

Place-Privileging Infill Development Planning

When Place is Personal for the Planner-Developer



Abstract

With OurWinnipeg - Winnipeg's latest comprehensive plan - coming into effect in 2011, infill development became a major focus to accommodate growth in the City of Winnipeg. The result was a policy encouraging intensification in existing neighbourhoods, allowing developers and homeowners the option to divide oversized lots into smaller sections for resale and redevelopment. Infill development can add density to a neighbourhood; however, change in a neighbourhood needs to be sensitive to the surrounding area.

When the planning and design of infill development occurs from within the community - by a planner who lives in the community - what kind of development emerges and what particular outcomes are created? How might the results be more compatible with and sensitive to the neighbourhood context, when the planner is of the place being developed? This case-in-point looks at how one Winnipeg planner is reshaping the very neighbourhood in which he lives through infill development. What might be learned about how this infill model could be applied in other development contexts?

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Original house on Perth Avenue (middle); new house built after subdivision (left)

“The houses that were being built did not respect the character of the existing houses in this mature neighbourhood.”

Background

The very first section of OurWinnipeg describes the need to offer “choices from traditional, single-family neighbourhoods to more dense forms of urban housing...” (p. 25). This has led planners and councillors with the City of Winnipeg to make infill development a priority, especially within what the OurWinnipeg’s Complete Communities document calls “mature neighbourhoods” (p. 11). These types of neighbourhoods are characterized by their older housing stock with low densities, networks of gridded streets and having access to a “full range of municipal services” (p. 82). Mature communities are praised for their “completeness”, and the OurWinnipeg document states that the preservation of the existing character of these neighbourhoods while increasing density and hous-

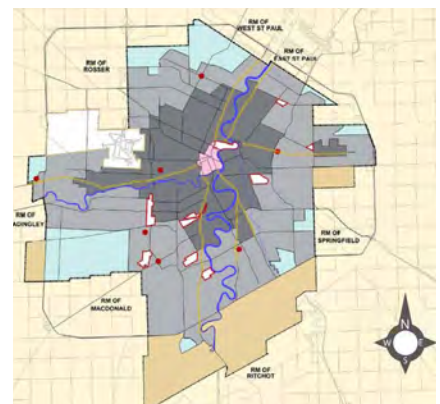
ing choices will be a challenging but important task.

Facts & Actions

In West Kildonan, one of the neighbourhoods classified by OurWinnipeg as being a “mature neighbourhood”, David Jopling, a planner by profession, is experimenting with infill development as a hobby. Buying older homes on large lots, he is able to either split or subdivide the lot into two parcels. The original house is then renovated as necessary and sold or rented; while the newly created lot either has a new house built or is sold for future development.

The idea stemmed from his dislike of the style and appearance of existing infill developments in his neighbourhood. The houses that were being built did not respect the character of the existing houses in

this mature neighbourhood: some homes did not have a front door to the street and were clad in stucco. In contrast, the houses David built incorporated a front porch offering the new homeowner an area to sit and visit with their neighbours and was designed to match the style of housing in the area, with a variety of textures and angled roof lines that add visual appeal.



Winnipeg’s communities

LEGEND

Downtown	Regional Mixed Use Centre	Recent Communities
Major Redevelopment Sites	Regional Mixed Use Corridor	Rural and Agricultural
New Communities	Mature Communities	Airport Area



Newly constructed 164 Perth Ave.

David used his local knowledge from living in the community to strengthen his neighbourhood. The first house built was a 1200 ft², two storey, three bedroom home on a 25 foot wide lot. The intent was to encourage young families with children to move in, as the neighbourhood school has seen declining enrolment in recent years. Many of the existing houses in the area have older residents which limits the opportunity for new families to move in. Without having young families move into the neighbourhood, existing resources such as the school have a smaller population base to draw from, reducing their efficiency.

In less than two years, David has bought four homes in West Kildonan and three in other neighbourhoods; those have since been transformed into thirteen properties. It hasn't always been without opposition, however. Many residents feel a 25 foot lot is not large

enough upon which to build a house, and they argue that infill housing promotes low income residents moving into the neighbourhood. In reality, a 25 foot lot is similar to many lots in older neighbourhoods, and although infill homes are relatively more affordable than homes in a new subdivision, infill homes built in older, mature neighbourhoods like West Kildonan provide more energy efficient options in a similar price range as existing homes.

Outcomes

Being a developer and a planner from within the community has allowed the developments to maintain sensitivity to the character of the neighbourhood. This has increased the property tax base, added new energy to the streets, young families to support local schools and resources, and increased property value in the neighbourhood - all of

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New house constructed on Perth Ave.

which benefit both the city and the residents. Developers typically do not have direct ties to the lands upon which they build; however this is not the case in this situation. Being FROM the community makes David a developer FOR the community; his best interests protect those of his neighbours. His desire is to eventually generate enough income to buy a larger urban infill property to develop an “Eco-Village” that can become a new precedent for sustainable infill development.

Lessons Learned

Infill development requires significant capital and does not necessarily have significant returns, especially because construction and renovations are outsourced. Doing the development is much different from planning the development. It has provided some insight into the economic side of planning, to which plan-

ners do not characteristically focus much of their attention when making plans. Acquiring properties takes time and patience, therefore simply sitting on properties, paying property taxes while waiting for other properties to become available is an expensive undertaking. This also lessens the ability of the developer to be more creative in the design of the properties, since developments must be quickly sold or rented to ensure some of the costs associated with the development are recouped.

Although David focuses his development work in his own neighbourhood, residents are often against his proposed projects due to the words 'density' and 'small lot' being included in the proposal. NIM-BYism is a difficult stigma to overcome, especially when housing types different from the neighbourhood norm are introduced. Establishing design guidelines to ensure new housing maintains some consistency with its neighbours could be the next step for

planners in supporting infill development.

Planning for infill at the urban fringe

The process of splitting and subdividing lots makes for successful infill development projects, although not all properties can apply this model. How can planners 'plan' for future infill development and where is the appropriate place to apply it? Dwellings situated on large lots are commonly centred on the site, creating a difficulty when attempting to split the lot. However, with a better plan at the onset, residential developments could leave room for future infill developments. In new rural residential developments at the urban fringe, large lots are and still can be the norm, so long as there is an allowance for future division of each lot once municipal services and infrastructure are provided. This allowance creates the possibility for not only infill development, but future parks and public spaces. Residents would have the opportunity to

split or subdivide their property and sell one portion to either another developer or the municipality to be developed for the benefit of the community.

Conclusion

With planning staffs in Winnipeg becoming increasingly supportive of infill development, especially in neighbourhoods designated as 'mature'; developers can take advantage by focusing their work in areas with well-established infrastructure, services and amenities. One Winnipeg planner is doing exactly that in his own neighbourhood; changing his neighbourhood while being sensitive to the existing character as a community stakeholder. This case study shows the opportunity that exists for communities and homeowners residing on oversized lots; an opportunity that was more difficult before the implementation of OurWinnipeg, and that can now be applied to urban fringe areas.



Newly constructed house on Perth Ave.

References

City of Winnipeg (2011). *OurWinnipeg*.

Images

page 1, left: *OurWinnipeg* (2011)

page 2, bottom right: *OurWinnipeg Complete Communities* (2011)

All other images from own collection