

Bridging Connections:

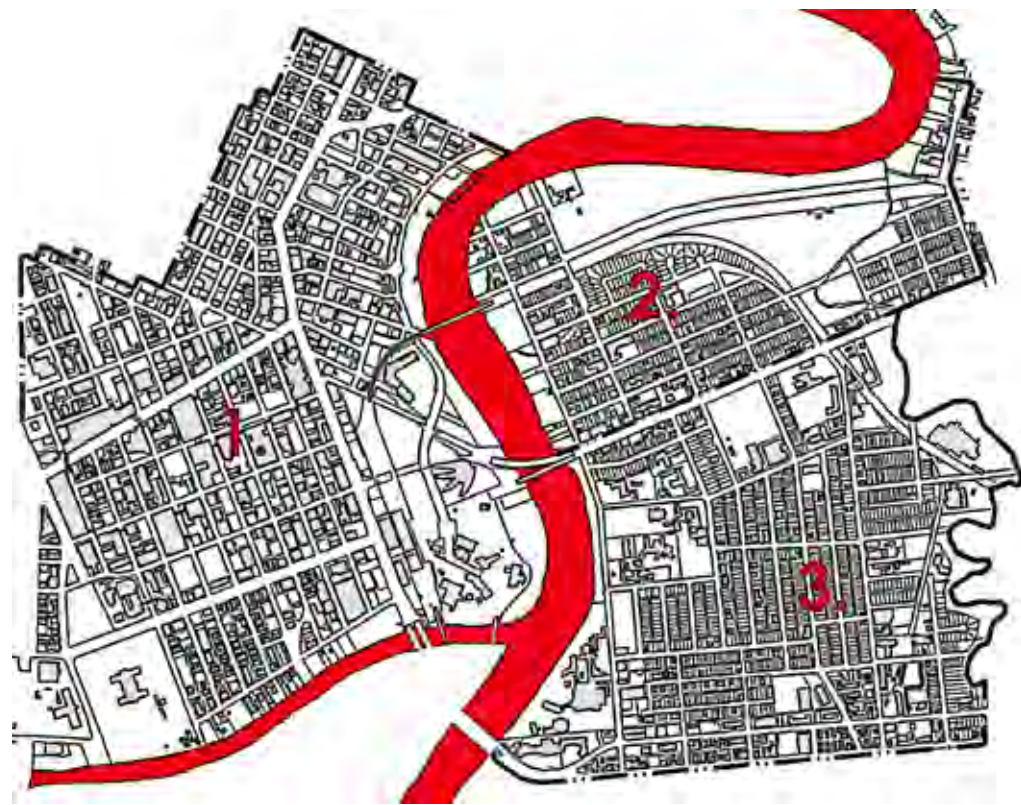
*an exploration of the
Provencher Bridge, Esplanade Riel
collaborative planning process*



Abstract

*Alexis Miller,
MCP Candidate
University of Manitoba
in collaboration with
Susan Freig, MCP
Owner and Principal,
Freig and Associates*

Collaborative planning is not standard practice. The Provencher bridge redevelopment is a model example of comprehensive collaborative planning, and a seminal piece for Winnipeg's municipal infrastructure projects. Susan Freig, MCP, was awarded the opportunity to implement the best public consultation process she could design. This was no tabula rasa; misgivings, misinformation and tension between St. Boniface and the City of Winnipeg branded this project as contentious. As such, a comprehensive collaborative planning process was created, rooted in relationship building, knowledge sharing and trust. It focused on an open, honest and transparent course of action while ensuring the public were given the information they needed to make an informed decision. Consultation methods were unique and sensitive to the needs of stakeholders involved, provided a dissemination of information and gave both the affected and broader community the power to be heard. What resulted from this community driven process exceeded anyone's expectations; the creation of an icon: the Esplanade Riel.



Alexis Miller in collaboration with Susan Freig

Map: communities consulted in the process, (1) Downtown (2) North St. Boniface (3) St. Boniface

Background: *an ordinary beginning?*

A Provencher Bridge, Esplanade Riel collaborative planning process resulted from the City of Winnipeg's need to rehabilitate or redevelop the Provencher Bridge in the mid 1990's. In dire need of repair, the City initiated a predetermined plan that antagonized and alienated community members in St. Boniface, Winnipeg's French quarter. Consequently, the project ground to a halt and tensions between St. Boniface and the City branded the project as contentious. Community members had no trust in the City; this fractured relationship was the basis upon which a comprehensive collaborative planning process began.

The City wanted a clean slate and to move forward in a manner that was acceptable for affected publics. As such, a successful consultation process had to not only address, but also alleviate suspicions and empower the community members of St. Boniface to become actively engaged in the project.



Facts:

a course of action emerges

In June of 1996, Susan Freig, owner and Principal at Freig and Associates completed an extensive community profile on the Provencher Bridge Project for the City of Winnipeg. Downtown and St. Boniface were thoroughly outlined to provide the foundation and context for a planning and public consultation process (Freig, 1996). This work, a balanced understanding of both the quantitative and qualitative attributes of each community, highlighted the need for these communities to become partners in the planning process. In addition, it was noted that the schism between St. Boniface and the City of Winnipeg extended well beyond the Provencher Bridge project; it was embedded in cultural rivalries from an earlier time in history (Freig, 1996). The community profile provided a historical perspective and brought to light the idea that this project could be bigger than the bridge itself, it was viewed as a potential catalyst for further neighbourhood improvements. Interviews with St. Boniface community organizations were conducted, an uncommon practice in typical community profiles, to gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge about and the attitudes towards the project. This process provided valuable insights as to how community members could be engaged and established consultation priorities.



“A planning and consultation process that emphasizes substantive, constructive public input for a project that is technically, socially, politically and financially acceptable, would enable the community to make a tangible contribution to the development of their community”.

Two years later, Susan was awarded the opportunity to design and implement a public consultation process. Building on her previous work in the community profile, a year long comprehensive, mixed methods approach to community engagement was created. Consultation methods on this project were designed specifically with a focus on the range of affected publics, notably:

- St. Boniface residents, businesses and community organizations
- Downtown residents, businesses and community organizations
- City-wide general public
- Provincial interests
- Media
- Politicians (Freig, 1996, p. 30).

A communications plan and brand was established to create “immediate public recognition for the project and its related print materials” (Freig, 1999, p. 2). Each tactic centered on the specific stakeholders involved. Bilingual surveys, newsletters, newspaper advertisements, open houses, site visit, a project hotline and the creation of a project advisory committee (PAC) were established. These strategies provided a dissemination of information and gave both the affected and broader city communities the power to speak and to be heard. Information was distributed to 18,000 homes and businesses, over 700 people attended the open houses and 1575 people responded to surveys. Conducted in April 1999, the surveys highlighted practical considerations in keeping or replacing the bridge; responses indicated that the general public reinforced the opinions of the affected publics.

The majority was in favour of replacing rather than rehabilitating Provencher Bridge (Prairie Research Associates, 1999). Furthermore, the results indicated that two alternatives were strongly favoured: the New Paired bridges and the New Conventional bridge options. Survey’s were provided to enrich the planning process for both PAC members and for City Council consideration (Freig, 1999). The PAC, 16 individuals representing 15 St. Boniface, Downtown and community wide stakeholder groups participated in ten three hour meetings from October 1998-May 1999. These meetings produced a near unanimous consensus to recommend the New Paired bridges alternative to City Council (Freig, 1999). This option was approved and resulted in a \$68 million dollar development sponsored by all three levels of government.



Image: Paired bridges: Provencher Bridge (curved) and Esplanade Riel (straight)

Actions & Interactions:

moving forward

The ultimate goal of the participation process was to create a meaningful, open, honest and transparent dialogue where community members could participate knowing their input mattered. Additionally, the process was designed to integrate transportation planning with community planning by taking into account social, economic, environmental, land use and technical data (Freig, 1999). Community members were outlined as partners in the community profile and treated as such as PAC members. A key feature was knowledge sharing within the PAC and beyond. Each individual on the PAC was a representative of and responsible to the external organizations they were a part of.

Interviewing potential key stakeholders from over 45 community groups enabled Susan to gauge their perceptions and willingness to participate in the process. Despite negative attitudes and distrust in the City of Winnipeg, community members were receptive and ready to get involved. Community stakeholders were joined on the PAC by the City of Winnipeg Public works and Planning dept; consultants were understood to be resources only (Freig, 1999).

The PAC created guiding principles that revolved around knowledge, communication and respect of differing opinions. A facilitator was hired to support the agenda of each meeting, which were organized in four phases to ensure the breadth of knowledge on the project was shared and understood before moving forward. The first phase involved background information, the second to determine goals, the third to select bridge alternatives and the fourth to make a recommendation based upon their knowledge, information sharing and broad public input (Freig, 1999). The goals prioritized in phase two included: fiscal responsibility, culture and heritage, aesthetics and economic development. In relation to phase three, it is important to note that Wardrop Engineering's bridge alternatives were based upon the four conceptual alternatives developed by the PAC. It is uncommon for the public to guide the engineering process.

As aforementioned, consultants were considered resources, making this a genuine endeavor to foster a community driven collaborative approach. It was noted that the PAC were :

“pleased, not just with the outcome of the process, but that they were part of a new approach to public consultation on public works projects- one that offered public input at the earliest opportunity and created the circumstances for the public to participate with the fullest level of knowledge”.

Emile Chartier, artist, activist, long time resident and former president of the Old St. Boniface Residents Association and PAC member, reflected the above sentiments during an informal interview session. He felt as though the meetings were efficient and prompt; the atmosphere and discussions were open and fair (they had stuck to their guiding principles) and he did not consider the committee to have been bought. Being an active community member and engaging with many different organizations throughout his life, he acknowledged that sometimes one knows when people have made decisions before entering a meeting; this was not the case in this process.



Image: Landmark within a landmark, Salisbury House on the Esplanade Riel



Image: Esplanade Riel reconnecting to Broadway

Also, he was pleasantly surprised at the level of detail in the design selection process. Not only did the PAC come up with the conceptual alternatives, they made design decisions on almost everything, including lighting standards. He appreciated the amount of information that was shared; even minor specifics were shared and explained. Emile asserted that people who hold or run meetings have a propensity (whether they are aware of it or not) to intimidate people; it's important not to intimidate your guests. During the PAC process he perceived everyone to be on the same page, there were no intimidation or hierarchy during the meetings. Speaking from his own experience, he was proud of and believer in the collaborative consultation process.

Outcomes: *extraordinary results?*

What began as the contentious redevelopment of the Provencher Bridge ended with an extraordinary process and extraordinary results. The collaborative planning process with the PAC in conjunction with the mixed methods approach to public consultation exceeded everyone's expectations. It was far more successful than ever thought possible. Susan was pleased by the unity between such a diverse group of stakeholders (Freig, 1999). Amazingly, one member of the PAC identifies as a community planner in relation to this project. The engineers involved were exposed to a community driven process and a broader range of planning issues; this may not have occurred in a typical consultation. However, in exposing the "bigger planning picture" to the PAC, some members saw this as an opportunity to discuss other issues outside the scope of the project. Provencher Boulevard was infused with investment after construction of the Esplanade Riel; it was a catalyst for revitalization. The pedestrian bridge was named after Louis Riel, a symbolic gesture since he is thought to represent the tensions that define Canadian history. This is a rather appropriate way to unify the communities on either side of the Red River.

A respect for history is an integral part of the design as the bridge reestablishes previously severed link to Broadway. It has become a gathering place for local residents and tourists alike; the bridge is now a Winnipeg icon appearing regularly in media and marketing material, on blogging sites and Flickr. It was even made into a film entitled "Crossing the Red". Susan was awarded a Transportation Association of Canada Medal as well as the International City County Management Program Excellence Award for Citizen Engagement. Lastly, the client (the City) was supportive of the entire process and was not afraid, even though it could have opened the door more than what they were prepared to deliver or pay for. No one on the PAC anticipated a restaurant on the Esplanade Riel, as such, to install washroom facilities in the middle of the bridge cost one million dollars! It was completed, but this situation was brought to light after the fact and slightly tainted all the hard work done by the PAC. Regardless of this hiccup, the project is a model example of the power of authentic collaboration.



Lessons Learned:

where to go from here...

True collaboration only occurs when every stakeholder believes in and is committed to the process, including the client. Both the time and money involved in designing and administering a comprehensive collaborative planning process must be viewed as a worthwhile endeavor. If a collaborative approach was taken initially with this project, the results from the first redevelopment efforts may have produced something different; rather than St. Boniface community members derailing the project. Never underestimate a well-organized community with clout. When the project was resurrected, establishing trust within the community was vitally important. Susan and her firm needed to emphasize independence from both the City and the engineering firm; this was key in resolving suspicion, garnering support for a collaborative process and beginning from a neutral position.



Planners should not be viewed as simply cogs in a bureaucratic wheel. Other key factors included representing oneself with honesty and integrity. Being human and showing that you are not immune to mistakes and that you are committed to fairness while respecting other people's time and points of view. Genuinely listening, fostering an atmosphere of openness and inclusiveness in each meeting, ensuring your guests are comfortable. A good process is one that is facilitated, so all members have the opportunity to speak and be heard, knowing that their opinions matter and that their time is being used wisely.

It's vital to be aware of power dynamics and to even the playing field in groups when needed. Emile Chartier reiterated this idea as well. Politics are always present and in relation to the PAC, some of its members had relationships already, and not all of them positive. Although they may have put their differences aside for this project, little things such as seating arrangements could have caused tension. Food is an obvious must have at community meetings, but pre-arranged seating arrangements may not be a good idea. In addition, it should be noted that not everyone likes process. As planners, and as this case-in-point highlights, a good process is paramount to building a successful project.

Image: Looking East towards St. Boniface

Being transparent with people may involve a dialogue surrounding the process, what we are attempting to do and why it is important. It's not a matter of convincing people *per se*, but rather, deepening their understanding of their role in the project. As Emile put it: "process is like a marriage- people have to understand both sides", this includes the opposition. There was a group who wanted to save the old Provencher Bridge; they were small and represented a point of difference you will find on any project. However, it's important to hear and address their concerns within the project if possible.

The importance of visual representation should be emphasized as well. During the open houses and in the newsletters of this project, the public was exposed to accessible images. It's typical to use engineering drawings, with bridges shown in plan or section using CAD, but on this project, hand drawn sketches with explanations were used in order for them to be straightforward and easy to understand. Visuals are an effective way of communicating technical information; they are more approachable than words and can spark people's imaginations. Ensuring clarity of information is incredibly important to mitigate confusion and misunderstanding.

In closing, we all should aim to do the best we can with what we have. This project was given the time, budget and commitment to become something illustrious, the second time around. Every project should start with a community profile, which includes outreach to community leaders; this approach not only builds a strong foundation and relationships, it may assist in addressing potential problems early on. Taking this extra step shows the planners sincerity and desire for community input at the beginning of a project.

Abridgment:

Commonly, public participation is a superficial process and often what is touted as collaboration is really not the case; comprehensive may be the goal but is not the norm. The design of the public participation process for the Provencher Bridge, Esplanade Riel project is an exemplary example of how collaborative planning processes should be done. A decade ago it was considered the “most comprehensive public consultation ever undertaken for a public works project in Winnipeg’s history” (Manning & Préfontaine, 2007). This project was ahead of its time and could easily be viewed as trailblazing and a best practice model of authentic collaborative planning.



Project Awards:

The Winnipeg Accessibility Award

Transportation Association of Canada Medal

Best Trade Contractor Award of Excellence

Certificate of Engineering Achievement

International City County Management Program Excellence Award for Citizen Engagement

References:

Freig, S. (1999). Provencher Bridge Consultation Process Final Report.

Manning, G. & Préfontaine, G. (2007). Crossing the Red: *Heritage Interpretation at Esplanade Riel*. Cited at:

www.chrs.ca/conferences/2007/pdf/abstracts/Glen%20Manning%20and%20Guy%20Prefontaine%20-%20Crossing%20the%20Red.pdf

Prairie Research Associates Inc. (1999). Results of Public Consultation on Provencher Bridge Alternatives.

Wardrop Engineering (1999). Provencher Bridge Alternative's Draft Working Document.

Images:

Unless indicated, all maps and images in this report were produced and edited by Alexis Miller.

Additional Resources:**Video:**

About A Bridge: Winnipeg's Esplanade Riel

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGPapX_pLes

Photos:

Esplanade Riel

www.flickr.com/search/?q=esplanade+riel

Social Media:

Esplanade Riel on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/pages/Esplanade-Riel/108059085889591

Research:

van Ginkel, R. & Dr. Emile Shehata (2004). Provencher Bridges: *Winnipeg moved beyond the utilitarian structures of the past for its new pedestrian bridge, and commissioned a beautiful landmark*. Cited at:

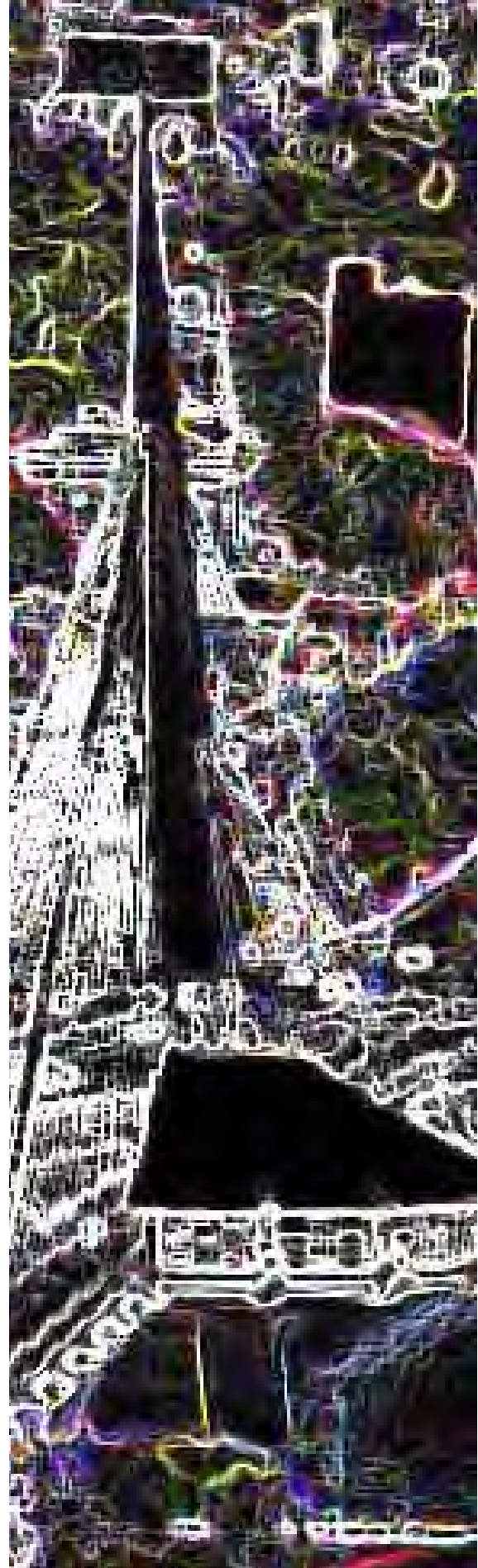
www.tac-atc.ca/english/resourcecentre/readingroom/conference/conf2003/pdfs/ginkel.pdf

The Keystone Professional: *Achievement Award Presented to The Cite of Winnipeg and Wardrop Engineering Inc. for the Esplanade Riel (Provencher) Bridge*. Cited at:

www.apegm.mb.ca/pdf/Keystone/05apr.pdf

Esplanade Riel Pedestrian Bridge, Winnipeg, Manitoba: *DSI receives Best Trade Contractor Award of Excellence for its products and onsite execution for the new stay cable pedestrian bridge in Winnipeg*. Cited at:

www.dywidag-systems.com/references/details/article/esplanade-riel-pedestrian-bridge-canada.html



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esplanade_Riel