

The Role of Planners: The Market Lands Initiative and the involvement of non-planners in the public engagement process



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Consulting with

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ABSTRACT

The Public Safety is a highly contested building due to its historical and architectural significance in a style that is either loved or detested. The brutalist style building was deemed structurally unsound and was decided after many years of debate that it would be less expensive to demolish the Public Safety Building than to try and repair the structurally unsound building. The demolition of the building would leave a huge whole in the centre of the Exchange which is in a stage of revitalization. The City of Winnipeg decided to give Centre Venture Development Corporation the contract to decide what to do with the space. Due to the sensitive nature of the site, public engagement and consultation would be essential. Centre Venture Development Corporation, a firm of City Planners, sent out an Request for Proposal for public consultation that was awarded to Public City Architecture. David Jopling, Manager of Planning, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design at WSP, and President of Manitoba Professional Planners Institute said that planning work should only be done by Registered Professional Planners (RPP.) The intention of this case-in-point is to understand why Centre Venture Development Corporation, an organization that employs Planners, is soliciting the assistance of Public City Architecture to conduct their public consultation.

What is the role of planners?

The original intention of this research into the Market Lands Initiative started out with the public engagement being advertised as a project conducted by Public City Architecture. With such an emphasis on planners doing planners work, the fact that Centre Venture Development Corporation awarded the project to an architect firm was one worth the investigation to find out what the role of a planner really is and when they need to hand of work to other professionals.

David Jopling, Manager of Planning, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Design at WSP, and President of Manitoba Professional Planners Institute said that planning work should only be done by Registered Professional Planners (RPP.) Something within the realm of Planning and included in Planning school is public engagement and public consultation. For the Market Lands Initiative on the former site of the infamous Public Safety Building, the public engagement was conducted by Public City Architecture. Public City Architecture specializes in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban engagement. Centre Venture Development Corporation hired Public City Architecture to conduct the public engagement strategy after Public City Architecture responded and was awarded the RFP for the Market Lands second phase of public engagement.

What are the Market Lands?

The Market Lands are 2.4 acres and is a desirable commercial and growing residential neighbourhood. The Market Lands site is connected to City Hall and the Centennial Concert Hall through underground tunnels and is in close proximity to many offices, shops, entertainment facilities, and homes. In the 1800's, the Market Lands was the site of a downtown public market and a hub for trade and commerce (Centre Venture, 2018).

According to the Downtown Winnipeg Zoning By-Law No. 100/2004, the Market Lands are in the Warehouse Character Sector of the downtown. Uses permitted in the Warehouse Character Sector include, residential, commercial, office, institutional, cultural and parks.

As stated in the Market Lands Urban Design Framework (2018)

The intent of this Sector is:

- *To regulate a compatible mix of use*
- *To ensure that the built form is contextual and complimentary to surroundings*
- *To highlight the importance of urban design review, which further reinforces the existing values of the surrounding built form*
- *To encourage enhanced pedestrian comfort through urban design*

New buildings within the Warehouse Character Sector may not be less than 25 feet (approximately 2 storeys), nor exceed 100 feet in height (approximately 8-10 storeys) without obtaining a Variance. Building setbacks in this Sector are not required – front

and corner side yards can only be a maximum of 5 feet. However, residential uses in this Sector require minimum interior side and rear yards.



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On the site currently sits the Public Safety Building and Civic Parkade. The Public Safety Building in the Exchange District of central Winnipeg is a highly contested building. The brutalist architecture is loved by some and detested by others which only furthered the debate as to what should happen to the building and site after the building was monitored until its closing.

On August 24, 2012, the building was closed to the public. The 400-car parkade was monitored by engineers regularly due to its slowly dwindling structural integrity. The building was deemed unsafe by the engineers and therefore was closed until further notice (CBC News).

In December 2015, the Public Safety Building was deemed unsafe and it was decided that it would be less expensive to demolish the building than it would to repair it. Council decided that the site could go to better use than to the restoration of the buildings (City of Winnipeg).

In April 2016, the City of Winnipeg approved the unique opportunity to improve and design an entire city block in the Downtown of Winnipeg. Centre Venture Development Corporation was tasked with the public engagement which was proposed to include respect for the past as well as a vision for the future (City of Winnipeg).

Architects and advocates for historic buildings strongly opposed the demolition of the building until the bitter end. It was decided that the Public Safety building, after standing on the corner of Princess Ave for over 60 years (CBC News).

What was the role of Public City Architecture and Centre Venture Development Corporation in the Market Lands Initiative project?



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This collaboration on the research into the involvement in organizing the public engagement was a project between Masters of City Planning student at the University of Manitoba, Olivia Michalczuk, and recent graduate from the program and Engagement and Research Specialist at Blueprint Inc., Brad Muller. Johanna Chabluk, MPP and Development Coordinator at Centre Venture Development Corporation was also consulted on the project.

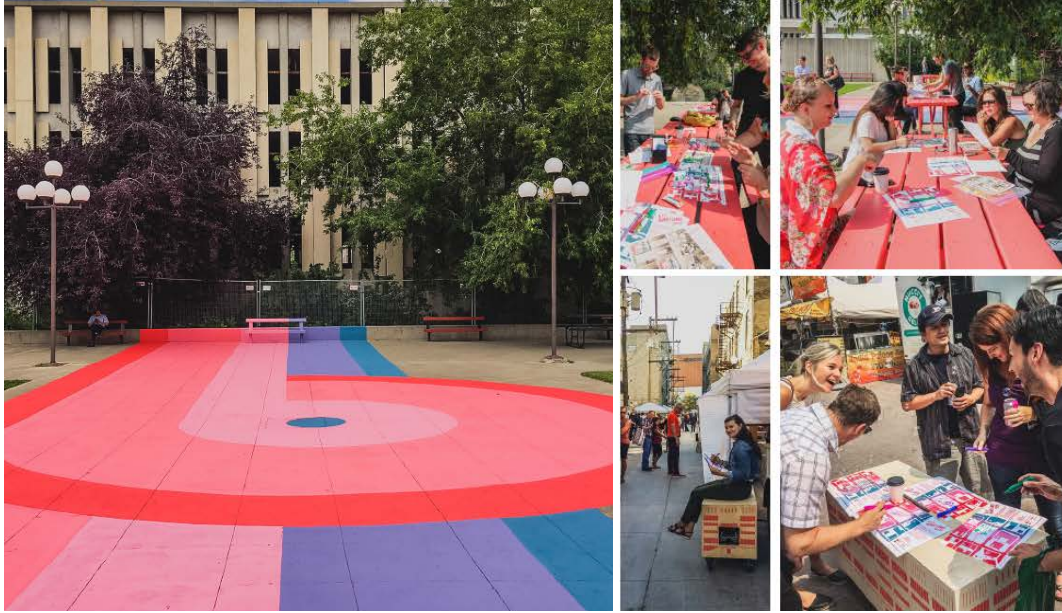
Brad Muller stated that the project wasn't exactly handed off to Public City Architecture and recommended a conversation with Johanna Chabluk about the nature of the relationship between Public City Architecture and Centre Venture Development Corporation. After Centre Venture Development Corporation was charged with leading the public engagement campaign which would inform the Urban Design Guidelines. Centre Venture Development Corporation drafted an RFP which Public City Architecture and Blueprint Inc. submitted a proposal for in partnership. The evaluation criteria and interview questions provided by Johanna Chabluk are available in the appendix. Planning firms did also submit a proposal but they just simply did not score as high as Public City Architecture.

Johanna Chabluk stated that the public engagement process for the Market Lands in fact is being led by planners. Chabluk and CEO of Centre Venture Development Corporation, Angela Mathieson, are planners and graduates of the University of Manitoba. Together they created the process and led the project from its inception. The relationship with Public City Architecture is a partnership. Consultation in the public engagement process was accessed when needed but Chabluk is firm on the fact that this was a planner lead project.

The public engagement process was conducted in three stages. The first phase of engagement resulted in the Guiding Aspirations report. Over 300 Winnipeggers came to the public engagement to participate in the Market Lands Initiative project and many participating in their online engagement portal. 120 stakeholders from the surrounding areas were interviewed in either individual or focus group settings. The stakes for this development are high as there is a high public concern that the project does fit the area and the space is being used to its greatest potential. The five guiding aspirations for the future of the Market Lands that were gathered from the consultations were belonging, destination, authenticity, connectivity, and innovation (Centre Venture Development Corporation, 2017). From there, they developed a framework for evaluating the next step of the engagement process.

The second phase of engagement required an interdisciplinary approach with technical skills in building development, public realm design and public engagement. Centre Venture Development Corporation issued an RFP to members of all design disciplines and public engagement specialists. The process included creating and releasing a public RFP, creating an evaluation process, and gathering an evaluation committee. Teams were shortlisted and interviewed and the winning team was chosen based on the evaluation criteria and interview questions in the appendix. The winning interdisciplinary team was not chosen to take over the public engagement process but to complement the existing team members. The team members from Public City Architecture and Blueprint Inc. included an architect, landscape architect and public engagement specialists. Chabluk states that the team complimented one another and contributed to the reason they were chosen and to the success of the public engagement.

The second phase of public engagement began in June 2017. Bright way finding cues were painted on the site in red, pink, purple, and blue, which have become the brand of the Market Land Initiative. This was designed to take an unused site and “turn it back on.” A shipping container was used as their onsite office/ kiosk and picnic tables and bike racks were put on site to make it easier, safer, and more accessible to engage.



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Public and stakeholder input was gathered in a variety of ways to ensure there was plenty of opportunity to engage in the process. Workshops, charrettes, pop-ups at public events, a media launch, and office hours on the site were some of the forms of engagement. Maps and 3D design kits were used as a fun and attractive way to engage. Staff would also ask questions about the site to engage with stakeholders which started with very broad questions which they slowly refined in to more specific questions which they recorded and used to inform their urban design guide which is available to the public online.



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Conclusion

Centre Venture Development Corporation was tasked with a large and highly contested project with a strong emotional attachment to Winnipeggers. Though Centre Venture Development Corporation was capable of conducting a public engagement individually, they decided to ask for assistance from an outside source to create a complimentary and complete team. Though planning firms did respond to the RFP, Public City Architecture was the best fit for the team and had ideas that would create a more holistic approach to engagement. At no point did Centre Venture Development Corporation hand off the project to another firm and there was always a collaborative partnership between all the firms involved. This project did not involve non-planners doing planners work but rather involved planners soliciting ideas and assistance from a firm with ideas and methods that would get the best results for the Market Lands site.

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Appendix A

Market Lands Interview Questions

1. What do you feel are the top three opportunities for the future of the Market Lands property? How could these opportunities be addressed by your design approach?
2. What do you think the Project's most significant challenges are? Why? How can these challenges be mitigated and addressed through your approach to the Project?
3. What methods have you used to date to engage the public and stakeholders in high-profile public sector urban design projects? What were the outcomes, lessons learned, etc.? How do you propose to involve the public and stakeholders throughout the design process?
4. What sets your team apart from others, making you the most qualified and suitable to deliver the Project?
5. Do you have any questions of CentreVenture?

Appendix B

Evaluation Criteria

Firm/Team: _____

Project Understanding

/ 25

- Consultants understand the scope of the project and needs of the client
- Consultants understand the project constraints/opportunities
- Consultants understand client expectations of collaboration, timeline, etc.
- Consultants understand the reporting structure of the project

Experience and Qualifications of Team

/ 40

- Related project experience
- Strength and interdisciplinary qualifications of team
- Management approach, project methodology
- Schedule, timeline, availability, etc.
- Innovation, creativity in proposed methods
- Specialization applicable to this project
- References

Overall Impression

/ 35

- Ability to clearly express ideas
- Organization of team for interview/presentation
- Ability/past experience working with client
- Communications/listening skills
- Ability to be flexible and adaptable
- Response to, "Why should we select your team?"

Total:

_____ / 100

Notes: