

PIBC 2026 Annual Conference: Overview

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The 2026 Planning Institute of British Columbia (PIBC) Annual Conference brought more than 350 planners, local government professionals, consultants, academics, and industry partners to Penticton from June 2–5 for four days of learning, discussion, and collaboration.

Hosted at the Penticton Lakeside Resort and Conference Centre, the event included the theme “Bold Plans. Local Action.” With over 40 educational sessions, more than 10 mobile workshops, two keynote presentations, networking events, and the annual PIBC Awards Gala, the conference highlighted both the opportunities and challenges facing communities across British Columbia and the Yukon.

The conference program reflected the increasingly complex environment in which planners are working. Whether responding to housing affordability, climate adaptation, infrastructure demands, economic uncertainty, or rapid technological change, planners are being asked to think beyond traditional approaches while remaining grounded in the realities of local communities. The theme ‘Bold Plans. Local Action’ encouraged courageous thinking paired with grounded, community-driven adaptation. Delegates explored innovative ideas while recognizing

that successful implementation ultimately happens at the local level through neighbourhood engagement, partnerships, and practical action.

Conference sessions consistently highlighted how communities can move from vision to implementation. Discussions on housing delivery, Indigenous partnerships, transportation planning, environmental stewardship, and emerging technologies all reinforced the central message that bold policy ideas must be accompanied by effective local execution. Furthermore, the conference program provided a useful framework that connected presentations, workshops, and informal conversations among delegates.

Inspiring Perspectives from 2 Keynote Speakers.

From my perspective, a highlight of the conference was the pair of keynote presentations that initiated each full day (Wednesday

June 3rd and Thursday June 4th). While each speaker approached planning from a different perspective, together they challenged delegates to think critically about the future of communities and the role planners play in shaping them.

Shauna Sylvester: Climate Leadership and Urban Resilience

Wednesday’s keynote featured Shauna Sylvester, a recognized leader in urban sustainability, climate action, and civic innovation. With more than three decades of experience working with governments, community organizations, and private-sector partners, Sylvester brought a practical and solutions-oriented perspective to some of the most pressing challenges facing communities today.

As Founder and Lead Convenor of Urban Climate Leadership, Sylvester works with hundreds of leaders across Canada to advance





< Anona Fawn Kampe from the snpink'tn Indian Band (Penticton Indian Band) welcomed conference attendees with a traditional drumming and song.

climate solutions at the municipal level. Her keynote focused on the need for local governments to move beyond planning for climate change and toward implementing measurable adaptation and mitigation strategies. Rather than framing climate action solely as an environmental issue, she highlighted its connections to housing, infrastructure, public health, energy systems, and economic development.

Particularly relevant to planners was her discussion of emerging issues such as the growing energy demands associated with artificial intelligence infrastructure and data centres. As communities grapple with increasing electricity consumption, planners will play an important role in balancing growth objectives with energy resilience and sustainability goals. Sylvester also discussed efforts to accelerate heat-pump adoption in multi-unit residential buildings, demonstrating how local governments can influence climate outcomes through policy, partnerships, and practical

implementation strategies.

Delegates appreciated the keynote's balance between urgency and optimism. While the challenges presented were significant, Sylvester emphasized that local governments possess powerful tools to create meaningful change. Her message aligned perfectly with the conference theme by illustrating how ambitious climate objectives can be translated into tangible local action.

Uytay Lee: Making Cities Understandable

Thursday's keynote offered a very compelling perspective. Uytay Lee, founder of the popular *About Here* media platform, explored the importance of storytelling in urban planning and public engagement. Known for producing accessible and engaging videos about cities and urban issues, Lee has become one of Canada's most recognizable voices in planning communication. He also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of British



< Shauna Sylvester's opening keynote presentation

> Uytay Lee, Thursday keynote speaker, and Odessa Cohen, #PIBC2026 Conference Committee Chair and host.



Columbia School of Journalism and as a commissioner on the BC Housing board.

Lee's entertaining presentation focused on a challenge that many planners encounter daily: how to communicate complex planning concepts to the public in ways that are understandable, relatable, and meaningful. Housing policy, transportation planning, zoning regulations, and infrastructure investments often involve technical language and long-term timelines that can be difficult for residents to connect with. Through examples drawn from his video journalism work, Lee demonstrated how effective storytelling can bridge that gap.

His keynote highlighted the importance of helping people understand not only what is being proposed, but why it matters. By connecting planning decisions to everyday experiences—such as housing choices, transportation options, neighbourhood character, and quality of life—communities can

foster more productive public conversations and stronger support for long-term planning initiatives.

For many delegates, Lee's presentation reinforced that technical expertise alone is no longer enough. Modern planners must also be communicators, educators, and facilitators. In an era of social media, misinformation, and rapidly changing public expectations, the ability to tell compelling stories about community futures is becoming an increasingly valuable professional skill.

Together, the keynote presentations offered complementary lessons. Sylvester focused on the substance of future challenges and opportunities, while Lee emphasized the importance of communication and public understanding. Both speakers reinforced the notion that effective planning requires bold ideas supported by practical implementation and meaningful community engagement.

Learning Beyond the Conference Room

One of the most popular aspects of every PIBC conference is the mobile workshop program, and Penticton proved to be an ideal setting for real-world learning. The conference featured ten mobile workshops, tours, and interactive activities that allowed delegates to leave the meeting rooms and explore planning issues firsthand.

The Okanagan region provided a living laboratory for examining many of the topics discussed during conference sessions. Mobile workshops highlighted issues such as waterfront planning, downtown revitalization, tourism management, agricultural land use, active transportation, environmental stewardship, and community development. Delegates were able to experience the successes and challenges of planning in a rapidly growing region while engaging directly with local practitioners and community leaders.



Thank you to our #PIBC2026 Conference Committee!

From left: Jerritt Cloney, Sophie King (PIBC staff) Odessa Cohen, Brad Dollevoet, Tharini Prakash, Emily Proskiw, Steven Collyer and Blake Laven.

Not pictured: Allyson Friesen, Braden Alexander and Audrey Tanguay.

These workshops demonstrated the value of place-based learning. By seeing projects on the ground and discussing outcomes in real-world settings, participants gained insights that cannot always be captured through presentations alone. The tours also showcased the unique character of Penticton and the South Okanagan, helping visitors better understand the local context behind many of the planning initiatives underway in the region.

A Venue Made for Planning Conversations

The Penticton Lakeside Resort and Conference Centre proved to be an outstanding venue for hosting a provincial planning conference. Located directly on the shores of Okanagan Lake and within walking distance of downtown Penticton, the facility provided a setting that reflected many of the themes being discussed throughout the conference.

Its central location encouraged delegates to experience the community firsthand, while the conference facilities accommodated both large plenary sessions and smaller breakout discussions. The lakeside setting created numerous opportunities for informal networking, allowing attendees to continue conversations outside scheduled sessions and build professional connections across the province.

Equally important, the venue offered convenient access to many of the mobile workshops and local tours that formed a key part of the conference experience. Delegates could move easily between educational sessions, networking events, and field-based learning opportunities. The combination of functional meeting space, scenic surroundings, and proximity to local planning projects made Penticton an ideal host community.

As the 2026 PIBC Annual Conference concluded, delegates left with new ideas, expanded professional networks, and renewed inspiration. The conference successfully demonstrated that while the challenges facing communities may be significant, planners continue to play a vital role in transforming bold visions into meaningful local action. Through its thoughtful theme, engaging keynote speakers, hands-on mobile workshops, and exceptional venue, the Penticton conference delivered an experience that will resonate throughout the BC & Yukon planning world.

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Thank you to Carolyn Donnelly, Urban Planner & Engagement Specialist at Dialog Design, for sharing this visual capture of her experience at the 2026 PIBC Conference.