

Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee Update: Unsettling our Profession

Isha Matous-Gibbs, Candidate Member, on behalf of the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee.

The Planning Practice & Reconciliation Committee is a standing committee of the Board responsible for acting as representatives of the Institute and the planning profession in BC and Yukon to seek truth, to assist in the active decolonization of planning practices in BC and Yukon, and to support members in advancing this work. Since its inception, the PPRC has sought to understand the hard truths of how planning practice has been an active agent of colonization. Along our learning journey, we have heard from Indigenous people about the impacts of colonization and the role that planning has played. What we have learned has led us to believe that simply applying recommendations that have arisen from truth telling in other areas, such as government (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), RCMP (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Report), or health (In Plain Sight), will not result in meaningful reconciliation within planning practice. We as a profession need to understand and learn from the unique ways in which planning in Canada has been built from a colonial agenda and continues to be complicit in its enactment.

“Recognizing and naming the historical and contemporary colonial harms perpetrated by professional planning is a prerequisite to respectfully engaging in this (reconciliation) exploration and moving forward on this journey. To honour Indigenous peoples and planning principles is to first acknowledge these truths and actively work towards unsettling the planning profession in meaningful ways.”¹ (Sanala Planning and the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee, p.7)

One of the many ways that planning practice has harmed Indigenous peoples and communities is by participating in removing their agency to plan and care for their own lands and people. We need to undo this harm. Today, as for millennia, Indigenous peoples are planning for their communities. There is an

immeasurable amount of knowledge and experience in planning for land, people, communities, and wellness amongst Indigenous planners that our institutions have failed to recognize and understand. By not doing so, we have missed an immense opportunity to learn and improve our practice. Settler colonial governments and their supporting institutions have planned over Indigenous peoples and lands, while simultaneously removing them from said lands and denying their agency. Reconciliation will require that we begin to uplift the voices of Indigenous planners by valuing their knowledge and advocating for Indigenous planning for Indigenous lands.

In order to prevent repeating mistakes, we need Indigenous planners to lead the way in unsettling the planning profession and, in order for that to happen, we need Indigenous planners involved in our institutions.

Learning from Indigenous Planners

Currently, PIBC is sorely lacking in Indigenous membership. It has become clear to us as a Committee that a critical step toward undoing harms is to make PIBC a more welcoming place for Indigenous planners to participate. To address this, the PPRC has been working with Sanala Planning to understand how PIBC can be a more attractive place for Indigenous planners to be. The ultimate goal, if it is determined to be of value to Indigenous planners, is to develop inclusive pathways for professional membership within PIBC that acknowledge and honour the deep knowledge and experience Indigenous planners hold.

As Sanala’s report on the project to date says, we seek to “raise up Indigenous planners and planning practices within and throughout PIBC, recognizing the colonial harms perpetrated by the Western planning paradigm, to explore the creation of new relationships and pathways to accreditation for Indigenous planners that provide meaningful benefit and recognition of their knowledge and experience.”²

The first step in this work has been to convene an Indigenous Advisory Committee made up of eight Indigenous planners whose work in planning spans over practices in social

planning, comprehensive community planning, health planning, governance planning, housing, data mapping, data sovereignty, environmental planning, community engagement and facilitation, and more. This committee met to discuss the concept of an Indigenous Planner membership within PIBC and its implications. Critical to the success of this work is that the process for exploring our questions and developing recommendations are Indigenous-led. Working with Sanala and convening an Indigenous Advisory Committee has meant that the work was completed by Indigenous people without interference from the PPRC. Ensuring that this process was Indigenous-led is one way in which the PPRC is committed to advocating for and uplifting Indigenous knowledge and protocols.

What emerged from this work was a fascinating dialogue about the benefits, challenges, and potential drawbacks of such a pathway being created. Indigenous planners are not always calling their work “planning.” “Contemporary Indigenous planning practices are built upon thousands of years of knowledge passed down from the Elders and ancestors, woven in with certain Western modalities that are in alignment with a trauma-informed, community-based approach.” (p.8). They are doing the work of leading in ‘engaging, healing and empowering their communities, often-times without even considering themselves a ‘planner.’” Indigenous planning is an active practice that does not require PIBC or any other institution to validate or recognize it. In fact, there is a significant risk of harm if an alternative pathway to membership becomes tokenistic, paternalistic, or extractive. The onus is on PIBC to decolonize and unsettle rather than on Indigenous people to Indigenize our organization. All planners and PIBC members have an immense amount to benefit from their knowledge and skills. PIBC holds power and has access to spaces that could help empower the work of Indigenous planners. However, in order to increase Indigenous participation, we must first address that PIBC is not currently a space in which Indigenous people feel seen, validated and safe.

*“Contemporary Indigenous planning practices are built upon thousands of years of knowledge passed down from the Elders and ancestors, woven in with certain Western modalities that are in alignment with a trauma-informed, community-based approach.”
(Sanala Planning and the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee, p.8).*

Next Steps

Phase one of this project is now complete and has resulted in 23 recommendations to PIBC. The PPRC has reviewed these actions and is working to establish a workplan for implementation. The recommendations fall into three categories: strengthen PIBC as a place where Indigenous planners are respected, represented and empowered; improve the accreditation process; and continue to explore creating an alternative pathway to membership. The full report and plan can be found at <https://www.pibc.bc.ca/committees/pprc>.

Our action plan includes:

- Beginning Phase 2 of this project, in partnership with Sanala, in which we will continue to build recommendations for PIBC to support the creation of an Alternative Pathway for Indigenous Planning Membership. The Indigenous Advisory Committee will continue to convene and explore what that pathway could look like.
- Sanala Planning and the PPRC hosted a panel-style discussion at the CIP Connections Conference in Edmonton to share findings and lessons learned from Phase 1 and encourage planners' self-reflection on the role of planning in colonization, and toward reconciliation.
- Working with Christopher Lamb on a Mitacs-funded post-doctoral research project to investigate how planners in British Columbia are educated about Indigenous land use and planning principles, reconciliation, and decolonization.
- Acting on Phase 1 recommendations, such as auditing PIBC documents to identify areas where references to Indigenous planning and reconciliation should be added.
- Designing a tier of membership for Indigenous planners who are not accredited to attend PIBC events.
- Other projects include investigating an Indigenous-led mentorship program to pair newer and experienced Indigenous planners to support their continued growth

and wellbeing. PPRC is also looking at a requirement for Candidates to submit a reflective submission to express their recognition and understanding of the Indigenous territories they live on and their commitment to active reconciliatory action through their planning work.

A Shared Journey

The changes needed to make PIBC a place that is welcoming to Indigenous planners are a shared responsibility of all our members. While the PPRC is acting on recommendations to make the Institute's support for Indigenous planning and reconciliation explicit, all members have work to do as individuals.

“Upholding Indigenous self-determination in planning requires non-Indigenous planners to pause, listen, and reflect on their own biases, privilege, and unlearning journeys when engaging in this work.”³

A foundational piece of this work is that we, members of PIBC, must adjust to a “paradigm shift in the way professional planning understands its connection to colonial land theft and Indigenous erasure, and the responsibilities of rebuilding relationships with Indigenous peoples, communities, and planners.”⁴ As we move along this journey, it is imperative that we understand and respect the longstanding and sacred connection Indigenous peoples have to their lands, languages, medicines, teachings, and ceremonies; knowledge which is imbued into Indigenous planning. Non-Indigenous planners must also be aware of the concerns of Indigenous planners such as appropriation, commodification, misinterpretation, power dynamics, and paternalistic approaches. We must prepare ourselves to unlearn our assumptions about what Indigenous planning is and how it is done in order to better listen and learn from Indigenous peoples.

There is an element of ‘we don't know what we don't know’ that has to be placed at the forefront of this work. As non-Indigenous planners, we must carefully evaluate our own sources of knowledge and credibility. Whose knowledge do we act on? Who do we consult and engage with during our projects? How do

we measure outcomes and evaluate our work? How do we collect that information and how is it shared? By whose metrics do we determine our success?

To move towards reconciliation, planning practitioners must examine how we learn, value, and apply knowledge. In order to make meaningful change, we need to seek to unsettle the planning profession.

The PPRC is seeking additional members. If you are interested in this work and wish to learn more, please write kelly.chan@pibc.bc.ca.

Thank You

The PPRC wants to send sincere thanks and acknowledgement for the wealth of knowledge and experience that was shared by participants. We value their time and efforts. Thank you to Rachel Wuttunee, Samantha Gush, Cara Basil, Jalissa Moody, Steven DeRoy, Gwen Phillips, Addison Fosbery, and Jessie Hemphill.

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¹Planning Institute of British Columbia Exploring Pathways for Indigenous Planning Membership: Reflections and Recommendations. Sanala Planning and the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee. 2023. Page 7.

²Planning Institute of British Columbia Exploring Pathways for Indigenous Planning Membership: Reflections and Recommendations. Sanala Planning and the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee. 2023. Page 3.

³Planning Institute of British Columbia Exploring Pathways for Indigenous Planning Membership: Reflections and Recommendations. Sanala Planning and the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee. 2023. Page 3.

⁴Planning Institute of British Columbia Exploring Pathways for Indigenous Planning Membership: Reflections and Recommendations. Sanala Planning and the PIBC Planning Practice and Reconciliation Committee. 2023. Page 7.