



## Case-in-Point 2023

# NIVERVILLE AS A SMART GROWTH CITY

## Niverville's development plan 5 years later

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### 1.0 Background and Context

Niverville is a town in Manitoba, just 40 minutes south of the centre of Winnipeg. The community began in the late 1800s when Mennonites settled in the area (Town of Niverville, 2020a). It remained a small unincorporated community until 1969, when it officially became a village (Town of Niverville, 2020a). The village grew slowly, and in 1991 it gained Town

status with a population of 1,530 (Town of Niverville, 2020a). Growth has since greatly accelerated, and the population has more than tripled in just over 30 years. Between the 2016 Census and the 2021 Census, the town grew by 29%; due to this, it currently holds the title of being the province's fastest-growing community (Town of Niverville, 2020a).

The town has heavily invested in infrastructure and services in the last two decades because of its growth rate. Projects

include a primary care centre, personal care home, a new high school, a new water treatment plant, and an industrial park (Town of Niverville, 2020a). The town will continue to grow, with population estimates ranging from 9,000 to 14,000 by 2045 (Town of Niverville, 2018). Many new Niverville residents are not working in the community but commuting into Winnipeg. A 2017 study concluded that approximately 41% of residents in the workforce commuted into Winnipeg versus approximately 40% who stayed within Niverville, and approximately 19% commuted to other surrounding communities (Enns, 2017). Due to these statistics, one could conclude that Niverville is a bedroom community. A bedroom community is a community without any significant industries or employers and is located near a larger population or employment centre where many residents work.

The town developed and adopted a new development plan to accommodate the influx of residents that Niverville is experiencing. The purpose of the development plan is to inform and guide development within the town, ensuring sufficient land is available and that development is occurring sustainably. The success of this plan and Niverville as a smart growth city will be evaluated using the United States Environment Protection Agency's Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities. While this document is for the US, it can be applied to Niverville. The document's purpose is to use a simple "yes"/"no" style questionnaire to determine where there might be gaps in a community's strategies and plans and what has been implemented by other communities to fill those gaps.

## 2.0 Facts of the Case

The Town of Niverville's Development Plan is a 48-page document detailing the town's current conditions, goals, and plans.

*Niverville is on track to be Manitoba's next city, reaching a population of 9,000 - 14,000 people by 2045*

- Town of Niverville, 2020a

The plan acknowledges that the town is growing rapidly and that development will occur. The plan states that if infill and multifamily development is prioritized, the town will have sufficient land to accommodate most projected growth scenarios (Town of Niverville, 2018). The document assumes there will be sufficient land within town limits



Fig 2. Niverville Aerial View. From the Empire-Advance, 2021

to accommodate population growth, and the plan is written based on that assumption. However, it also notes that for land available for sufficient housing, annexation from adjacent areas may be needed (Town of Niverville, 2018). With the anticipated growth, the city has addressed the need for future school expansions, including a future francophone school (Town of Niverville, 2018). If annexation is required, the town has identified areas where this may be possible. The lands north of the town, east of the town, and west of the industrial park are possibilities (Town of Niverville, 2018).

*Ground is going to be broken on a \$30,000,000 film studio this summer bringing up to 300 jobs to the community*

- Dow, 2023

Currently, not all buildings are connected to municipal water within the town. Moving forward, the town wishes for all buildings to be connected to municipal water and has proposed multiple strategies to do so. Possible solutions include mandatory municipal water hook-up for new development and a mandatory transition for

town wishes to increase local employment opportunities and proposes encouraging home-based and small businesses (Town of Niverville, 2018). As for transportation, some identified priorities are within the plan. System connectivity and compatibility are essential, and new developments should be constructed such that they are easily accessible by both road and through active transportation. The town's main commercial corridor, Main St, is a major provincial road creating a delicate situation wherein the needs of commercial tenants must be balanced with the efficiency at which people and goods are moved along the road. Railroads are common in Southern Manitoba and produce safety concerns, amongst other adverse effects. It is crucial that development be buffered and setback from rail corridors (Town of Niverville, 2018).

Niverville is in the Red River Valley, which is at risk for flooding, especially as climate change affects the frequency and severity of floods (Town of Niverville, 2018). The town aims to minimize the risk of flooding while reducing the risk of water contamination and preserving and creating wildlife habitats (Town of Niverville, 2018). They intend to do this by requiring flood protection plans for development outside of the town's dike and through ground and surface water protection strategies.

existing development (Town of Niverville, 2018). Continuous development and infill will be encouraged to reduce the costs of servicing new developments (Town of Niverville, 2018). This type of development is cheaper for the town as extending services to developments "leapfrog" development is expensive (Town of Niverville, 2018).

One problem the town is experiencing is its low job growth compared to its population growth, which creates problems for creating a stable tax base as most of the municipal revenue comes from residential property taxes (Town of Niverville, 2018). The

The development plan has extensive land use policies covering multiple development areas such as industrial, commercial neighbourhood, parks and open space, and town centre. Common themes across these development areas include creating welcoming spaces for folks of all demographics to live, work, and enjoy at all times of the year, creating a vibrant, connected small-town feel for the community, ensuring affordable yet high-quality development, and preserving and improving community services and the environment (Town of Niverville, 2018).



Fig 3. Niverville Sign. From the Niverville Heritage Dental Centre, 2022

### 3.0 Outcomes

Since establishing the development plan in 2018, the town's population has grown. As of the 2021 Census, it has a population of 5,947 people, making it well on its way to becoming Manitoba's next city once it reaches a population of 7,500 (Statistics Canada, 2023; Province of Manitoba, 2023). Due to its continued growth, the town has decided to act upon annexation and expand its footprint. While not fully approved yet, the town is in the process of annexing 2,600 acres of land from the neighbouring RM of Hanover; this will roughly double the geographic size of the town should the deal occur (Buffie, 2023). There are concerns with the annexation around the loss of farmland as the proposed lands are used for agriculture. These concerns were why a previous proposal to annex 1,100 acres in 2017 was denied (Buffie, 2023). While the annexation is in progress, the town still grows within its current limits. The number of residential building permits fell in 2022, which could be caused by outside factors such as high building costs and interest rates; however, in 2021 and 2022 combined, there were 108 approved single-family home permits and 102 units of multi-family housing approved (Loewen, 2022).

To address concerns about the provision of municipal services, the town produced a document called Town of Niverville Standards for Design and Construction of Public Works in 2019 (Town of Niverville, 2020b). They require all new development, including infill, to be connected to the town's municipal water system and outline the specifications for the connections (Town of Niverville, 2020b). To help prevent flooding, drainage systems must be constructed to the same standards as Winnipeg, which includes the

requirement for all new developments to provide storage on-site for stormwater to the level of a 1 in 25 storm (Town of Niverville, 2020b).

Progress has occurred to increase local employment opportunities. There have been some major expansions in the industrial and commercial sectors in recent years. The number of high-value commercial/industrial permits has quadrupled between 2021 and 2022 from three to 12 (Loewen, 2022). Expansion is occurring in the business park, and new lots are being opened up for commercial enterprises (Loewen, 2022). An exciting new project is in the works for the town that will potentially bring 300 new jobs to the area (Dow, 2023). The project is a 30-million-dollar movie and television studio set to begin building this summer (Dow, 2023).

### 4.0 Lessons Learned

#### Low Density Housing vs High Density Housing in a Rural Setting

There is an emerging trend where the communities with the highest growth are located outside but close to larger population centres, demonstrating a growing preference for suburban and bedroom community living. Niverville promotes its rural and small-town feel that appears to be a significant drawing factor for many Winnipeg ex-pats. Often one of the draws for the suburban and exurban lifestyle is large lots and single-family homes. This creates a delicate balancing act for the development plan as its policies seek to increase its density through infill and multifamily development while catering to

those who want the large lot rural lifestyle. The development plan contains several policies regarding the high priority to encourage infill and higher-density housing. This indicates that the Town and its residents want more than just larger lots with single-family homes. The top three reasons residents moved to Niverville were that it is a good place to raise a family, affordable housing, and a good community atmosphere of safety (Enns, 2018). The fourth reason people moved to Niverville was the want for more property space (Enns, 2018). If affordable housing and strong social connections are the primary reasons that individuals choose to relocate there, then Niverville exemplifies that complete communities can occur in rural areas.

## **Small Town Main Streets and Provincial Highways**

A great number of towns in Rural Manitoba contain a main street that is also deemed a Provincial Highway. Niverville is no exception, with PR 311 running East-West through and cutting through the development plan land designations of the Town Centre and Commercial Corridor. Smart Growth and Complete Communities principles aim to encourage a clustering mixture of land uses along a main street corridor to create a walkable neighbourhood. While policies exist that encourage this in the development plan, there are also policies regulating highway safety by decreasing the number of access points along the Provincial Highway. It can be difficult to promote pedestrian-friendly development by locating buildings closer to the street, while also adhering to setbacks imposed by Manitoba Highways. This is but another balancing act that Niverville, and other Manitoban Towns, are required to bear in order to achieve their

development plan policies of creating a complete community in a rural area, where the main streets are also main transportation routes.

## **Limited Transportation Options Equals More Parking Required**

One of the shortcomings of the development plan is the emphasis on automobiles and parking. The town has high parking minimums, which actively works against creating a compact, walkable city, one multifamily development was even denied multiple times until it could account for two parking spots per dwelling (Steinbach Online, 2019). As noted above, some of the town's main streets are Provincial Highways which causes high expectations for traffic efficiency, which makes the emphasis on designated parking in commercial and residential areas understandable. While Niverville is still a town, it is quickly approaching city status and could emphasize compact development and active transportation more heavily. Reducing parking minimums and introducing stricter road diets could help achieve this. With approximately 41% of the workforce being employed in Winnipeg, looking at ways to connect residents of Niverville with the Winnipeg Rapid Transit Station at St Norbert would reduce some of the emissions produced by individual automobiles. It may be possible to construct a park-n-ride facility at the St. Norbert Transit Station to facilitate people being able to transfer to transit. A community rideshare program for commuters could also be an option for the town.

# Difficulties of Regulating Planned Unit Developments in Rural Communities

A planned unit development or “PUD” is a type development wherein a developer can develop a large piece of land with more flexibility than the existing zoning by-law may typically allow (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). While a PUD benefits the developer it can also have benefits for the municipality as they can have extra requirements for developers to contribute to infrastructure or designate greenspace (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). The challenges with a “PUD” in a rural setting as small municipalities may not have the staff to appropriately negotiate contracts, it can also have negative impacts on agricultural lands, environmental standards are often not as enforced (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). In Niverville large sections of development happening it will be vital for the community to managed PUDs to make sure they fit with the goals with community goals and provide benefits.

## Conclusion

Taking the development plan into consideration and comparing it the Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities checklists Niverville would qualify as a Smart Growth city because it has taken many steps to revitalize its town centre through infill and housing cluster while also taking steps to upgrade its walkability and other infrastructure. There is still things that can be improved on such as the town’s parking requirements, however, its future as Manitoba’s next city looks bright.

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*Appendix A. Niverville's Smart Growth City Check List*

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Adopted?</b>	<b>Add or Improve?</b>
<b>Goal 1: Revitalize Village and Town Centers</b>		
Do development policies provide incentives for infill development?	X	
Are financing mechanisms available to promote development in village and town centers?		Add
Do plans and policies support constructing or relocating municipal buildings in village and town centers?	X	
Do plans and policies promote efficient use of infrastructure?	X	
Do plans and policies support infill development?	X	
<b>Goal 2: Strengthen the local economy</b>		
Is economic development adequately covered in communitywide and comprehensive plans?	X	Improve
Is there an inventory of local products, recourse, or areas prime for development?		Add
<b>Goal 3: Engage and connect community members</b>		
Do planning documents or local government policies support development of community-shared spaces?	X	
Do planning processes or government policies promote community engagement?	X	Improve
<b>Goal 4: Improve health and promote active living</b>		
Do local officials perform studies to identify, analyse and reduce health threats?	X	Improve
Do policies support community collaboration on plans, investments and policies?		Add
Are plans in place that support and improve walking and bicycling?	X	
<b>Goal 5: Protect natural habitats and ecosystems</b>		
Does the local government provide incentives to landowners to conserve land?		Add
Are there policies to create designated growth areas and preserve rural areas?	X	Improve
Are there cleanup or restoration requirements to preserve or restore biological diversity?	X	
Are there regional and local green infrastructure investments?	X	
<b>Goal 6: Support productive agriculture for a variety of markets</b>		
Are systems in place to support informed decisions on agricultural preservation?	X	
Are there financial incentives for preserving agricultural lands?		Add
Are there marketing strategies or policies to support local agriculture?		Add
<b>Goal 7: Meeting housing needs for different ages and incomes</b>		
Do new development for older adults consider access to everyday needs?		Add
Are there programs to inventory locations of new affordable housing developments?		Add
Does the local government encourage more rental housing to meet demand?	X	
<b>Goal 8: Preserve historic and cultural resources</b>		
have significant historic or cultural features been identified?	X	
<b>Goal 9: Provide transportation choices</b>		
Do planning documents call for the integration of multimodal improvements in all infrastructure projects?	X	Improve
Do planning documents identify priority areas for multimodal improvements?	X	
Do planning documents make connections between land development and transportation?	X	Improve
<b>Goal 10: Invest in efficient public infrastructure systems and operations</b>		
Do policies direct development to areas with existing infrastructure and away from environmentally sensitive areas?	X	
<b>Goal 11: Use energy efficiently and provide renewable energy</b>		
Do land use plans and policies support compact development and redevelopment of existing town centers?	X	
Does the local government promote and monitor energy efficiency?	X	Improve

(United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015)