Transforming Canadian and Canadian Planning

by David L.A. Gordon, MCIP RPP

The diversity of the participants was more impressive than the sheer numbers. The speakers represented thirty-five municipalities (from coast to coast to coast), over forty-five consulting firms, and numerous government agencies. Twenty international speakers from ten different countries further enriched the conference. There were scores of sessions on current Canadian planning problems, as well as comparative presentations on international practice and the experiences of Canadian planners working abroad.

We were also pleased to facilitate the return of Canadian planning schools to the CIP conference. They had never completely left, of course, but in recent years you could find many more Canadian professors at American academic conferences than at CIP's. This year, faculty from fourteen Canadian and three international planning schools participated in the conference. To their credit, they refused an offer to organize a "research" stream and insisted on participating in joint sessions with the practitioners. Some of the best sessions contained this mix, including the panel on revitalizing medium-sized cities, which won the award for "Best Presentation." (The articles on Red Deer and Cornwall can be found in this issue of Plan Canada.) This is a good omen for reducing the "town-gown" separation in the future.

By happy coincidence, the First Nations Community Planning Model by Dalhousie University (Daltech) won the CIP National Award for Planning Excellence. The multiple-theme structure of the 2001 conference allowed room for practitioners and academics who work far away from the land-use planning mainstream of CIP. There were sessions on planning with aboriginal peoples, urban design, radical planning alternatives, multiculturalism, and a host of green planning initiatives. Other delegates spent the entire conference dealing with economic development or capital-city planning issues.

If there was a common theme to the conference, it was perhaps the idea of transforming Canadian communities and Canadian planning practice. The conference's program committee drew inspiration for the structure from the many transformations of the host community. Our national capital has changed from a lumber town into a government city and then into a tourist attraction—and, most recently, into a high-tech "cluster." Its community has transformed from a bilingual, bi-cultural region into a multi-cultural society. Planning in the national capital region has evolved from some of the earliest Canadian comprehensive plans to some of the best ecological planning in the country. This diverse local experience inspired the seven themes of the conference:

1. Advanced technology
2. Capital cities: international, national, and provincial
3. Urban culture, arts, tourism, and sports
4. Multiculturalism
5. Green planning
6. International planning
7. Transforming planning practice

These themes seemed to resonate with many delegates. Summaries of each theme, accompanied by edited versions of related presentations, follow below. They are preceded by the keynote addresses of Sir Peter Hall and Alan Gotlieb. (John Fresco's keynote address on Maryland's Smart Growth initiative will appear in the next issue of Plan Canada.) The full version of all the keynote speeches, along with summaries of almost all the presentations, were published in the proceedings of the conference, which reached over 400 pages.

Although "smart growth" was frequently heard in the corridors and presentation rooms, the idea that seemed to cut across the themes was "quality of life." Planning activity that can demonstrably improve the quality of life for a community will attract public support, as we saw in numerous case studies and presentations. CIP initiated a new "Vision in Planning" Award at the conference to highlight implemented plans that have clearly improved the quality of life in their communities. The National Capital Commission accepted the inaugural award for its role in implementing the 1950 Plan for Canada's Capital, prepared under the direction of Jacques Gréber. This document was one of the first plans implemented after World War II, setting the standard for comprehensive treatment of open space, natural features, transportation, land use and urban design. It was the blueprint for transforming the region from a bleak industrial town into an attractive modern capital with a high quality of life.

So the conference results should not be viewed as an article or a CD-ROM or a Web site, but as a "quality of life" toolkit. We all owe thanks to the planners who volunteered their time by presenting their ideas and tools at the conference, and by writing them up for the proceedings and for this issue of Plan Canada.

The 2001 CIP/OIPPI conference program was organized by a remarkable group of volunteers, many of whom will introduce their themes in the sections that follow. However, I would like to reserve special thanks for our conference chairs, Pamela Sweet and Bob Tennant, who let us try many new ideas, and our program co-chair, Marni Cappe, who kept us on an even keel. The full proceedings of the conference were produced as a book and a CD-ROM by a dedicated team at Queen's University, led by co-editor Professor John Andrew and production editors Mark Martynshyn and Saide Sayah. The book and CD-ROM sold out, but the full proceedings will be posted on the CIP Web site (www.cip-icp.ca). This will be the first digital presentation of CIP conference proceedings, which is perhaps appropriate since the program included a high-tech theme and was coordinated by more than 3000 e-mails from my computer alone.

While the 2001 conference program was quite ambitious, my only regret is that it rained on our final picnic. Perhaps the 2002 Vancouver conference can avoid that problem!

Dave Gordon teaches urban planning at Queen's University and the University of Pennsylvania, where he is currently a visiting professor and Fulbright scholar. He was the program co-chair of the 2001 conference. Aside from editing the conference proceedings, he and Dr. John Andrew contributed to the editing of this issue of Plan Canada. Prof. Gordon can be reached at: davidgordon@pobox.upenn.edu