



**Policy Paper:**  
**The Case for the Province of Ontario to  
Regulate the Planning Profession**

The Provincial Government is committed to ensuring the planning of our communities, resources and environment protects the public interest. To that end it has put in place a framework for guiding the planning process and managing future growth. Today the challenge is to ensure its implementation reflects the economic and health interests of Ontario communities. Professional planners are integral to that outcome.

The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI)—with over 4,000 members—is committed to achieving healthy, sustainable communities. Given the changing political, professional and societal context within which decisions are made today and the challenges on the horizon, OPPI is seeking legislative change in how the planning profession is regulated. Its intent is to enhance the public's confidence in professional planners and their commitment to protecting and furthering the public interest.

Today OPPI members are regulated by the Institute, which requires members to pursue continuous professional learning and adhere to a code of ethics and practice standards. Under the proposed public legislation, OPPI members would still be regulated by OPPI but, as with other professions, the Institute would ultimately be accountable to the government and the people of Ontario. This change is anticipated to generally raise the level of planning practice across the province—supporting better community outcomes, a more engaged public and a streamlined provincial system of delegated planning authority.

Planning matters are not the sole purview of professional planners and planners routinely work on a collaborative basis with other professionals in a range of disciplines. Similarly OPPI has established good relationships with colleagues in related professional associations (e.g., engineers, architects, public health officials and lawyers). As a result, the Institute is committed to ensuring that its proposed act affects only OPPI members and will in no way restrict other professionals. Furthermore, the cost of regulation would not be borne by the provincial government. Similar to other regulated professions it would be funded by the profession itself.

As professionals, planners are dedicated community builders with a steadfast commitment to sustainable, healthy places for Ontarians to live, work and play.

We advise government decision-makers, implement planning legislation and engage the public in a fair and transparent process. Planners have the education, skills and ethics to constructively advance the public interest. Regulating professional planners is good for the Government of Ontario and it is good for Ontarians. This Policy Paper sets out the case for the Government of Ontario to enact public legislation to regulate professional planners. Its intent is to stimulate focused dialogue on the benefits to the Provincial Government, its communities and the public. The paper is organized around the following themes:

- Planners have the skills and a proven track record in serving the public interest...
- Good planning decisions require an informed, engaged public...
- Increasing complexity reduces Ontarians ability to be constructively engaged...
- The timing is opportune...

***Planners have the skills and a proven track record in serving the public interest...***

Ontario's professional planners have successfully help guide and frame the Province's healthy communities agenda. They are recognized as providing independent and skilled practice on behalf of the public interest. Their skill base sets them apart from other professions:

Planners both envision the long term and are able to connect the short term with the long term. They think in an integrated way about how all the different elements and systems come together to produce change. Planners are trained to collect, analyse and marshal evidence, whatever form it may take. They possess an analytical, evidence-driven, evidence-based skill set. Analyzing and interpreting consequences of actual or prospective policies is a core competency of professional planners. *(Adapted from an interview with planner and University of Toronto president Meric Gertler.)*

Professional planners are crucial integrators and visionaries, coordinating and working in the space between provincial government planning policies and other regulated professionals (engineers, architects, lawyers, public health officials, etc.). They provide independent professional opinions, not simply supporting whatever their clients say. Professional planners are trusted to offer objective expert testimony, as evidenced by their role at the Ontario Municipal Board.

OPPI members uphold a *Professional Code of Practice* that emphasizes their primary responsibility as defining and serving the interests of the public. They employ theories and techniques of planning that inform and structure debate, facilitate communication and meaningful participation and foster understanding of the issues at hand among decision-makers and members of the public.

### ***Good planning decisions require an informed, engaged public...***

Good planning decisions, which reflect the economic and health interests of Ontario communities, require an informed public and a fair, inclusive and transparent process. People across the province are quite vocal about wanting to be involved in the decisions that shape their communities and they have high expectations as to what that means.

While planners have always been involved in engagement, public expectations have risen considerably over the last 20 years since the *OPPI Act*, a Private Bill, came into force. So too has the relationship changed between the public and professional planners. Today respect for the professional planner's advice is more commonplace, even when stakeholders have differing opinions. Increasingly, the public recognizes that professional planners provide reliable, independent work, informed by knowledge and experience, based on comprehensive practice standards and subject to ethics and discipline standards.

The *Planning Act* seeks to aid the process of information dissemination and public participation through procedural tools. However, these tools alone cannot ensure an objective process, or an informed public. They alone cannot advance the public interest. Professional planners are most adept at effectively using the *Planning Act* tools and ensuring the public interest is met.

The Province has delegated many of its planning responsibilities to municipalities. Thus, if it is to be confident that good decisions will result from the planning process it needs to ensure the right expertise and advice is brought to the decision-making table, by the right people. The proposed legislation would help to enhance the public's confidence that planners are accountable to act in the public interest.

### ***Increasing complexity reduces Ontarians ability to be constructively engaged...***

The Province has set in place a framework to guide the planning process and manage future growth so we know what is coming. However, the context is changing as issues grow more and more complex and an ever increasing number of stakeholder voices seek to be heard. Those with resources will tend to dominate the conversations and seek to influence decisions. Not all will advocate in the public interest.

It will become ever more difficult for the public to sort through stakeholder voices unaided in order to ascertain the facts as the challenges Ontarians face intensify:

- Continued population growth and the resulting pressure that puts on our natural and built environments
- Densification in major urban centres and de-population in many rural or northern communities
- Aging population
- Extreme pressure on our physical infrastructure, including the effects of a changing climate

- Urgent drive to reduce carbon emissions across the economy
- Growing awareness of the public health implications of every aspect of community design
- Requirement to accommodate industry and create employment opportunities for Ontarians in the face of the challenges of an increasingly globalized economy.

In the next 25 years, more than ever before, Ontarians will benefit from a trained, disciplined and independent voice offering professional facilitation and advice on behalf of the public interest, a voice skilled at balancing diverse perspectives in complex environments. The Province will benefit from an informed public able to make decisions that are good for the economy and the health of their communities.

The challenges are formidable, but professional planners excel in multi-disciplinary environments. They offer inter-disciplinary leadership in areas of strategic decision-making, subject-matter expertise and facilitated dialogue. They routinely work on a collaborative basis with other professionals in a range of disciplines. Colleagues such as engineers, architects, public health officials and lawyers are fully regulated by the Province and are part of professional organizations (such as the Law Society) that play an important role in ensuring members meet and indeed exceed professional standards. The public expects that people with these titles have the requisite education, training and professional ethics to engender trust and it expects the Province to oversee their credentials. They deserve the same assurance when it comes to professional planners.

### ***The timing is opportune...***

With the updated *Provincial Policy Statement* adopted and the review of critical provincial plans—*Greenbelt Plan*, *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*, *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* and the *Big Move*—on the horizon, the timing is opportune to introduce legislation to regulate professional planners. The spotlight will be on these plans and the planning process more broadly.

Land resources are limited and need to be carefully conserved and leveraged to ensure future generations continue to have choice and opportunities. The multiplicity of reviews will be challenging. However, it offers a tremendous opportunity to help the public gain an understanding of the interconnections among the plans and the need to balance competing perspectives among stakeholders if the public interest is to be well served. Facilitating this dialogue is a role at which professional planner excel.

Ontario has a rich and proud history of planning legislation on behalf of its communities, in partnership with the professional planning community. In the past Ontario has been a leader in planning legislation and in its recognition of professional planners. Ontario was the first province to introduce the Registered Professional Planner (RPP) designation in 1994 and today members of all seven professional institutes across the country use a provincial RPP, or equivalent. In tribute to Ontario's leadership, all the other provinces have enhanced their planning profession legislation

since our 1994 act. But Ontario's legislation is now 20 years old and it's time to bring Ontario back to the forefront.

It is time for contemporary legislation that enhances the public's confidence in the role of the professional planner to protect and strengthen Ontario's communities and resources. This will contribute to the planning process and the public good. It would ensure the information and recommendations presented to decision-makers continue to be of a high standard in terms of reliability, consistency and quality. It would ensure that planning advice reflects best practice, educational certification, peer assessment and independent professional opinion. Under such legislation, the accountability of professional planners to maintain professional education, adhere to established standards and be guided by a code of practice and ethics would be held through OPPI membership, which would become the norm.

What does the alternative future look like? It likely would mean an increase in calls to MPPs on planning issues from frustrated stakeholders adamant about a particular issue or complaining about a certain decision. It likely would mean more referrals to the Ontario Municipal Board and other tribunals. The provincial government is the ultimate decision-maker, but MPPs being pressured to choose sides among constituents and trying to broker ad hoc solutions to complex issues is not a sustainable approach to achieving economic and healthy communities.

Ontario needs to grow in ways that protect our economic well-being and vital resources and sustain healthy lifestyles and a healthy environment. Professional planners can be instrumental in making that future a reality.