updating their regulations to comply with the Province's new housing legislation. Several legal questions were put forth during the Ministry's webinars and, in response, local governments were advised to speak with a lawyer about their specific circumstances. PIBC recognizes that not every local government has in-house legal counsel and that obtaining external advice on general matters has both time and financial implications.

Approach

PIBC, recognizing that legal questions may slow down the momentum of local governments updating their regulations to comply with the new housing legislation, will provide a variety of opportunities for local government staff to access information related to their legal questions. *The actions below are not intended to replace legal advice, but rather to help local governments find answers to general inquiries that do not require specialized legal advice.*

Priority Actions

To support local governments' need for legal guidance, PIBC will pursue the following actions on a priority basis:

1. Organize and deliver an "Ask a lawyer" webinar, during which local governments will be able to pose questions to a (panel of) planning lawyer(s). The (panel of) lawyer(s) will provide general answers to practitioner questions (e.g., definitions, process-related questions, etc.) For questions that are specific to a particular community or context, the lawyers will provide guidance on how a local government could locate the necessary information and identify where a legal opinion would generally be necessary. PIBC will record the webinar and provide a written copy of the answers that were provided, categorized by topic, for future reference by local governments and practitioners.

2. PIBC will actively encourage practitioners to use Quickscribe, currently available to use free of charge through PIBC and via a free trial for others, to find commentary on legal and legislative matters by legal experts in BC. Quickscribe includes a new "Ask Bill Buholzer" Q&A feature: a land use and development guidance component of the site from a licensed BC planning lawyer. PIBC will also seek to subsidize access to *BC Planning Law in Practice* for local governments across the province that can't otherwise afford to access these resources. *BC Planning Law in Practice* provides those involved in the land use planning process in BC with a "how-to" manual for land use regulations.
3. PIBC will explore the scope and feasibility of developing a legal hotline for practitioners as they implement the Province's new housing legislation. PIBC will contact several BC planning lawyers to better understand whether, and to what extent, legal advice could be provided via a legal hotline.

Timeline

PIBC will organize and host a legal webinar with a (panel of) planning lawyer(s) by **February 29, 2024**. PIBC will release a written transcript of the questions and answers, organized by topic, within one week of the webinar.

PIBC will explore how Quickscribe and BC Planning Law in Practice can be leveraged as a tool to support collaboration between local government colleagues on relevant land use development topics by **February 29, 2024**.

PIBC will also determine the scope and feasibility of providing a legal hotline **by the end of February 2024**.

Anticipated Outcome

PIBC will address the need for legal advice by providing general responses to common questions. For more context-specific legal questions, PIBC's priority actions for the PLN are anticipated to provide practitioners with open access to legal information via Quickscribe, process-based information through *BC Planning Law in Practice*, and answers to general questions and guidance on how to locate answers to specific questions through the webinar.

3. Digital Sharing Platform

Description of the problem

Local governments are individually responsible for locating appropriate emerging practices and for identifying early adopters to assist them in implementing the Province's new housing legislation. Given the expedited timeline for zoning revisions, there is a need to centralize information delivery and facilitate timely access to emerging and best practices.

Approach

To support local governments in locating emerging practices and early adopters, sharing information, and facilitating regional conversations, PIBC will develop a digital sharing platform and associated discussion forum.

Priority Actions

To support digital sharing and collaboration, PIBC will pursue the following priority actions:

1. Develop and launch a dedicated Peer Learning Network page on the PIBC website. This page will serve as a central knowledge hub and will include links to emerging and best practices, resources, timelines, and Q&As (e.g., the Q&A from the legal webinar). The links will be organized by topic to facilitate access by practitioners.
2. Organize and launch a series of online discussion forums where practitioners can participate in either topic- or regionally-focused discussions relating to the implementation of the Province's new housing legislation. The forums will be searchable, allowing practitioners to locate peer-created answers to their questions.
3. Create an inquiry form that practitioners can use to submit a specific legal- or planning-related question to PIBC and receive a verbal response. PIBC will facilitate access to practitioners and subject matter experts who will provide peer support relating to housing matters.

Timeline

PIBC will launch a dedicated PLN page on the PIBC website by **February 9, 2024**. The webpage will be updated regularly (e.g., weekly) and will include a means of submitting viewer inquiries immediately upon activation. PIBC will launch a discussion forum, organized by topic and region, by **February 9, 2024**.

Anticipated Outcome

The PLN webpage will address the need for a centralized, trusted source of information, emerging and best practices, and peer-to-peer digital collaboration. The webpage and discussion forums can be launched in the immediate future and will be used both to disseminate and collect information from practitioners working on implementing the Province's new housing legislation.