



COLLABORATION TO CREATION:

The Ridgewood South Precinct Planning Process

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ABSTRACT

Charleswood is a timeless community with rural character, remaining relatively unchanged since joining Winnipeg in the 1970s. As per the City of Winnipeg development strategy, *Complete Communities*, the area directly South of Charleswood has been designated as a precinct for a new community. With a new local Councillor, open to development, came the opportunity to create the precinct plan to guide the planning and growth of the new community. Understandably, the existing community members were initially quite concerned about having new development directly adjacent to the area in which they live, work, and play. Landmark Planning and Design was hired by Qualico Communities, local developer and landowner, as a consultant to develop the precinct plan. In collaboration with Donovan Toews, Principal at Landmark, this case-in-point examines the Ridgewood South precinct plan as an example of effective planning practice in engaging a diversity of stakeholders, and addressing environment, servicing and infrastructure needs through innovative solutions.

1.0 / INTRODUCTION

Precinct plans serve two particular purposes in community planning. On one hand, they are used as a tool to distill and implement the broader planning goals of the City's development plan (e.g. *OurWinnipeg*) and the directions given subsequent strategies (e.g. *Complete Communities*). On the other hand, precinct

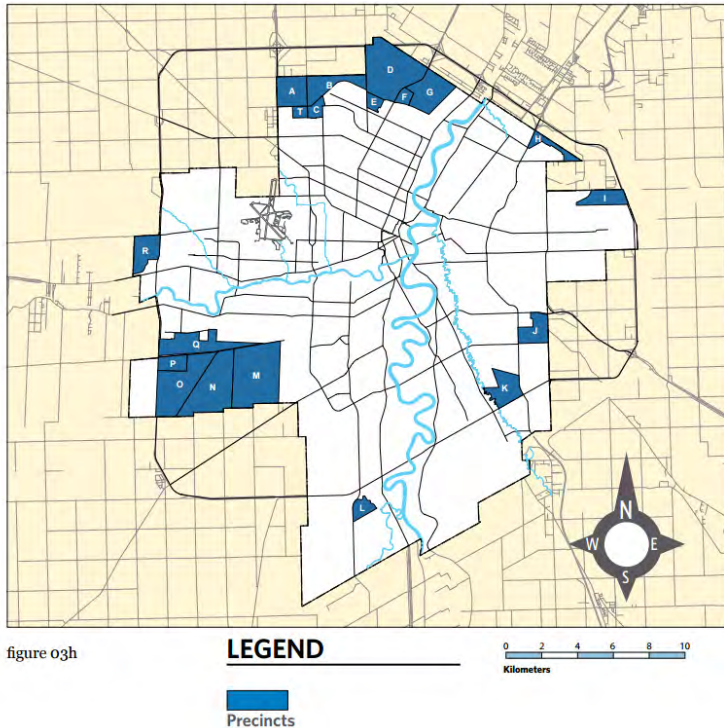


FIGURE 1 | Precincts identified in *Complete Communities*

plans are used to provide detailed directions for land use, subdivision, parks and recreation infrastructure, servicing and road infrastructure, and development decisions that will ultimately shape the new community (City of Winnipeg, 2013).

This case-in-point will look at the planning process for a new precinct, or community, in Winnipeg using the example of Precinct Q, or Ridgewood South. The background highlights the people, places, and possible conditions to provide context for the planning process. The approach and process are then discussed, providing groundwork for how the project concluded with specific outcomes and lessons learned. What makes Ridgewood South exemplary is the collaboration with the existing community and involved stakeholders throughout the whole planning process from preconceptions to approved plan.



FIGURE 2 | Rural Municipality of Charleswood Sign, 1938

2.0 / BACKGROUND

Ridgewood South is located directly south of the neighbourhood of Charleswood on the west side of Winnipeg. The precinct area is bordered by the Perimeter Highway on the west, Wilkes Avenue on the south and east, and Ridgewood Avenue on the north (*figure 3*).

Local History and Context

What is now known as the neighbourhood of Charleswood experienced significant development following World War II and grew into a suburban community within the Rural Municipality of Charleswood. As part of the Unicity Amalgamation in 1972, Charleswood became part of the City of Winnipeg (Charleswood Historical Society, 2015).

As the community developed initially in a rural context, it has maintained rural characteristics including an abundance of drainage ditches, a lack of sidewalks, gravel and asphalt roads, large low density residential lots, and thick natural vegetation. Major roadways providing access to Charleswood include Roblin Boulevard to the north, and Wilkes Avenue to the south. However, there are no collector roads within the community.

Policy Framework

The Winnipeg Charter (section 234) states that secondary plans (such as precinct plans) may be adopted by Council through by-law, so long as the plan is consistent with the City of Winnipeg development plan. OurWinnipeg, the current development plan, is supported by four direction strategies. The Complete Communities strategy is “Winnipeg’s guide to land use and development” (City of Winnipeg, 2011).

In the Complete Communities strategy, there is a section dedicated to development of New Communities. Here, the City has determined several precinct areas to guide the future green field development of the city. Ridgewood South was originally named Precinct Q (figure 1). There are six key directions detailed in the strategy to guide new community development, most relevant to Ridgewood South are:

- “New Communities will increase the opportunities to live, work, learn and play in the same neighbourhood.
- New communities will be developed with complete streets, enabling safe and convenient spaces for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit ridership and motorists to promote physical activity, health and active transportation
- Encourage green development and conserve natural areas to develop new communities in a sustainable manner.
- Reflect local heritage in the development of new communities.”

(City of Winnipeg, 2013, p. 10)



FIGURE 3 | Ridgewood South Precinct Area



FIGURE 4 | OurWinnipeg Development Plan and Complete Communities Strategy

Reason for Plan

Development processes in undeveloped areas of the city, including the rezoning and subdivision process, cannot happen until a secondary plan is in place. While the City has identified precinct areas in the Complete Communities strategy, the actual individual precinct plans are not developed until there is sufficient demand or motive to do so. Local developer, Qualico, owned a significant amount of land within the Precinct Q area and approached Landmark Planning and Design to help put together a plan to propose to City Council. A new councillor for the area was elected in 2010 who, unlike the previous councillor, was seemingly willing to consider new communities so long as community concerns could be addressed and natural areas were preserved to the degree possible (Fuller, 2010). This shift in political perspective presented a positive opportunity to develop the precinct plan with an increased likelihood of Council approval.

Vested Parties

In this project there have been a number of different parties with varying interests and responsibilities, the key parties are highlighted below.

City of Winnipeg

The City is responsible for ensuring development and planning happens in a manner that adheres to regulations and guidelines. Both elected and administrative sides of the city are involved including Council and committees, and several departments such as Planning, Public Works, Parks, and ActiveTransportation. The City will also be responsible for maintenance of the area in the long term.

Developer and Landowners

The developer wants to develop land in a financially feasible manner and timeframe, with minimal risk to having the plan turned down by Council. The developer will also be responsible for providing services to the area the short and medium term. Some land owners may also be interested in developing, but others want the confidence that their community will become a place they can comfortably live, work and play.

General Public and Interest Groups

The general public has been concerned with local character and the long term reputation of the community. In response to the Ridgewood South precinct planning process a group of concerned citizens came together to form the Citizens for Charleswood Habitat Preservation. The key mandate of the group revolves around the preservation of wildlife and natural areas within the precinct. Other involved interest groups include the Friends of Harte Trail and the Charleswood Historical Society.



FIGURE 5 | Local community expressed concerns through signage

Landmark Planning and Design

Landmark was the lead project manager for the precinct plan. The organization also acted as consultant to the developer, partner with the City Planning Department, and collaborator with the landowners, interest groups, and the general public. (Toews, 2017)

Conditions and Considerations

There are a number of subjects to consider throughout the planning process that may impact decision making along the way. In the case of Ridgewood, fragmented ownership was a key consideration. As noted in figure 5, there was a range of individual land owners, over 30 of whom have development potential with parcels over 1 acre. Amongst these land owners and the neighbouring community, Charleswood, the level of knowledge varied which led to an initial lack of trust,



FIGURE 6 | Ridgewood Landowners Map

creating process challenges. From before Charleswood joined the City of Winnipeg very little has changed in the neighbourhood. As a result, there were a number of vacant private properties that had been used in lieu of public parks. This created hesitation and concern amongst the community regarding the preservation of natural lands. The area does have ecologically significant natural areas, regardless of ownership, that needed to be addressed with care (Toews, 2017).

There are also several servicing constraints to consider regarding transportation, and water, wastewater, and land drainage. Charleswood has no collector roads in the neighbourhood. This means there is limited traffic the existing roads can handle, so north/south traffic needed to be minimized and east/west networks and connections promoted to prevent congestion and preserve safety. Charleswood currently uses a drainage ditch system which causes poor drainage for the existing and future community (City of Winnipeg, 2013).

Other key considerations for the project included the community concerns that multi-family development may impact property values, preservation of the local neighbourhood character, and future school enrolment.



FIGURE 7 | Local road with rural character in Charleswood

3.0 / APPROACH + PROCESS

Approach

To achieve meaningful representation from both public and private sectors a partnership was formed between Landmark Planning and Design and the City of Winnipeg Planning Department to oversee design and implementation of public engagement and plan development.

For the consultation process, Landmark uses the Stakeholder Tier System as a tool to identify and work with key stakeholders. The aim of the tool is to engage all stakeholders, particularly those who will be directly impacted by the project should be engaged early, often, and intimately to assist in comprehension, and gaining trust, collaboration and support (Toews, 2013). The system identifies stakeholder groups based on tiers of potential impact (figure 9). Initially, Tier 1 stakeholders included those directly adjacent to the precinct area, those that may be directly impacted by precinct traffic, and those who organized and lobbied for environmental protections (i.e. Citizens for Charleswood Habitat Preservation). Consultation happened through collaboration between the city, consultants, and the community, to enable input and acceptance; and respect and patience for all persons through out to improve community relationships and effectiveness of the process (Toews, 2017).

Process

The first three rounds of public and stakeholder consultation involved over thirty group and individual meetings with landowners, and stakeholder groups

TIER CRITERIA	
TIER 1	Potential direct property impacts (i.e., potential acquisition) and/or has existing direct access to Route 90 section and/or governing jurisdiction (e.g., City of Winnipeg Departments).
TIER 2	Potential indirect property impact and/or business operations in the near vicinity of Route 90 section.
TIER 3	No direct or indirect property impacts anticipated Includes general interests or topic-specific interests. Includes non-jurisdictional governments or agencies.

FIGURE 9 | Stakeholder Tier example from *Plan Canada* article titled "The Stakeholder Tier System", 2013

including government bodies, community groups, and others. Each round of consultation concluded with a public workshop and/or public open house to discuss the ideas and progress made to date and to receive input to help further develop the draft plans and policies for the Ridgewood Precinct area (figure 8) (City of Winnipeg, 2013a).

Some meetings were held with specific stakeholder groups to address specific issues, such as the meetings with the Friends of Harte Trail. The general concern was that the new community would remove parts of, or negatively impact, the trail. By meeting with the Friends of Harte Trail and other stakeholder groups on a regular basis a positive working relationship developed and resulted in established policies that protect and improve Harte Trail, while meeting the needs of other groups.

When the public consultation process was complete, the municipal process began. This included the submission of the precinct plan proposal which was discussed by the local community committee, standing policy committee, and executive policy committee before being presented to City Council.

The proposal was approved by Council, solidifying the Ridgewood Precinct Plan as a by-law. This leads to where the project is now. A long range plan has been created and an ongoing relationship between the community, City, and developer has been strengthened to enable an effective development process and to hold all parties responsible in their own capacities for the best possible buildout of Ridgewood South (Toews, 2017).

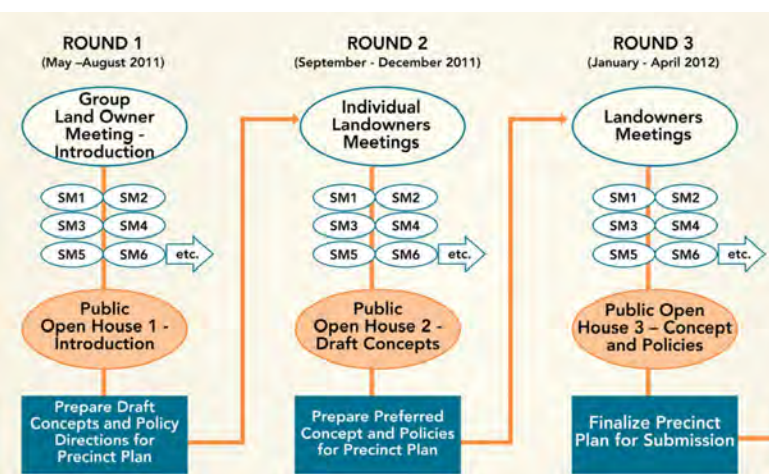


FIGURE 8 | Ridgewood South engagement process

4.0 / OUTCOMES

The planning process for Ridgewood South achieved a number of important outcomes. Firstly, a positive relationship grew between the project partners and the concerned community. Initially the community was so concerned they organized an advocacy group, Citizens for Charleswood Habitat Preservation, to voice concerns regarding the impact potential development may have on the local ecosystem. By the time the project was brought forth to Council, the same group had written a letter of support, and only three people remained in opposition from an initial hundreds. To put the community at ease and to fully understand the ecological significance of the area Native Plant Solutions was hired and put together a detailed biological inventory and recommendations report to advise Qualico and the City on how to proceed with development in an ecologically sensitive manner (Toews, 2017).

Other concerns were addressed through the physical design of the neighbourhood. The plan not only preserves, but in places improves Harte Trail, part of the Trans-Canada Trail. Along with the design of interconnected regional active transportation pathways, an interconnected naturalized wetland network has been proposed to both protect the local environment and improve drainage for the community (figure 10). The land use and road network designs respect the existing character of Charleswood and gracefully integrate the new community. The adjacent areas in Ridgewood South are planned as low density residential, while there are a couple higher density nodes proposed farther south (figure 11). While there are larger

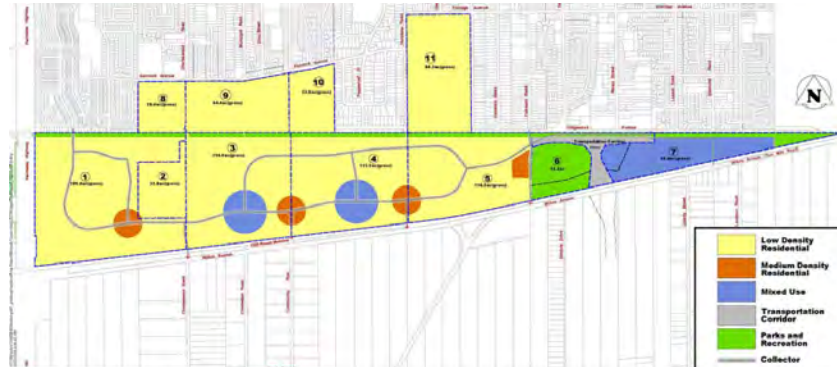


FIGURE 11 | Land Use Map

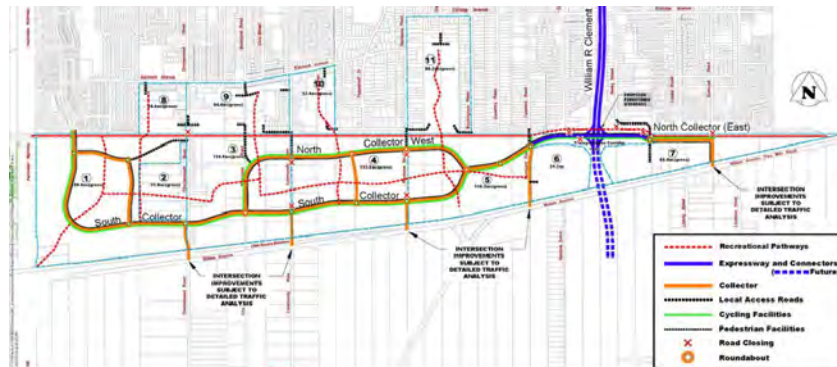


FIGURE 12 | Transportation Map

collector roads proposed for the development, they run exclusively east/west and only local roads link to Charleswood (figure 12) (City of Winnipeg, 2013).

5.0 / LESSONS LEARNED

The planning process used for this project yielded successful engagement and adoption of the precinct plan. The Landmark Planning and Design Team have worked with the City and other key stakeholder groups on a variety of projects since and have used the following lessons learned to better their practice.

Trust Building and Transparency

Communication is a multi-directional engagement, thus it is important to start communication between all potentially involved parties early. The goal of the consultant should be to create a channel for ongoing communication between the remaining parties once their involvement in the project has been completed.

In working alongside the developer, City, and community the consultant can act as an emulsifying agent to



FIGURE 10 | Greenway Network Map

bring the key parties together through collaborative measures instead of acting as a barrier or gatekeeper managing each group individually. By documenting communications and reiterating information to key parties throughout the process a planner can also build trust through transparency. It is also important to consider time as a beneficial factor to building trust. The consultation for this project happened over two years, providing plenty of time to build real relationships with the City, developer, landowners, community, and interest groups.

Diversity

While diversity of opinions, agendas, interest, and goals can prove difficult to manage, the process of effective management can lead to a stronger plan and relationship between involved parties. Initially some stakeholders may stand to benefit, some may feel indifferent, and others may feel imposed upon. By engaging and appreciating all types of stakeholders Landmark was able to satisfy all parties to the greatest degree possible. While some had to make compromises on their positions, it was explained to them exactly why; they were receptive to the news, and appreciated being given the opportunity to be heard and understood. (Toews and Salakoh, 2017)

6.0 / CONCLUSION

What started off as a highly contentious issue and hundreds of opposed community members ended with an approved plan and only three citizens who stood in opposition. The reason why? Early, frequent, and open communication. The engagement process focused heavily on collaboration instead of convincing which lead to a highly informed and highly accepting community. By involving the community in the entire process, the community is given the opportunity to take ownership of the plan and know that their involvement has helped shape the forthcoming community into a place they can comfortably live, work, and play.

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RESOURCES

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Image Resources

Figure 2. Charleswood Sign - 1938. Retrieved from: http://www.seniors.cimnet.ca/p/19C99_51T8029T50T3124T52T8088

Figure 5. Say NO to Ridgewood sign. Retrieved from Landmark Planning. Re-used with Permission.

Figure 7. Local Road in Charleswood. Retrieved from: <https://www.google.ca/maps/@49.8590289,-97.2970032,3a,75y,187.17h,84.95t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sQihlgKn9QjvL-XFcLwpuA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>