

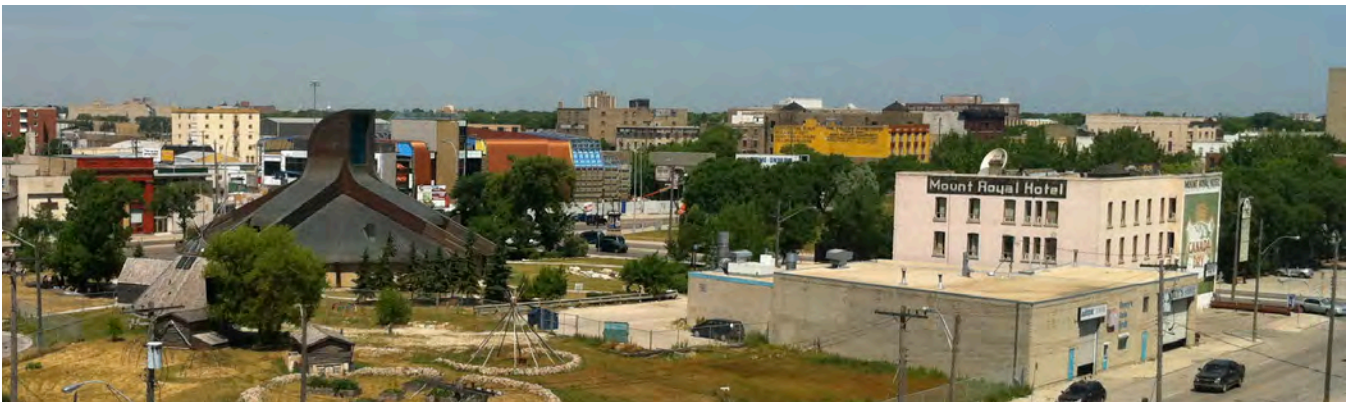
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# Community by Design

## Learning from the South Point Douglas Pre-Consultation Study Experience

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in collaboration  
with Michael Robertson and Harry Finnigan



**Abstract** South Point Douglas is often mentioned as a “diamond in the rough” or in some similar fashion. This is largely due to its rich history. It’s current land use regulations however make it difficult for developers to invest in the area because of its large percentage of land that is zoned as industrial use. In early 2008 the City of Winnipeg’s Planning Property and Development Department commissioned Bridgman Collaborative Architecture and McKay Finnigan and Associates to provide the planning research and rationale by way of community engagement for consideration to be given to a possible Plan Winnipeg designation change as well as the development of a Secondary Plan for the South Point Douglas neighbourhood. This “pre-consultation study” consisted of a sizable engagement process with a range of stakeholder groups in the community to learn their requirements of the area. The study ultimately recommended that the industrial policy area designation under Plan Winnipeg be amended, and that a secondary plan be formulated for the area. Since this time however, the city has focused on other priorities, and the South Point Douglas secondary plan has fallen by the wayside. This report will highlight the lessons learned throughout the process of conducting this study.

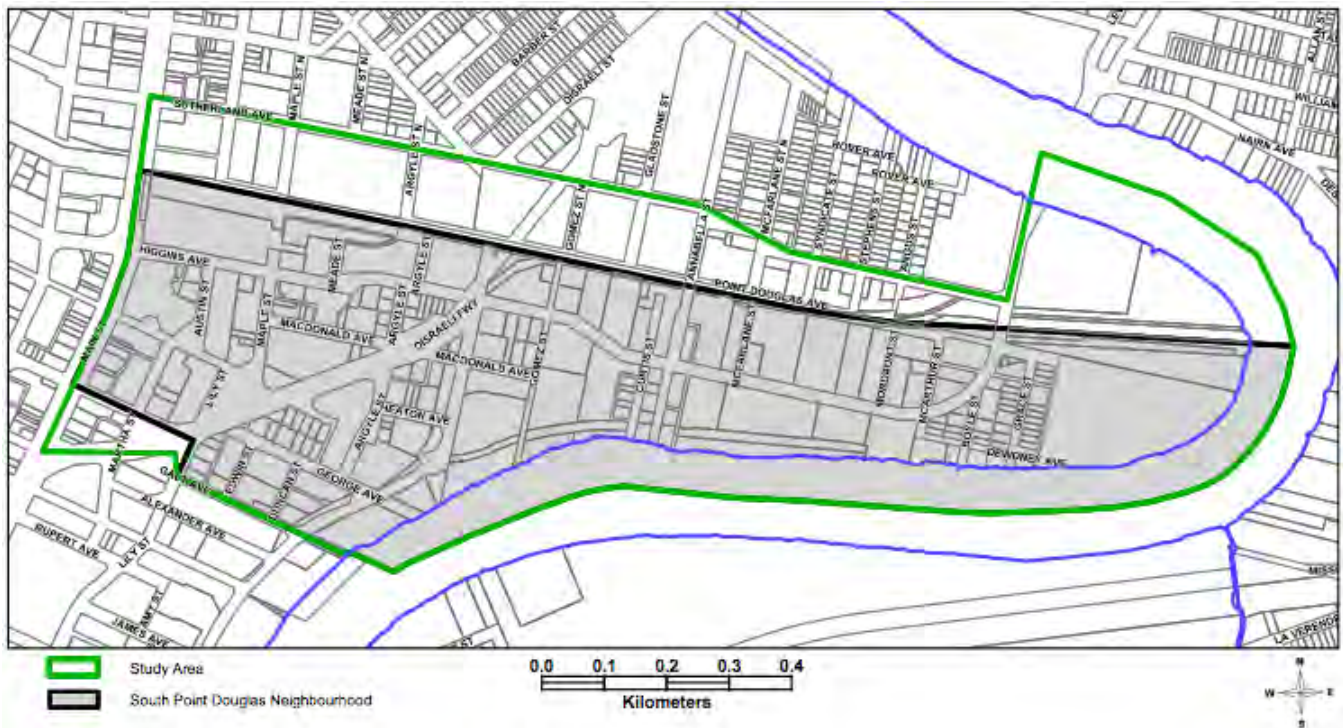
## Background and Context

Formally a prestigious residential community, the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late 19th century began to heavily affect the community of South Point Douglas. A slow process then began that saw the decline of residential land use and an increase in industrial land use throughout the community. South Point Douglas remains a proud community full of passionate residents who care very strongly about their neighbourhood and wish to see its revitalization come to fruition. In January of 2008, Michael Robertson was approached by the City of Winnipeg Planning Department to undertake a Pre-Consultation Study with the intent of assessing the need for a secondary plan in the South Point Douglas

area. With that in mind the purpose of the pre-consultation study was to determine the needs and views of the various stakeholders and to identify the current issues in the neighbourhood. Land use regulations were of particular interest. As the project manager for this study, Michael Robertson commissioned Harry Finnigan of McKay Finnigan and Associates to design and facilitate the engagement process.



The Riverwalk located on Waterfront Drive is an example of successful South Point Douglas development. (Image Credit: Bridgman Collaborative & McKay Finnigan and Associates, 2008).



Above is a map indicating the South Point Douglas neighbourhood boundaries and the Pre-Consultation study area. (Image Credit: Bridgman Collaborative & McKay Finnigan and Associates, 2008).



## Facts of the Case



Henry Avenue and Main Street. The streets no longer intersect, but there is heavy pedestrian activity due in large part to the Salvation Army. (Image Credit: Ryan Paradis).

### *The need for a secondary Plan*

The pre-consultation report defines a secondary plan as “the second tier in the City’s hierarchy of plans (right behind Plan Winnipeg) and once formally approved by Council, it has the status of a by-law” (Bridgman Collaborative Architecture, & McKay Finnigan & Associates, 2008, p.4). The City of Winnipeg was compelled to investigate the need for a secondary plan in the area due to the increased interest in the downtown as well as the development on waterfront drive and its proximity to South Point Douglas. Among other things, a secondary plan would address areas pertaining to land use regulations and evaluate the need for rezoning the large percentage of the community that is currently zoned as Industrial use in Plan Winnipeg.

### *The objectives of the study*

The three specific objectives of the study as stated in the report are:

1. To determine the needs and views of the various stakeholder groups about existing conditions and the future of the area.
2. To identify planning and development issues in the area.
3. To undertake preliminary exploration to determine possible community/stakeholder interest in actively participating in a Secondary Planning process for

South Point Douglas and the potential for “partnerships.”

A secondary plan engagement process would necessitate a larger scale and more in depth study than the one that was undertaken in this instance. However the scale and depth of research in this Pre-Consultation study was appropriate given the smaller budget and stated objectives.

### *The methodology*

The neighbourhood inventory conducted by the City of Winnipeg in 2007 provided a solid background for the consultants before undertaking the engagement process itself. After an extensive review of this information, and a canvassing of stakeholder groups in the area, four categories of stakeholder groups were identified. The alphabetical listing of them is as follows:

- Aboriginal Organizations
- Artists
- Businesses
- Residents

It was reportedly difficult to get a hold of many of the major landowners of the industrial lands in the area. This potentially represents a massive gap in the consultation report. Chances are however that it would not have changed the results in the report. Initial research showed that there is a fair amount of apparently unintentional land banking in the area and a small number of



(Image Credit: Bridgman Collaborative & McKay Finnigan and Associates, 2008).

## Conclusions & Outcomes



A snapshot of the parking lot located at 49 Austin street. Positioned between The Aboriginal Centre, the Manitoba Metis Federation, and the Thunderbird House, it presents exciting possibilities for development in the neighbourhood. (Image Credit: Ryan Paradis).

stakeholders would represent a large percentage of industrial lands in the community.

The discussions that took place with these focus groups were guided by a series of predetermined open-ended questions. The aim was to ensure the identification of all the important issues that concerned the participants involved. It was not important for the purpose of this process for a consensus to be reached so all responses were recorded and there were often differing opinions.

According to the report, the study “found the South Point Douglas neighbourhood to be a well-established area with a fairly strong sense of community, and a general feeling of optimism about the future” and that “the mere existence of the study seemed to help to counteract a general sense of cynicism about the City’s level of concern for the area and the views of existing stakeholders about it” (Bridgman Collaborative Architecture, & McKay Finnigan & Associates, 2008, p.22). As previously stated the study ultimately recommended that the industrial policy area designation under Plan Winnipeg be amended, and that a secondary plan be formulated for the area. Most of the stakeholders expressed a desire for mixed-use development in the community with a significant housing component involved. So what happened?

### *Post consultation confusion*

Consultation can be a precarious thing as it has the potential to backfire. This is illustrated by the fact that there was a certain level of confusion that resulted in the weeks following the conclusion of the study, as it was shortly afterward that the Winnipeg Free Press printed an article that announced the plan to bulldoze the area for a waterpark and stadium. Not only did these plans fly in the face of the outcomes of the study, they were not in line with the City’s expressed goal – outlined in Plan Winnipeg –



A photograph of Harry Finnigan leading a consultation workshop as part of the research for the South Point Douglas Pre-Consultation Study. (Image Credit: Bridgman Collaborative & McKay Finnigan and Associates, 2008).

## Lessons Learned



A snapshot of mixed use development on Waterfront drive. (Image Credit: Bridgman Collaborative & McKay Finnigan and Associates, 2008).

to encourage a compact urban form. These inconsistencies with the study served to increase resentment, as the facilitators of the process received a number of concerned phone calls. It is the opinion of some of the practitioners involved that the study served to confirm what the City already knew, and that the City should have committed to a secondary plan and engaged them on that level. The flipside to this is that the study reportedly had a direct impact on David Asper's decision to ultimately locate the new stadium elsewhere in the city.

### *Increased sense of community*

Another very real conclusion from this process is that if there were no consultation, there would be no voice for the people. In fact, it was through the process of exercising this voice that people increased their awareness of each other within the community. This served to create a stronger bond between residents and stakeholders in the area.



Former Canada Pacific Railway Station, circa 1920. The historic building is currently the Aboriginal Centre and houses the Winnipeg Aboriginal Council as well as the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development. (Image Credit: City of Winnipeg, PP&D. Retrieved from <http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/historic/historic.stm>).

### *Following up*

The importance of following up with consultation/engagement participants after the process is complete and announcements are made in the media or elsewhere cannot be understated. Much of the cynicism that was created by the announcement of the large-scale developments that were to be plopped down in South Point Douglas (i.e. The stadium & water park) could have been avoided by immediately providing status updates to those who were involved with the consultation process.

### *Fundamental Principles*

There is only so much that you can do as a planner. It is an unfortunate thing that planners often have to fight for and justify a planning process. However, if we step back and look at what has come out of this process, we can see that even though the City has yet to directly act on any of the recommendations made, the study has had a very real impact on the community. Because the report is a public document it can be viewed by anyone and is difficult to ignore. As previously stated, David Asper's decision to build the new stadium elsewhere was in large-part a result of his review of the Pre-Consultation Study report. This serves to illustrate where the balance of power lies in the development industry. Who determines how the city is developed? The power is where the money is, and if it weren't



for the planning process the people would have no role.

This example may also serve to highlight the limited (however important) role and power that planners have in the development of cities - specifically in the decision-making process. It is a reminder that ultimately it is the elected officials who hold the responsibility to make these decisions on behalf of their constituents.

Sure, there are undoubtedly failings in almost any engagement process. Certainly, the majority and/or loudest in a group do not always make the correct decisions. Decisions also tend to be made by those who attend, and then those who attend but do not actively participate limit them again. But essentially, if you believe that people should have a say, then you must believe in planning and engagement processes.



A postcard of South Point Douglas, circa 1910, when the neighbourhood was bustling with promise. At the centre of the image is the junction of Austin Street and Henry Avenue. The photographer is unknown.

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