

Implementing 'Complete Communities' Collaboratively

Lessons learned from Winnipeg's Waterford Green

Ryan Gilmore in collaboration with Dave Palubski, FCIP and special contributions from David Marsh, MCIP, AICP

Abstract

The City of Winnipeg's development plan *OurWinnipeg*, adopted in 2011, sets out a new vision for sustainable growth for the city with particular emphasis on the development of New Communities, recognizing the important role these areas will play in accommodating the city's future growth. In support of this vision, *Complete Communities* is a direction strategy intended to guide the land use and development of these new neighbourhood areas. A new collaborative planning process has been developed, driven by the desire to implement *Complete Communities'* policies in a way that better enriches people's lives. It endeavors to do so by creating a mechanism to share information early in a process that engages and enables civic leaders, civic administration, school divisions and citizen stakeholders to work with developers to play more meaningful roles in the design and development of new neighbourhoods. At the core of this new approach are a rich public engagement process and a planner-advocate acting as a bridge-builder between stakeholders and city departments. Waterford Green is a new subdivision in the city of Winnipeg and is one of the first developments to complete the new collaborative approach. This development stands as an example of the enhanced outcomes that are possible through a collaborative planning process and exemplifies the policies of *Complete Communities*.

COMPLETE
COMMUNITIES

Introduction

In 2011, The City of Winnipeg adopted its latest development plan, *OurWinnipeg*. This new plan establishes a strong vision for the city and attempts to position Winnipeg to develop sustainably and to address the many challenges that face a growing city in the 21st century. In the plan ‘New Communities’ are identified as one of several ‘Transformative Areas’ that offer the best opportunities for significant growth and change in the city. These ‘New Communities’ will be expected to accommodate a significant proportion of the city’s projected population growth, and therefore it is important for the City to ensure that these ‘New Communities’ are planned with sustainability in mind from the very beginning.

In support of this new sustainable vision for the City, *OurWinnipeg* is complemented by four Direction Strategies: *Complete Communities*, *Sustainable Transportation*, *Sustainable Water and Waste*, and *Sustainable Winnipeg*. *Complete Communities*

is the direction strategy intended to guide the development of the City’s ‘Transformative Areas’ and ‘New Communities’. From the City’s perspective, “New Communities should contribute to the City’s balance of residential, commercial, industrial, natural and recreational land uses to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability” (*Complete Communities*, p. 74).

Planning for Transformative Areas and New Communities will be guided by core planning principles established in *Complete Communities*. *Complete Communities* will guide the development of these areas in a sustainable manner, meaning that New Communities will provide increased opportunities to live, work, learn, and play in the same neighborhood. In New Communities the City will strive to create streets that reflect existing local character and that are designed to accommodate the needs of motorists as well as to provide safe and convenient spaces for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit ridership, as a way of promoting physical activity and healthy, active lifestyles. In

addition, green development will be encouraged as will the conservation of natural areas. The design of new communities will be guided by a collaborative planning process led by planners, ensuring that local residents and community stakeholders are included in the development process.

Planning Precincts:
Planning Precincts divide New Communities into logical fractions in order to ensure that planning for New Communities is comprehensive, orderly and complete.

Under *Complete Communities*, the development of ‘New Communities’ is supported by a collaborative planning process and managed through the creation of precinct plans. A precinct plan informs and guides development at the neighbourhood level, providing direction on the mix of uses, development densities, project phasing, infrastructure and servicing, neighbourhood access and transportation, as well as a concept plan for the subdivision layout (Lombard North Group). Precinct plans seek to identify and address neighbourhood concerns with specific development concepts to guide future development, making certain that “new infrastructure and community services optimize existing facilities and connections while identifying any necessary upgrades from the outset” (*Complete Communities*).



Source: City of Winnipeg (2011)

Waterford Green exemplifies the development of a precinct plan, a new community, and a mixed-use centre and is one of the first developments to follow the new collaborative planning approach established under *Complete Communities*.

Waterford Green - A new community

Waterford Green is a new planned community currently in the preliminary stages of development. The development area, located in the northwest quadrant of the city, is one of the City's 'New Communities' and is also known as Precinct C. Waterford Green differs from previous developments of its kind in the City, striving to be a complete community that provides places for residents to live, play, and shop close to home. The vision for Waterford Green is to create a new standard for planned communities in the City of Winnipeg that places an emphasis on a diverse mix of housing types and high quality street aesthetics that are seamlessly connected to parks, green spaces, shopping, public transit, schools and adjoining neighbourhoods.

When completed, Waterford Green will accommodate over 2,275 people in approximately

1,100 new housing units made up of a mix of single-family, semi-detached, townhouses and condos. A high priority will be placed on creating high quality green spaces including a naturalized two-lake retention system with scenic park spaces overlooking the lakes. The neighbourhood will be home to a new elementary school as well as recreation facilities that include active play spaces, multi-purpose sports fields and children's playgrounds. Waterford Green also puts neighbourhood connectivity at the forefront, ensuring that community pathways and sidewalks connect residents to the community's parks, school, Village Centre, and active transportation facilities.



Source: Lombard North Group (2013)

At the heart of Waterford Green is a new 3-acre mixed use Village Centre, providing residents with access to neighbourhood services and amenities. The design of the commercial area is intended to be pedestrian-oriented as opposed to car-oriented. The concept plan design for the Village Centre incorporates trees, landscaping,

pedestrian scale lighting, and places for people to sit and gather.

Achieving the vision for Waterford Green was made possible by undertaking extensive local neighbourhood consultation as well as participating in the City's new collaborative planning process.



Source: Lombard North Group (2013)

The Collaborative Planning Process

The new collaborative planning process at the City of Winnipeg has its origins as part of the implementation strategy for *Complete Communities*. The City recognized that in order for the city to grow in a sustainable manner and to achieve innovative forms of development, it would need to approach the development process differently. For the visionary policies of *Complete Communities* to be translated into the built environment, the City must be a leader and an advocate for the types of development it wants to see.



The City came to the realization that it could not expect different development outcomes without introducing changes to the development process. The City also recognized that there were numerous developers operating in the City that were willing to work closely with the City to undertake projects that meet the objectives of *Complete Communities*. Therefore it was up to the City to create a new process that would facilitate collaboration between the City and the development community. The new collaborative planning process does just this, putting planners in the role of advocate and empowering staff to encourage new concepts and approaches to development that reflect the goals of *Complete Communities*.

The Typical Process

When following the ‘typical’ development application process, a developer will generate their full concept independently and submit their application to the City. The City then reviews the application and may propose revisions before the application moves on to the formal decision-making process. In this scenario, City staff is not involved in the project concept development, seeing the proposal for the first time when the application is submitted for review. Under this process the City can only be reactive, responding only to what is in the application, which limits the scope of any changes or revisions that the City may want to suggest that could further City

The Typical Planning & Development Process



Source: City of Winnipeg (adapted from Manitoba Planning Conference proceedings (2013))

goals. In the typical application process there is virtually no opportunity for collaboration between the City and the applicant. Under this approach, the City acts as the regulator, not as an advocate or partner.

The Collaborative Process

The new collaborative approach leverages the expertise of planning staff, creating an iterative process between the City and the development community. The developer or development consultant will approach the City early on in the concept development stage to work with City staff from the very beginning. This dialogue continues as the project evolves and the concept plans are finalized. The review and revision phase occurs largely before any application is

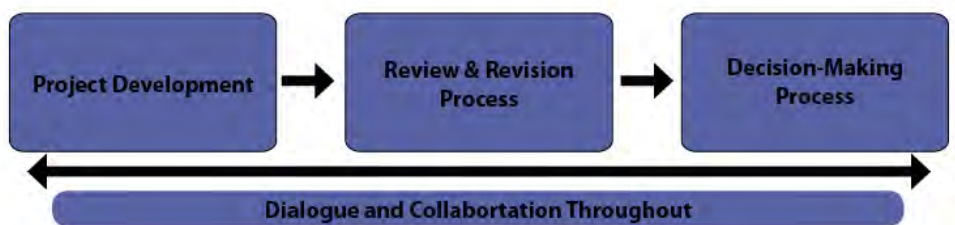
filed by the developer, with the result being that when the City receives the application, staff is familiar with the details of the application as they have already been discussed and debated. In the collaborative process, staff are not being reactive, but rather they have been proactively involved from the beginning. In the end, since there are no surprises, the application review is generally straight forward and is more a matter of dotting the i's and crossing the t's.

Step-by-Step Process

A development following the collaborative planning approach will typically evolve as follows:

The developer or consultant will approach the City, to initiate high level discussions at the precinct

The New Collaborative Planning & Development Process



Source: City of Winnipeg (adapted from Manitoba Planning Conference proceedings (2013))

level/area plan level. These conversations will help to establish how the development will speak to the objectives of *Complete Communities*, as well as to establish what the City will require from the developer in the way of background studies and to address any area-specific issues. Guiding these discussions is the core project team, consisting of 1-4 members of the Urban Planning and Urban Design divisions, one of whom acts as project manager. Throughout the collaborative planning approach, the core project team is the central point of contact for the project, working closely with the applicant throughout the process.

Following this initial discussion, the developer or consultant will decide which development application process they wish to

pursue – standard or collaborative. If the collaborative approach is chosen, then a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will be assembled. TAC consists of representatives from various city divisions, departments, and special operating agencies that are involved in the planning and development process. The creation of the TAC represents the initiation of the dialogue between the City and developer. This dialogue begins early on, particularly for large-scale projects such as precinct or area plans. The developer or planning consultant will then flesh out a high-level concept plan, identifying infrastructure and policy issues, and subsequently presents these initial concepts to the TAC Committee. The TAC’s role is then to provide comments on this preliminary plan, beginning

the iterative or back and forth discussion of the development concept. This is the time in the process where innovative approaches can be introduced by either partner, such as more diverse housing mixes, higher development densities, or innovative design alternatives. The TAC meetings involve the discussion of generally high level details over multiple stages of review until the concept plan is ready to be submitted as an application. There is an opportunity at this stage to pull in various other City departments as specific issues arise as a way of heading off potential problems down the road. The TAC can also include other non-City entities such as Manitoba Hydro and local school divisions. The TAC is led by a planner who is responsible for assembling the essential City departments



Source: City of Winnipeg (adapted from Manitoba Planning Conference proceedings (2013))

and necessary stakeholders. The planner is also expected to act as an advocate for the partners in the process and for the innovative development envisioned under *Complete Communities*, while also managing conflict where necessary.

The other key City players in the collaborative planning process are the Planning Executive Advisory Committee (PEAC) and PEAC support. PEAC is composed of the directors of City departments and PEAC support is made up of department managers. These two bodies are brought in when discussing innovative ideas that challenge the business-as-usual way of doing things. Including key department heads and managers early on in the discussion ensures

that any issues with new ideas being proposed can more easily be overcome.

Lessons Learned

The collaborative approach introduced by the City new has already resulted in some key lessons learned:

New process positively received

According to City officials, the new collaborative planning process has been positively received by developers and planning consultants. The new approach to development enhances the credibility of the public service and increases confidence in the ability of staff to lead planning and development processes. Together, these factors contribute to political support for the new process.

Planner as advocate

The planner has an important role to play in this new process as an advocate for City goals and for innovative approaches proposed by the development community. However, planners still have a regulatory role to play in the process; therefore, ensuring that these two functions are properly balanced will be imperative as the collaborative planning process continues to mature.

Opportunities for innovation

The collaborative planning approach allows both the City and the developer to push for innovation and new approaches that help move the City towards the vision for sustainable development laid out in *OurWinnipeg* and *Complete Communities*.

Eligibility for the collaborative process

One challenge that the City has encountered is how to decide whether a development can or should follow the collaborative process. Due to the relatively high level of staff resources that must be allocated, the collaborative process is not suitable for all projects. The new process is ideally suited for larger-scale precinct or area-level developments. In addition to project scale, it is important that all or a majority of the landowners of a given precinct or area agree to participate in the process. In the future it may be necessary for the City to formalize requirements for participation in the collaborative process. Developer experiences thus far have demonstrated the value of retaining the services of in-house or external planning expertise to help navigate the planning process.

Exiting the collaborative process

Another challenge that has yet to arise, but potentially could in the future, is how the City can extract itself from the collaborative process

Technical Advisory Committee

Planning, Property, and Development

- Transportation Planner
- Universal Accessible Design Coordinator
- Parks Planner
- Economic Development
- BIZ Officer

Transit

Public Works

- Transportation
- Active Transportation
- City Forrester
- City Naturalist

Water & Waste

Fire & Paramedic Service

- Fire & Building Code
- Service & Station Planning

Police Services

Externals

- Manitoba Hydro – Distribution Services
- School Division
- Public School Finance Board

Planning Executive Advisory Committee

COO

Directors

- Planning, Property, and Development
- Public Works
- Water & Waste
- Transit
- Community Services

Chief Planner

Source: City of Winnipeg (adapted from Manitoba Planning Conference proceedings (2013))

in the event the City-developer partnership is not functioning properly. It will be important for there to be a protocol in place that allows the City to exit from the process if the arrangement is not operating as designed. Exiting the collaborative process would be a last resort option as there could be political implications for doing so, as well as the potential to damage the perception of the new process. It is essential that the development community view the collaborative approach as a value-added process that both the developer and the City benefit from in the form of enhanced development outcomes.

Resource constraints

As the popularity of the new collaborative approach grows, the strain on the City's limited planning resources increases. In order to manage the growing workload, the City will be looking to expand the planning department if budgets permit. At present, the cost to a developer for following the new collaborative process is the same as following the standard development application process, yet the amount of staff resources required is generally greater for the collaborative process. While the collaborative process is still in its infancy the City is reluctant to develop a different fee structure for the two processes to ensure that is not higher costs that deter developers from undertaking the collaborative approach. To do so may create disincentives for participating in a process that ultimately benefits the City and helps achieve the City's

objectives. However, as more and more developments chose the collaborative approach, this may have to change.

Including elected officials

The collaborative approach enables elected officials to be brought into the process as part of the inquiry stage discussions with TAC and the developer. This stage of the process offers an opportunity for the developer to gauge political support, something that is unique to the collaborative planning approach. It is also an opportunity for City councilors to express desires or concerns and to confirm that the public will be properly consulted. Enabling such interactions brings these discussions into the process informally in an open and transparent way that can be facilitated and monitored by TAC and planning staff, as opposed to unofficial meetings behind closed doors. Properly managing this process is important in order to preserve the integrity of the planning process. Planning staff, as leaders of the collaborative process, must ensure that interactions between elected officials and the development community not be interpreted as negotiations by the participants themselves or the public.

Engagement process

The City of Winnipeg currently does not have explicit requirements for community engagement, nor does it have formally recommended best practices; however, the City is working towards developing

policies in this area. However, there is "a strong political desire for a public engagement process to occur as elected officials will often question staff and applicants as to how the public is being consulted. The development community understands that applications will not move past the public hearing stage if neighbourhood stakeholders have not been consulted, and therefore neighbourhood consultations have become standard practice. Developments like Waterford Green stand as an example of how valuable numerous public engagements can be for both public relations as well as for the commercial success of a project. The project outcomes at Waterford Green provide additional lessons that can inform the development of new communities as well as the evolution of the City's collaborative planning process.



Source: Lombard North Group (2013)

Key Outcomes: Waterford Green

The combination of the collaborative planning approach and an extensive public engagement process resulted in a very straight forward public hearing with virtually no opposition to what is a significant residential and mixed-used development in the City. This outcome is a testament to the strengths of the collaborative approach and the value of collaborating in the concept development stage as a way of anticipating and avoiding potential conflicts.

However, the project development was not without its challenges. Some specific project outcomes and innovations initially introduced by the developers for Waterford Green, although supported by City Planners, failed to be achieved in the final design for two reasons:

- City Streets was not prepared to consider alternatives to lane widths or street widths. Consulting engineers for the Developer advised the level of effort required to introduce alternative design options (notwithstanding the possibility

to provide experience from other cities) would delay the detailed design approval process substantially and may not result in buy in from City Public Works.

- The Developer was unwilling to invest the time and resources expected to be required to introduce alternate street and lane design standards.

Other innovations introduced by the Developer such as the orientation of single-family dwellings to have the front yard rather than back yard face on to Dr. Jose Rizal Way (a collector street), were opposed by City Public Works and only received soft support from City Planners who were reluctant to provide an opinion contrary to Pubic Works. The matter of orientation of the single –family dwellings on Dr Jose Rizal Way will go before the Community Committee in July of 2013 for a determination. In this instance the Developer is prepared to pursue the alternative design approach and will be providing supporting information to the Community Committee in the form of examples of streetscapes from around the City that turn their backs on the streets and create canyons of multi-coloured and unevenly maintained rear yard fences, in the hopes of illustrating the contrast between this approach and the alternative design.

Conclusions

The primary success of the Collaborative Process was the meaningful involvement of area residents in the planning and neighbourhood design process, while providing an opportunity for developers, City administration (principally represented by City Planners), and politicians to exchange views and create a shared vision for the neighbourhood.

The collaborative process between the developer, citizens, political representatives and city planners worked exceptional well. Internally the collaborative process would benefit from stronger leadership to ensure a willingness on behalf of all City departments outside the Planning Department to buy into the ideals of the *OurWinnipeg* Plan that promote creativity, design and innovation. Achieving this will mean continuing to work to break down departmental silos. Furthermore, stronger internal direction is required that supports initiatives to develop and evaluate alternatives to City standards with the goal of improving the “liveability” of our neighbourhoods, creating quality and innovative neighbourhood design, and reducing infrastructure capital and maintenance costs.



Source: Lombard North Group (2013)

Resources

City of Winnipeg. (2011). Complete Communities, available online from <http://winnipeg.ca/interhom/CityHall/OurWinnipeg/>

City of Winnipeg. (2011). OurWinnipeg, available online from <http://winnipeg.ca/interhom/CityHall/OurWinnipeg/>

Marsh, D., Robinson, M., Palubeski, & D.Zywina, G. (2013). Collaborating fore more complete communities. Proceedings from the Manitoba Planning Conference. Winnipeg. 28 Feb. 2013.

Special thanks to contributors:

Dave Palubeski, President of the Lombard North Group, FCIP; and

David Marsh, Principal Planner, City of Winnipeg, MCIP, AICP.