

same time as me. We talked about the course content and questions, prepared for the exam together, and met as a group throughout the year (which usually included spicy bánh mì for dinner). This built some studying accountability and helped us all plan and prepare for the final professional exam. An added bonus - we had a mix of working professionals in different sectors and fields of planning which provided broader perspectives and context throughout our conversations.

I also took my time getting my certification. I could have started this process shortly after graduating, however, I found that when I started working, I was eager to learn a lot early on in my career and focused on advancing my career through work experience. Working on a range of projects actually gave me insight into what planners *actually do*. Over time, this allowed me to build my understanding of the skills and competencies needed as part of the certification process.

Did growing up in a small rural town in Alberta influence your decision to make planning your profession? How did social planning become your passion and area of professional focus?

People still find it interesting that I grew up in a National Park – in Jasper, Alberta. Not many people can say that, so I understand the intrigue. For those that are unfamiliar with Jasper, the town resides in a National Park on the border between BC and Alberta. It is still, in many ways, my home, as my family still lives there today.

One of many things that made Jasper a special place to grow up, and likely similar in other smaller communities, was the people. You get to know the people – and each other – quite well and this really builds a strong bond in the town.

For me, growing up in a small town was my blueprint to what a 'sense of community' means – knowing your neighbours, caring for one another and uplifting others when they need it. During the recent 2024 Jasper wildfire, I am so grateful for the surrounding small towns and many other communities that immediately took care of my family, friends, neighbours, and the people I grew up knowing for many years. Even though everyone made it out safely, there is still a long road ahead to rebuilding the town to what it used to be. Through all of this, I still believe that the community resilience is there and it is holding strong.

In Jasper, I was really shaped by the people who showed me the importance and strengths of community building. I think this deeply influenced how I show up for myself in my professional life and goals that I want to achieve. To me, the field of social planning

is the people part of planning that focuses on community building. I naturally gravitate towards this type of work and how relational planning is. It takes two (likely many more) to tango and this is evident as we tackle complex social issues that no single entity can address alone. At this point in my career, I find the work rewarding and meaningful to the communities and partners that I am so fortunate to collaborate and share this experience with. No two days are the same and I am grateful to listen, learn and work in communities on their ongoing and emergent needs.

Thank you for your volunteer work as Co-Chair of PIBC's Justice, Equity, Diversity, Decolonization, Inclusion and Accessibility (JEDDIA) Working Group. What motivated you to volunteer and what do you identify as a top potential opportunity or challenge to successfully integrating JEDDIA into the planning profession?

I was interested in volunteering and joining the JEDDIA Working Group to better connect with PIBC and to learn more about what this work could look like for the institute. I also wanted to support the broader JEDDIA work within the planning profession and improve my connections with other members in BC and the Yukon who are also passionate about this topic.

I appreciate getting to work with my Co-Chair and PIBC Board member, Eve Hou RPP, MCIP. Together, we have been navigating a lot of very tough questions with the working group on what and how the JEDDIA project process would look like. As we are still working through the project, I think identifying concrete actions while balancing people's different views and understanding of JEDDIA will be a challenge, but this is also a great learning opportunity. As a group, we look forward in providing some recommendations on how JEDDIA work can be integrated into the planning profession.

Beyond work, do you have a favourite activity or way to unwind?

I have recently recovered from a knee surgery, so I am back to my running, strength training and soccer regiments. My e-reader has multiple books on-the-go, so keeping up with those at a coffee shop is nice (I seem to enjoy memoirs of former political figures).

This year, my partner and I recently moved into a new place, so finding ways to make the space feel like home is my current project. If anyone has some good ideas on interesting art pieces, reach out and let me know!

Lastly, I want to give a special note of thanks to Kate, Jenna and Jean for their kind advice on this interview and for being the best RPP study group!

Planning Podcasts

Join the PIBC Communications Committee in sharing interesting planning-related podcasts!

City Talk Canada Podcast from Canadian Urban Institute (CUI): Barrie's mayor on declaring an emergency over encampments

Podcast summary by: Steffi Sunny
Communications Committee Member
with special thanks to Sidney Elliott,
PIBC Student Member & Community
Planner at Urban Systems, for
recommending this podcast.

Run time: 28 minutes

Host: Mary Rowe, President & CEO
of the Canadian Urban Institute

Guest: Alex Nuttal,
Mayor of Barrie, Ontario

Podcast link
youtube.com/watch?v=5WWDK0UNm0zw

Podcast Summary
Across the country, people are increasingly turning to encampments for shelter. These informal communities spotlight many complex challenges, from housing affordability to substance use and mental

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health issues. Encampments also present challenges to the social and economic functioning of neighborhoods and downtown areas.

For the last few years, CUI has been talking with community leaders, stakeholders with lived experience, civic organizations and business operators to look for mutually respectful, effective solutions to ensure Canadian cities are accessible, safe and equitable for everyone. In this episode, Mary talks with Alex Nuttal, Mayor of Barrie in Ontario, to discuss what led to his decision to declare a state of emergency and how he intends to move forward given the limits of the city's power.

Why Planners Should Listen

This podcast addresses an issue that remains prominent in many Canadian communities, including those in British Columbia and the Yukon. It features the City of Barrie which, despite its geographic distance from BC, faces similar challenges. Urban planners acknowledge the existence of social and economic barriers affecting communities provincially, nationally, and globally. Developing effective strategies to navigate these challenges is integral to contemporary planning practice.

Mayor Nuttal brings over two decades of service across multiple levels of government and shares his efforts to implement initiatives aimed at reducing homeless encampments, as well as associated drug and crime concerns within Barrie. In response to many years of criminal incidents and the continued declining levels of local safety, he declared Barrie in a 'state of emergency' to get actions rolling out immediately. His focus is on fostering a safer city environment for all residents and delivering targeted support and resources to individuals most in need of help. Nuttal further observes that federal government intervention is required, attributing this need to insufficient action and accountability in addressing these crises.

The mayor also discusses the complexities introduced by safe consumption sites, which created additional challenges in Barrie and elsewhere in Canada. He expresses his belief that these sites should not be implemented at all, and that continued disruptive behavior by individuals who decline available assistance should not be permitted, and that such individuals may be served a trespassing notice.

This podcast showcases one community's approach towards problems such as public substance use, drug related crimes and extreme homelessness within their municipality. What lessons might it provide for other communities elsewhere?



Spacing Radio Podcast, Episode 90: Bless This Urban Mess

Podcast summary by: Kali Holahan
RPP, MCIP, PIBC Communications
Committee Chair

Run time: 57 minutes

Host: Glyn Bowerman, Spacing Radio

Guests: Dylan Reid, Zahra Ebrahim, Leslie Woo — Co-Editors of *Messy Cities*; and Danielle Goldfinger, Executive Director of The Laneway Project

Podcast link

<https://spacing.ca/toronto/2025/10/14/podcast-spacing-radio-90-bless-this-urban-mess/>

Podcast summary

Change in cities is often slow when using official channels. There is a desire to achieve the perfect plan, one that balances everyone's needs and preferences but sometimes you need to get down and dirty. In this episode, this host talks to three of the co-editors of the new book *Messy Cities: Why We Can't Plan Everything*. Spacing Executive Editor Dylan Reid, public interest designer Zahra Ebrahim, and CivicAction CEO Leslie Woo talk about this collection of essays that embraces the beautiful messiness of urban communities. Danielle Goldfinger, executive director of The Laneway Project, also shares details of a project aimed at helping communities make the most of their laneways.

Why Planners Should Listen

Bless This Urban Mess explores tensions in modern urban planning. The episode is centered around this provocative question: Would our cities be more lively and more livable if we just "broke the rules" a little more often?

Drawing inspiration from the book *Messy Cities: Why We Can't Plan Everything*, the conversation unpacks the yin and yang of urban development. Cities need structure but they also need openness, improvisation, and the freedom for people to shape spaces from the ground up.

The guests reflect on how urban migration (people arriving from somewhere else and remaking their lives in a city) naturally produces complexity, diversity, and, yes, messiness. So, if cities are inherently messy, then trying to eliminate messiness through bylaws and extreme regulatory planning may undermine what makes a city a city.

Rather than romanticizing disorder, the podcast carefully acknowledges the real challenges tied to noise, conflict, inequity, and safety that come with messy cities. At the same time, it highlights how "cleaning up" urban messiness can unintentionally clean out the very people, cultures and activities that make cities vibrant.

The discussion questions whether our regulatory impulses have gone too far. Why does a neighborhood spend years debating a single corner store, or get mired in controversy over essential health services like safe consumption sites? At what point does regulation and planning become paralysis? Guests talk about the book's core argument that crowded streets, eclectic architecture, graffiti, street vendors, and the broader "kaleidoscopic city" are signs of urban vitality rather than poor governance.

Two Toronto examples ground these ideas:

- Kensington Market: A neighborhood that has resisted gentrification enough to preserve its personality, multiculturalism, informality, and spontaneity, qualities that make it one of Toronto's most beloved districts.
- Laneway Revitalization Projects: Community-led transformations where residents, businesses, and organizations work together to turn utilitarian laneways into welcoming, multi-use public spaces, complete with local art, pedestrian lighting, safety measures, and green elements.

Overall, the episode offers a thoughtful, hopeful lens on the future of cities. It invites listeners to reconsider what we regulate, why we regulate it, and whether the pursuit of order sometimes works against the very urban life we're trying to improve.



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