



OPPI is nearing its 25th year as a professional organization in Ontario. Over those 25 years our profession has faced many challenges and has grown significantly. Today we are faced with what I believe is one of the most important decisions our members will make. That is the decision to improve our national standards for membership to ensure our profession has the formal requirements for education and certification in place to secure trust and respect for our profession in Ontario and throughout Canada.

## **What has happened so far?**

For more than four years OPPI has been actively involved in revising our national membership standards through the Planning for the Future project or PFF (formerly called the Membership Continuous Improvement Program or MCIP). In 2009, OPPI Council endorsed the three initial Task Force Reports on Ethics, Competencies and Certification and has since been working on the implementation of the recommended changes to modernize the membership process and standards.

The National Affiliate Membership Committee, which consists of the membership chairs and registrars from all CIP affiliates, endorsed the PFF implementation reports relating to accreditation of planning schools, certification, and fellows at its meeting in February 2010. These reports, which include the establishment of a national Professional Standards Board (PSB), were endorsed by CIP Council in March 2010 and by OPPI Council on April 30, 2010. Copies of these reports are available online <http://www.planningincanada.ca>

## **Where do we go from here?**

We are now moving into the most important stage of the process, whereby all of the Affiliate Councils will move to approve the implementation reports and both the Affiliates and CIP will begin to implement the needed changes to the membership process. This will mean changes to CIP and OPPI's by-laws. A vote on these by-law changes is expected go out to the members in fall 2010.

## **How can such a broad group such as planners be "standardized"?**

A profession is by definition a group of individuals recognized for their common levels of education and for a system of accountability. I have heard concerns that planning is a broad and diverse field that draws on many disciplines and that by setting standards we are restricting and narrowing the way the profession is defined.

I strongly believe we are recognizing the broad scope of our practice through this process and ensuring that our future planners have the strong foundation they need to practise in a variety of areas. We are not all "land use" planners and the national task forces have recognized this fact. Also, more than 1,000 planners from a broad range of practice participated in the development of competency standards proposed.

## **What are the main changes proposed to the membership process?**

There will be seven steps in the new membership process. Note that in future, the term "provisional member" will be replaced by the word "candidate."

1. Apply for candidate status.
2. Receive candidate status.
3. Meet mentorship requirements (one year minimum).
4. Pass course on ethics and professionalism.
5. Meet requirements for practical work experience and sponsorship.
6. Pass written professional examination.
7. Receive professional status from Council.

As has always been the case, there will be differences in the process for those entering the profession with a degree from an accredited planning school and those entering with a degree in a subject other than planning. There are also provisions for planners who have trained outside Canada who want to become professional planners.

In all cases, applications will be submitted to a national Professional Standards Board (PSB), which will be responsible for evaluating applications for membership, notifying applicants and affiliates of new candidate members, and implementing all membership standards and marking examinations.

All routes to membership require candidates to pass an examination on ethics and professionalism, complete a period of practical work experience, meet a mentorship requirement, and pass a final professional exam. Many aspects of the mentorship requirement have been modelled after the successful program currently used in Quebec.

## **Why such a strong focus on ethics?**

Ethics and professionalism are at the core of what we do. Planners provide independent professional opinions to their clients and employers – governments, developers, agencies and organizations. Ethics and professionalism are the basis of accountability - they are what bind us and makes us professional planners. We need to conduct our work in accordance with standards for practice and high ethical standards to maintain respect for our profession. Those who choose not to be part of our profession are not bound by those core values and principles and are not accountable to a professional body for their actions – as we are, through our Code of Conduct and our Standards of Practice.

## **The oral Exam A is an important part of the current process – why are we getting rid of it?**

Several members have expressed their opinions for and against the elimination of the oral examination, which was eliminated in the province of Quebec some years ago. Many of us have had very positive experiences with the Exam A process. It does allow for face-to-face interaction with provisional members and gives them the opportunity to respond to questions on professionalism and ethics. However, as the Director of Membership Services for many years, I heard numerous complaints about the oral exam from those who have participated in it.

The recommended changes to certification will ensure that the candidate's knowledge of ethics and professionalism is tested in a consistent, objective and reliable way. The interactive role between the full member and the provisional member that currently takes place for one hour at the very end of the membership process will now be provided through a minimum year-long interaction with the provisional member's mentor. OPPI is also looking to ensure that the interaction with full members at the end of the process takes place in a positive setting where new members are recognized for their successful completion of the process by their peers.

We must also acknowledge that OPPI does not have the resources, staff or available volunteers to continue to administer and carry out an oral exam. Other professions have adopted standardized written examinations to assure consistency in support of assuring transportability of professional credentials across the nation. The oral exam approach is also not an approach acceptable for a self-regulating body because it is not objective, rigorous, or transparent enough, and it is therefore subject to challenge by unsuccessful candidates.

### **Where can I find out more about this process?**

Included with this article is a summary of ten things you need to know about this national standards initiative. As well, you can continue to stay informed by visiting the OPPI website and look for the heading "Planning for the Future." A fact sheet is available there, as well as a link to a special website just about this initiative. There is also a special e-mail address for your comments [planningforthefuture@ontarioplanners.on.ca](mailto:planningforthefuture@ontarioplanners.on.ca)

OPPI can also arrange workplace or district information sessions to inform you about this initiative and answer your questions.

*Dana Anderson, MCIP, RPP, Director Membership Services and OPPI representative on the National Membership Committee. Dana can be reached at [danderson@oakville.ca](mailto:danderson@oakville.ca)*

*This article appears in the Ontario Planning Journal's May/June 2010 issue (Vol. 25, No. 3).*