



Decision point

By Mary Lou Tanner

The number 25 has special meaning for OPPI and its members this year. Twenty-five years ago on January 7th OPPI was born. In the intervening years, the planning profession and our organization, OPPI, have grown in ways that our first leaders may have hoped for, dreamed for, but couldn't really predict. Because of their foresight, members today enjoy the fruits of being a professional planner in Ontario.

The number 25 also represents the last time our professional standards were reviewed. These are the standards we hold ourselves to as professional planners and what we require of colleagues seeking to advance to full professional membership. Can any of us imagine trying to stay with policies and plans that were created twenty-five years ago—do they truly and adequately reflect what we work for in today's Ontario?

Just as OPPI's first leaders envisioned a new future for planning and planners in Ontario, it is again time for our generation of planners to think to the future. To think about our profession today and in the years to come—what it means to be a professional planner, what do planners “need to know” and how we make sure the standards for planners are current, relevant and forward-thinking. Planning for the Future is the platform for this conversation about what it means to be a planner and what future we envision for our profession.

Planning for the Future is...

Planning for the Future, nicknamed PFF, is a national initiative in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners and all seven of its provincial/regional affiliates. Planning for the Future is about a shared vision of national standards for planners, a Canada-wide consistency to the membership process for certification of planners and the accreditation process for university programs, and a commitment to raise the bar on professionalism of planners in Canada. Three key areas have been identified by the PFF Task Forces for updating: competency standards for planners; ethics for planners; and accreditation of university planning programs. These future directions emerged through reports prepared by teams of colleagues from across the country with specific expertise in each of the areas, results of a national survey in which 1,200 members participated and members' comments on various drafts.

What is changing?

Membership certification process

I heard a well-respected colleague describe our current membership process as 65 routes to becoming a professional planner. That

is not a comment on the work of our predecessors but rather the reality of a 25-year evolution of membership processes.

The new membership procedure reflects best practices from other professional organizations tailored to the planning profession. The requirements are clearer and reflective of what professional planners need to know and demonstrate to become full members of the professional association.

New graduates will have two routes to become full members. Those who have graduated from an accredited planning program will complete the following (in this order):

- Application to become a “Candidate Member” (replacing provisional);
- Two years work experience during which you must:
 - work under the direction of a sponsor to whom you submit your record of planning experience
 - complete a one-year mentorship with a full member
 - complete the mandatory ethics and professionalism course;
- Successfully complete the written examination on professionalism.

Those who have not graduated from an accredited planning program, the route to full membership is called “Prior Learning Assessment Review,” which requires you to complete the following (in this order):

- Five years work experience as a planner;
- Application to become a “Candidate Member” at which time you must submit the assessment of your education and work experience demonstrating how you have achieved the competencies of the membership requirements;
- Once accepted as a Candidate Member you must:
 - complete one additional year of work experience with a sponsor to whom you submit your record of planning experience
 - complete a one-year mentorship with a full member
 - complete the mandatory ethics and professionalism course;
- Successfully complete the written examination on professionalism.

The most significant changes in the membership process are the move to two clearly identified membership routes and the

mandatory mentorship and ethics requirements. The written examination reflects change as well—consistent with best practices for professional organizations, is replicable, transparent and may be appealed based on the written record (the exam and its marking) and not the summary of oral examination. It should be noted that OPPI Council elected to move to a written exam in 2010.

Professional planners work under a Code of Conduct; we all need to be practicing within this framework. The ethics and professionalism course is intended to ensure new colleagues understand their obligations. Similarly, the mentorship requirement takes the current one hour oral examination and turns that into a year-long conversation with a full member about what it means to be a professional planner. Finally, the written examination is necessary to ensure consistency of questions and grading. It is about transparency, consistency and integrity of the process.

University planning programs accreditation

The Planning for the Future initiative brings recommendations to update the requirements for university planning programs. CIP, its affiliates, and university programs all want the best planning education for graduates. We all support the range of planning specialties offered and want students to have access to programs that suit their specific area of interest and future career path. To achieve these shared objectives a review of university programs is recommended through a partnership between a newly established Accreditation Program Committee and the university planning programs.

Accreditation of university programs helps to ensuring the faculty and program provide students with the knowledge to work as a professional planner while being trained in a program that has close ties to the profession and professional planning practice.

Professional Standards Board

Administration of both the membership certification and accreditation process will be done by the Professional Standards Board. The new organization will operate as a partnership between CIP and its affiliates and will ensure national standards are applied consistently across Canada. In other words, if you are living in Manitoba, you can expect the same membership process as a resident of Ontario or Prince Edward Island. National consistency is a hallmark of mature professional organizations.

The Professional Standards Board will be self supporting and will operate as efficiently as possible with regular reporting to CIP and its affiliates based on an accountability framework.

National Membership Standards Committee

Policy on membership matters and accreditation will continue to be the shared responsibility of CIP and its affiliates through the National Membership Standards Committee. It is very important that there are checks and balances to ensure the new process is implemented properly, is providing the service expected and in a manner that is fair, transparent and affordable. Furthermore, a commitment to ongoing continuous improvement of professional standards is imperative—we won't wait another 25 years to review them.

Decision time

Both CIP and OPPI councils have unanimously endorsed the PFF Task Force reports. The decision as to whether to move forward on the recommendations will be determined by two membership votes. First, CIP will conduct a national ballot on by-law changes to implement PFF starting in April. The by-laws concern the new categories of membership and certain membership requirements. Results will be known at the end of May. Second, if PFF passes nationally, OPPI will similarly conduct a vote on amendments to its bylaws to implement Planning for the Future.

Help to make 1986 and 2011 hallmark years for the planning profession in Ontario. Having matured as a profession, the Planning for the Future recommendations seek to enshrine forward-thinking, updated, relevant standards, transparent processes, checks and balances in our policy making and a commitment to continuous improvement.

The future of our profession is now in your—the membership's—hands. In another 25 years, when we celebrate OPPI @ 50, our decision this year will have set the course and determined our legacy to future generations of planners. Please remember to vote.

For more information about Planning for the Future visit www.ontarioplanners.on.ca or www.planningincanada.ca or email planningforthefuture@ontarioplanners.on.ca.

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