



# Canada in 2100

**A Bold Vision for Planning's Role in  
Achieving Sustainable Prosperity**

*A Report Prepared by the College of Fellows*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*As Fellows of CIP, we acknowledge that our work extends across all ancestral lands in this place now known as Canada, and we value the ongoing stewardship of all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We recognize the importance of learning from Indigenous ways of knowing and being in order to practice planning in an inclusive way.*

This report builds on the work of many individuals who contributed to an earlier foundational report entitled “Imagining Canada in 2100,” distributed to the College of Fellows in January 2025. (Adjustments and additions have been made to that report since it was first distributed.)

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*ON THE COVER: A mosaic of Canada, which is made from 121 images captured by Canadian satellite RADARSAT-2. These images were acquired from May 1, 2013, to June 1, 2013. The colour variation represents the changes in soil texture, roughness and the level of soil moisture. (Credit: RADARSAT-2 Data and products © MDA Geospatial Services Inc. 2014 – All rights reserved. RADARSAT is an official mark of the Canadian Space Agency.)*

# Canada in 2100

## A Bold Vision for Planning's Role in Achieving Sustainable Prosperity

Looking ahead to the year 2100, this report prepared by the College of Fellows outlines a once in a generation opportunity for the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and its members to refresh and elevate the role of planning in Canada.

To this end, a key purpose of this report is to ask that the Canadian Institute of Planners lead the profession in collaborating with government, business leaders and other key institutions to formulate and implement policies to grow Canada's population in ways that equitably respond to the needs of current citizens and newcomers, as well as future generations, by planning for a Canada that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable for all.

This report sets out two complementary themes:

### **ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

First, building on the conclusions of a foundational paper developed by the College over the course of 2024 ("Imagining Canada in 2100"), this report makes the case that planners should actively engage with government, the business community and the country's major institutions to advocate ways for a planning perspective to be integrated into the development of immigration policies as they affect the economy, housing and infrastructure priorities. This has been missing to date, but to do this effectively, the profession will need to expand its capacity to think and act longer-term while continuing to address current and medium-term issues.

### **EMBRACING CHANGE**

Second, the report outlines a series of steps that we believe CIP should take in collaboration with provincial/territorial affiliates to expand on the ideas and conclusions reached in our foundational paper. Making the most of the experience and diverse knowledge within the College and the CIP membership at large can help the profession reach its full potential.

This report is organized as follows:

- Part One briefly reprises the aims of “Imagining Canada in 2100.” This section acknowledges Canada’s historic and continuing reliance on immigration as a source of new population to grow our economy but notes that a number of troubling issues are currently undermining public support for immigration. The report also emphasizes that a fresh approach to thinking about the future is required, noting that Canada’s ability to protect the country’s many physical and human assets cannot – and should not – be taken for granted. A key goal of the “2100 project” is to “lay the groundwork (for planners) to actively contribute to discussions on matters of national importance.”
- Part Two details lessons learned from the experience of developing the foundational paper. These include a recognition that there is a continuing need for planners to meaningfully engage with Canada’s Indigenous peoples, particularly with respect to land rights, as well as to contribute to Canada’s role in reducing domestic emissions in order to help mitigate and adapt to climate change. It is also important to acknowledge that national policies affecting the economy, housing, transportation and infrastructure investment often need to be adjusted to take account of regional priorities.
- Part Three sets out a series of steps that will move these ideas forward, beginning with a commitment in principle from the CIP Board of Directors that acknowledges the need to expand the profession’s influence, as described in this report. Engaging the membership at large will begin with the upcoming 2025 CIP/OPPI conference to be held in Toronto in July, in the form of three presentations and preparation of a report on discussion of the project at the conference. The process will continue throughout the year with columns in *Plan Canada* and a Fall issue dedicated to the topic. This report also identifies a number of specific actions to develop these ideas that involve meeting and making presentations to key institutions and political parties. We are hopeful that the CIP Board of Directors will endorse the potential for establishing a formal working group of CIP to provide a vehicle to guide the project forward.



## PART ONE – THE DESIRE FOR A DIFFERENT FUTURE REQUIRES A FRESH APPROACH

“Imagining Canada in 2100” asks a fundamental question: “What will the country be like 75 years from now at the turn of a new millennium?” The report pointedly avoids offering prescriptions, emphasizing instead that achieving goals for an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future will require a fresh approach to the way that government makes decisions, particularly those with long-term spatial implications. The report also suggests that if the planning profession wishes to participate in how decisions are made, we will have to expand our capacity to think longer-term and learn to deal effectively with complex issues not necessarily contained within local boundaries.

The starting point for “Imagining Canada in 2100” was a call to Fellows across the country to respond to a set of questions from their regional perspective. These contributions were then distilled into a narrative that identified national priorities, summarized under six headings – Truth and Reconciliation; Climate Change; the Economy (including agriculture and resource development); Housing, Transportation and Infrastructure; Governance; Immigration and Demographics. It became clear to us that while we share many common values, trying to fashion a single vision for Canada’s future is neither realistic nor desirable. This was a valuable insight as it underscored why planners, experienced in resolving conflicting policy directives, have a role to play in decisions affecting the country’s future.

Recognizing that 25-30 years is the outside limit for reliable demographic forecasts, we developed “what if” scenarios to look ahead beyond 2050 to 2100. The resulting low, medium and high levels of population growth (50 million, 75 million, or 100 million respectively) proved to be a useful way to highlight that immigration policies are a key variable affecting the demand for housing, job growth or the requirement to expand physical and social infrastructure. Given Canada’s recent history associated with declining birth rates, future rates of population growth will inevitably depend heavily on Canada’s immigration policies.

Although successful immigration policy is a massive positive, challenges with policies affecting immigration recruitment and settlement have also been a constant, and often troubling theme throughout Canada’s development. This underscores a disconnect between the immense size of Canada and its relatively small population. Over the decades, the quest for solutions has generated a variety of visions for a larger population. Some have called for a population as large

as 100 million, or at least a need to reach population levels capable of growing the economy and related institutions that would enable Canada to compete on the world stage.

Based on analysis undertaken for the report, “Imagining Canada in 2100” concludes that immigration has played – and will always play – an outsized role in Canada’s search for long-term prosperity. But Canada’s reputation as an open, welcoming society capable of offering a high quality of life to its citizens and newcomers alike is a relatively new construct. Regrettably, this aspiration has become less believable in recent decades. Increasing income inequality, a shortage of affordable housing and uneven economic performance are among the issues placing a strain on the country’s ability to sustain standards that were, until relatively recently, taken for granted. Our report also noted that Canada’s ability to retain immigrants has re-emerged as a worrying trend.

“Imagining Canada in 2100” acknowledges that public discourse in Canada is dealing with two important realities. First, we have become aware – some would say embarrassingly late – that our relationship with Canada’s Indigenous peoples needs to change – and that a process of Truth and Reconciliation requires a new worldview – for society but most importantly from the perspective of this report, from the planning profession. Second, the threat of climate change is already having devastating impacts in many regions and differing views on appropriate responses are the cause of considerable debate.

## **PART TWO – THE NEED FOR A “COURSE CORRECTION” FOR HOW GOVERNMENTS DEVELOP POLICIES AFFECTING NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PRIORITIES**

This section summarizes some of the principal lessons learned during the process of writing “Imagining Canada in 2100.” In addition to benefiting from diverse viewpoints from Fellows in different parts of the country who contributed their regional perspectives<sup>1</sup>, we also received helpful feedback from Fellows after the paper was circulated in draft form last fall. This led to the expansion and refinement of questions posed in the last chapter of the paper; these interactions also shaped our decision to position the final version of the paper as a “foundational” document, and to prepare this second, shorter report, focused on next steps for the “2100 project.”

### **TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION**

An important step in the process of writing the first paper was recognizing the extent to which Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples has changed – and will continue to change. The foundational paper notes the following points:

- As efforts at meaningful reconciliation continue, the impetus for the planning community to be more intentional and proactive in its engagement with Indigenous peoples has never been more pressing. As more land disputes get resolved, there is also an increased likelihood that additional lands will be returned to Indigenous stewardship. From a practical perspective, projects such as infrastructure initiatives that rely on access to Indigenous lands will require consent, and where appropriate, lead to economic development partnerships. Planners in all sectors will need to increase their cultural awareness and understanding of Indigenous land rights and the diversity of Indigenous perspectives. It will also be important to reflect Indigenous values when undertaking consultation and engagement involving Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> We also benefited from valuable insights contributed by members of CIP who stepped up to provide responses to our questions in regions where Fellows were not available.



- Indigenous cultures put a high value on how nature impacts development and ecology, and traditionally take a long-term, multi-generational perspective; this complements a stated goal expressed in the paper that exhorts planners to expand their worldview and develop the capacity to think longer-term when providing advice.
- From a practical perspective, as more and more communities adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) principles related to Truth and Reconciliation, we expect that these principles will increasingly be revealed in official plans and other planning tools. In anticipation of these coming changes, paying attention to the four principles articulated by the Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business for PAR Certification is a good start: Respect and Recognition, Community Investment, Lasting Relationships, and Opportunities through Partnership.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

The year 2025 began with depressing news from the EU's Copernicus Climate Service confirming that the world has officially breached the 1.5°C warming threshold established by the Paris Agreement, making 2024 the hottest year on record. As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, how does Canada fit into the global picture? While addressing its own climate-related challenges must be a priority, it can also be argued that Canada has a responsibility to show the world that transitioning away from dependence on fossil fuels can be achieved without sacrificing living standards or damaging the economy.

First, as made clear in the foundational paper, there is mounting evidence of climate change having negative impacts in most regions of the country. These include extreme heat events, wildfires, drought, atmospheric rivers and flooding, causing economic disruption and population dislocation in affected communities. In the Canadian North, melting glaciers and reduced snowpack are affecting transportation routes and destabilizing permafrost. These trends also threaten the availability of freshwater to downstream communities, affecting the agricultural sector and essential infrastructure such as hydro-electric dams that supply electricity. Canada's Boreal forests are being devastated by wildfires as well as through the spread of insect-borne diseases. However, in some parts of the Prairies, it is forecast that increasing temperatures will have a positive impact on agricultural production and even lead to new opportunities for tourism.

Second, although Canada has made a bold pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050<sup>2</sup>, the transition to a low or no carbon economy is made more difficult by conflicts between federal and provincial (territorial) responsibilities.

The recognition of Indigenous rights and the value of Indigenous partnerships must be an essential part of the solution. Sensitivity and respect to the greater impact regional projects may have on Indigenous populations must be addressed. Effective partnerships can help address infrastructure needs, improve economic equity and sustainable employment opportunities, delivering better outcomes and unlocking value for all parties by enabling sustained community support and increased project certainty.

The need to factor in responses and recognition of Indigenous rights only adds to these challenges.

From a practical point of view, there is a need to simultaneously advance the cause of reducing emissions (mitigation strategies) while also improving our capacity to build resilience to climate change impacts (investment in adaptation measures). In addition to participating directly in such initiatives, planners also have a role to play in helping government achieve an appropriate balance between these two policy imperatives.

It should also be noted that the accelerating rate of warming in the Canadian Arctic places a new emphasis on protecting the sovereignty of the Northwest Passage (NWP). The Canadian position is that the NWP is entirely within internal Canadian waters, but this claim has not been recognized by the USA. It is possible that Canada's current level of activity in the Arctic will be judged to be insufficient to protect our claims and that major investments to establish a stronger presence will be required. If such investment occurs, it may well significantly shape Canada's economic and political future.

## **THE ECONOMY**

As one of the principal determinants of quality of life in Canada's city-regions, towns and rural communities, questions about the future of Canada's economy are central to discussions concerning the well-being of Canada's current residents and the ability to attract and retain new immigrants. In a country with six time zones, eight main geographic climatic zones and one of the lowest population densities in the world, there are many complex factors driving Canada's

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<sup>2</sup> Mitigation and adaptation initiatives are described in more detail in the foundational paper.

economy, not the least of which is the degree to which the economy is concentrated in cities, dispersed across vast rural areas, and subject to significant variations in regional performance.

For all these reasons and more, Canada's economic future must not only reflect nationally important concerns such as low productivity and, and as some have suggested, over-reliance on public sector employment, but must also respond to regional needs and priorities.

Like the country itself, Canada's economic profile has undergone – and continues to undergo – radical changes in terms of the factors driving the national economy, but which have played out differently on a regional basis.

Agriculture and mining, the dominant sectors a century ago, are still important but are driven by changing priorities. Today, agriculture and the agri-food sectors are multi-billion enterprises focused on exports but also ones that strive to remain relevant to communities by supplying locally grown food. With the decline of coal, the focus of the mining sector today is how to contribute to Canada's transition away from fossil fuels by delivering key elements within the value chain of decarbonization products, such as inputs to batteries for electric vehicles (EVs) and much more. However, oil and gas currently account for more than 25 per cent of all Canadian exports. There is also increasing interest in mineral resources in the Prairies. The forestry sector has also moved to increase its ability to contribute to value-added products at the same time as it seeks to protect its resources and introduce more sustainable practices, affecting jobs and exports.

Nowhere is the changing profile of Canada's economy more visible – and potentially vulnerable – than in Ontario. Although the province is home to Canada's financial centre and is the country's manufacturing hub, Ontario is also heavily dependent on exports to the U.S. As a result, Ontario's declining GDP per capita – a common measure of prosperity and living standards – relative to the rest of the country, is a major concern. Contributing factors such as the crisis in housing affordability and growing income disparities are not unique to Ontario. These concerns are not just the purview of economists but represent a practical problem for those leading communities, regardless of their size or location. It must also be acknowledged that the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the economy, including the management of data and the potential to anticipate future conditions, is still an open question.

## **HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

For much of the period since the Second World War, Canada relied heavily on the private market to supply individuals with housing in the form of home ownership or long-term tenancies. Those

unable to afford either of these options relied on government-subsidized assisted housing programs. This delicate balance started to deteriorate in the 1970s, when the government upended a thriving private sector delivery model that was delivering 50,000 rental apartment units a year by changing the parameters affecting return on investment for developers. A shift in emphasis in government policies in favour of subsidized home ownership, combined with decisions to cut back on federal funds for “social housing” and offload responsibility to provincial governments, contributed to the present situation, where housing prices, regardless of tenure, are unaffordable for large segments of the population.

Many communities are seeing a growing reliance on foodbanks and rising levels of homelessness. The irony is that Canada is building fewer homes today than in the 1970s, even though our population is now twice the size it was then – leading to criticisms of complex approval processes. These problems have reached crisis proportions due in part to reliance on “condo-driven financialization,” a term that housing policy expert Carolyn Whitzman describes as “the process of treating homes as sites for investment rather than places to live.”<sup>3</sup> Recent high levels of immigration have also exacerbated the situation. All this leads to a conclusion that our model for housing delivery needs a complete reset.

The development of Canada as we know it today owes much to controversial decisions taken in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to invest in a trans-national railroad, which accelerated the process of western settlement as well as providing an access point for emerging agricultural exports. The goal of establishing modern transportation corridors to facilitate economic activity and intra-urban travel has proven more difficult ever since, in part due to changing sensibilities regarding environmental and societal impacts and the challenge of sustaining support for investment in transport infrastructure through multiple electoral cycles.

As one commentator notes, Canada’s transportation conundrum can be defined as “so much distance, so little space” – the disconnect between a need to link communities over long distances but struggling to provide for intra-urban travel within our large and medium-sized cities. Accommodating new rail-based transit in densely developed neighbourhoods is a perennial challenge. The gap between a desire to achieve “transit-oriented development” and the reality of implementation in a world dominated by cars and trucks is an uphill battle, underscoring the extent of the challenge of achieving the planned switch to electric vehicles.

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<sup>3</sup> “Home Truths: Fixing Canada’s Housing Crisis” Carolyn Whitzman, On Point Press, 2024

Although there have been some modest successes in infrastructure investments such as oil and hydro transmission lines across provincial boundaries, planning and securing investment for projects, particularly “mega-projects,” is complex and fraught with risk. Recent capital-intensive commitments by federal and provincial governments to partner with companies ready to construct battery factories, while global demand for EVs is falling, illustrates this.

It is also important to acknowledge recent innovations in delivering low and non-carbon thermal energy projects that have the potential to reduce emissions for neighbourhood-scale development.

## GOVERNANCE

A fundamental constraint affecting how municipalities manage growth and plan capital and operating expenditures stems from decisions made at the time of the passing of the British North America Act in 1867, when it was decided that “municipalities are creatures of the province.” Although the scope of municipal governance has changed fundamentally over the past 150+ years, the governance model – to quote a former federal minister of transportation – is “stuck in the horse and buggy age.”<sup>4</sup> With minor exceptions, the principal source of revenue for municipalities in 2025 is from the property tax – the same as it was in 1867. The continuing quest for funding from federal and/or provincial sources commensurate with increased municipal responsibilities defines the scope of action required in all spheres – from infrastructure and housing, to transportation and the provision of social services. New revenue sources that respond to these needs and grow with the economy are essential to achieve a high quality of life in municipalities. Access to income taxes, sales taxes and or transportation system user fees would all represent game changers.<sup>5</sup>

Another reality is that Canada’s growing population is still packed into more or less the same configurations established at the time of Confederation. “New cities” have been added at the edges of existing centres such as Greater Vancouver, the Greater Toronto Area and Greater Montreal, shifting the governance challenge to one of how to manage and plan for necessary infrastructure to deliver services in ever-expanding urban areas.

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<sup>4</sup> Presentation to the Canadian Urban Institute by the Hon. David Collenette, MP, circa 1997.

<sup>5</sup> These issues are discussed in more detail in Appendix 3 of the foundational paper.

Looking ahead, where will additional millions go? Will very large urban areas get even larger, with all the challenges this brings? Or will future population growth shift to small and medium-sized cities, or be dispersed more extensively to Canada's rural areas? Although statisticians count 80+ per cent of Canadians as living in urban areas, the reality – to quote Professor David Gordon, is that much of these “urban” areas are “not rural” – a way of explaining large areas devoted to suburban growth. Our governance model is not ideally suited for continued population growth. Planners will need to play a role in determining a sustainable way forward.

## **IMMIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

As demonstrated in both our foundational paper and this report, Canada has always – and will always – be heavily dependent on immigration as a way to expand our population. Continued reliance on immigration also ensures that we are able to attract and retain individuals with the talent, drive and ambition to make Canada more successful in a competitive global environment. This report assumes that planners wish to contribute to government efforts to restore Canada's reputation as a welcoming place that makes the most of its physical and human assets to protect and improve quality of life for everyone.

Demographic change is ever present. Whether it is challenges inherent in dealing with an aging population – challenges that encompass living standards, housing and impacts on the size and capacity of Canada's labour force – or the realities of acknowledging that Canada is now experiencing the lowest replacement rate for new births in its history, planners need to be at the forefront of building and designing communities capable of absorbing and celebrating increasing diversity and incorporating partnerships to welcome an evolving role in terms of collaboration with Canada's Indigenous peoples.

## PART THREE – THE WAY FORWARD

This section sets out recommendations for how the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) should take action to address two issues identified in our research.

The first issue is that there is currently inadequate communication among the federal government, the provincial and territorial governments and local governments during the development of policies and the setting of targets with respect to immigration. Such communication is necessary because immigration policies impact the rate of growth in many, if not most, communities.

As our profession is the one most often tasked with planning the future of regional, urban and rural communities, it is our belief that CIP members are well-placed to understand the issues associated with growth and therefore the Institute is an appropriate body for federal and other governments to consult with when formulating long-term policies that determine immigration.<sup>6</sup> The section outlines a possible approach for CIP to provide this input.

The second issue is that planning professionals have focused in recent years on planning within a time horizon of approximately 25-30 years. As a result, it is possible that the skills of the membership have not evolved to keep pace with the needs of today's rapidly changing environment. Such skills are necessary to make long-term policy decisions to address issues such as climate-appropriate infrastructure and the vulnerability of some sectors of society. The profession needs to acknowledge this and upgrade its skills accordingly.

### **Steps required to secure recognition of the planning profession as a partner to be consulted in developing immigration policy**

Immigration is a shared jurisdiction between the federal government and the provinces. This is appropriate because immigration policies have a profound impact on the development of provinces and their local jurisdictions. The organizational structure of CIP and the provincial and territorial Institute affiliates enables the profession to contribute in a coordinated way at all relevant levels.

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<sup>6</sup> We note that increasingly, references to "immigration" fail to distinguish between economic migrants, individuals arriving for the purpose of furthering their education, and refugees. These distinctions will need to be better communicated in future by all stakeholders.



1. CIP agrees this is a role it is willing to play by establishing a formal working group with the following terms of reference:
  - a. Present findings of this report to the Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; Immigration and Citizenship (and other federal departments as appropriate) with the goal of reaching agreement for appropriate mechanisms for CIP to provide input on immigration policy.
  - b. Notify and seek the engagement of provincial and territorial Institute affiliates in formulating its contribution to immigration policy.
  - c. Establish monitoring mechanisms and conduct annual surveys on how growth linked to immigration policy is impacting communities across Canada. The results would be provided to the Department of Housing, Communities and Infrastructure.
  - d. Report annually to CIP Council on how this initiative is progressing.
2. A new formal working group explores ways of undertaking further research on how other jurisdictions address the linkage of federal decision-making on immigration with provincial/territorial and local community needs.
3. CIP disseminate its research on this topic by:
  - a. Publishing articles on these topics regularly in *Plan Canada*
  - b. Encouraging members to write articles on the topic that can be placed in the national and regional media.
  - c. Making regular representations to the appropriate parliamentary committees as well as policy committees of major political parties.
  - d. Engage with the media across the country to connect big ideas with people's existing and desired daily life cycle aspirations.
4. Discuss with the heads of accredited planning schools through the Association of Canadian University Planning Programs (ACUPP) the perceived need for planning curricula to include material concerning longer-term planning and infrastructure

investment, including considerations related to AI. Determine their views on this and report back to CIP.

Our research to date has identified the need for the profession to be proactive in addressing two important issues. What is set out here is just one way of engaging with decision makers to help address these issues. Our members will undoubtedly have additional ideas on how these matters can be addressed by CIP. We look forward to hearing these ideas on how to fulfill our responsibilities in this area.