

# Member in Focus

**Kai Okazaki** RPP, MCIP  
 Social Planner at City of Burnaby and  
 Co-Chair of PIBC’s Justice, Equity, Diversity,  
 Decolonization, Inclusion and Accessibility  
 (JEDDIA) Working Group



During PIBC’s annual World Town Planning Gala events, it is always a pleasure to hear the proud cheers and applause from colleagues, mentors, friends and family who come to celebrate and recognize those officially receiving their member certificates as new Registered Professional Planners or those who have earned the achievement of holding professional certification for 25 years or more. This past November, we were excited to have Kai Okazaki cross the stage to receive his certificate. We caught up with Kai after the celebration to learn more about how growing up in a

tight knit community in rural Alberta shaped his career path towards social planning and his thoughts, as Co-Chair, on the work ahead for the PIBC JEDDIA Working Group.

**What inspired you to become a planner?  
 Was there a person or event that led you to explore planning as a profession?**

While I was studying natural resource conservation for my undergraduate degree at the University of British Columbia (UBC), I was introduced to the world of planning through a part-time job at the university’s Campus and Community Planning (C+CP) department. In this role, I met all sorts of dedicated, curious people (including a few planners) working on interesting projects, from campus planning and community building to climate action and transportation. I was still navigating my education and possible career paths at the time, so I wanted to learn more about their jobs, interests, and what led them to working for the university. Looking back now, what a neat opportunity this was for me! I was able to connect and hear different people’s stories of how they were all striving to serve the university community.

Through C+CP, I learned about the SCARP Symposium. UBC’s School of Community and Regional Planning held this annual event to invite professionals, academics and students for a full-day discussion on emerging planning issues. To be honest, I wasn’t familiar with the topics or issues, but I decided to register anyways. It was a good thing that I did attend because it was there that I met my future faculty advisor.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I worked a few years to gain experience elsewhere and pay down my student loans. Before applying to UBC SCARP, I spoke with a few alumni, current students and professors about the planning school. What I

took away from these conversations was that attending this program would help with my career path in becoming a planner.

When I was accepted into graduate school, I took a wide range of planning courses and still continued working part-time to support myself. It gave me the chance to work with my faculty advisors in SCARP and my former faculty (the Faculty of Forestry) who both shaped a lot of my thinking still to this day. Now as an alum, I am always reminded of the great people I met personally and professionally in the planning community. I’ve made some wonderful friends along the way, and I enjoy reconnecting with them regularly to hear about their projects. And here we are, years later, with this interview. It feels like a full circle.

**Congratulations again on becoming a Certified Member and Registered Professional Planner! For others starting or going through the certification process, what advice would you share?**

For those thinking about starting their RPP certification journey, I would look at the PIBC and CIP websites to understand the process, time commitment and costs. I would also recommend attending any free information sessions offered year-round. It’s also helpful to start thinking early about potential mentors and sponsors (and reading through the information that explains each role). I found it helpful to connect with a few different people to determine who might be the right fit – it might be based on your planning interest areas, or it might be the interpersonal connection that works best for you.

I found meeting with other Candidates extremely helpful while going through the certification process. I was fortunate to know a few other people who were going through the ethics & professionalism course at the



I organized a birthday fundraiser in response to the Jasper wildfires in 2024. Collectively, we raised \$2,500 for the Jasper Community Team Society with friends and their loved ones (some are not captured in the photo but made contributions to the fund).

Top left: Receiving my RPP certificate at the PIBC 2025 World Town Planning Day Gala (Nov 2025).

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=5WWDKOUNm0zw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=5WWDKOUNm0zw)

### **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

**Got a podcast about planning you want to share? Contact us with your podcast summary at [editor@pibc.bc.ca](mailto:editor@pibc.bc.ca)**

