Age-Friendly Cities

Inter-departmental Collaboration:
Designing for Accessibility in Winnipeg

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Abstract

An aging population is a defining characteristic of Canadian cities and regions. How municipal governments respond to the accessibility needs of older adults will be a major issue in the coming years. The City of Winnipeg has taken a proactive approach and in 2001 was the first Canadian municipality to adopt universal design policy. Recent updates through a set of accessibility standards as well as broad integration of age-friendly principles within a variety of planning documents has given the City of Winnipeg an edge in implementing principles of universal design throughout the city.

Using the City of Winnipeg as a leading example, this report describes how the City has adopted standards and implemented plans to provide comprehensive solutions to accessibility issues. Deserving special attention is the decision-making model and inter-departmental collaborative planning effort used by the City of Winnipeg to ensure both city-funded and private development projects meet specific design standards. The approach taken by the City has proven itself to be an effective model for internal collaboration on projects and the private sector has begun to see the benefits of voluntarily applying the City's guidelines for universal design in both new construction and redevelopment projects. There are a number of lessons that can be learned from the City's experience that are applicable to other municipalities across Canada.

Introduction

An aging population is the defining characteristic of many Canadian cities and regions. The cohorts of baby boomers moving through the population pyramid started to retire in 2011, and the number of Canadians over the age of 65 is expected to surge dramatically. By 2036 it is estimated that older adults will comprise of roughly one quarter of Canada's population – representing a rate of increase eight times greater than the number of people under the age of 65 (CMHC, 2011). An aging population will dramatically shift the organization and composition of Canadian cities and redefine how land use, transportation, and services are used and distributed.

Age-friendly initiatives, Waterfront Drive.

Age-friendly Cities

An age-friendly city is one that supports and enables older people to age actively. At the municipal level, cities have the resources to organize engagement, provide venues for knowledge development and exchange, and the ability to create policy to shape the growth and direction of cities (Plouffe & Kalache, 2011). Although designing for accessibility in Canada includes federal, provincial, and municipal tiers of government, this paper deals with how decisions are made at the municipal level to better examine how the City of Winnipeg is consistently able to provide resources to make the

The Issue

In the late 1990s, the City of Winnipeg realized that the planning methods currently used needed to be adapted to consider older adults in city growth and development decisions. Key to this would not only be policy design, but successful implementation of planning measures. Implementation was not just about ensuring that these

policies work their way down into the neighbourhood level, but about building inter-departmental capacity to jointly work on these projects through interdepartmental teams and an *Integrated Planning Model.* Building capacity within the city and implementing plans through a variety of measures ensure the applicability of universal design initiatives in city-funded projects and private developments. The City of Winnipeg is taking the necessary steps to plan for a future where older adults comprise of a much larger segment of the population.

New visitable housing, Bridgewater Forest.

This is an ongoing process, and a long-term commitment. Through the measures discussed here, transportation, housing, the built-environment, and services provided by the city will be more responsive to the needs of older adults.

Background

The road to becoming a more age-friendly city has been the result of years of effort which is only now starting to come to fruition. The story starts with the foundation of the Access Advisory Committee in 1999. This volunteer citizen committee drafted the first ever Universal Design Policy which was subsequently adopted by City Council in 2001. However, the City lacked a clear implementation framework and inconsistency in adoption of the plan across city departments.

This all changed in 2003 when the City took two steps to provide a unified position cutting across departments. The Universal Design Coordinator position was created to liaison between the various city departments and accessibility design standards

New pedestrian controlled intersection, Dakota Street.

were introduced. Shortly after, the City directed the adoption of a Universal Design Steering Committee and the *Integrated Planning Model.* This model created the Planning Executive Advisory Committee consisting of the Directors from various departments as well as a support staff comprising of managers. The Universal Design Steering Committee assists in implementation, enforcement and compliance of the Universal Design Policy. Through these methods, the City was able to provide consistency in policy implementation which moved Winnipeg towards becoming a more age-friendly city.

A further push to work collaboratively on projects continued with the adoption of Winnipeg specific Accessibility Design Standards in 2006. These standards required city owned, leased, or funded projects to include accessible and age-friendly design. This was followed up by the creation of the Mayor's Seniors Advisory Committee in 2007 which ultimately supplements the work of the Access Advisory Committee by creating respect for the differing needs of persons with disabilities and older adult populations. In the time since 2007, age-friendly policy and guidelines have worked their way into all of the City of Winnipeg's guiding and

policy documents as well as filtered down through area-specific plans.

Collaborative Planning

Strong implementation measures have been adopted to ensure that the requirements of the Universal Design Guidelines and the Accessibility Design Standards are brought into action. Teams of city staff

Property line enhancements, Osborne Village.

consisting of representation from all major city departments are brought together to review and discuss city-funded projects. Urban design specialists come together to review downtown development applications and an internal team of professionals review outside downtown applications.

Each member of these groups has specific comments on the project and distills the application through their department staff to receive additional feedback (below).

This process strives to ensure that projects not only conform to the goals, objectives, and mandates of specific departments, but also enables the implementation of universal design. Tools are in place to help private developers understand the benefit of accommodating a wider range of people through design. The system has been effective because through collaborative processes, developers receive consistent positions

and remarks from the city on privately funded projects. A unified policy and commitment to the concept of building an age-friendly city creates an environment that has fostered better communication between city staff who are mandated to ensure specific requirements are met, and private developers.

Strategies and Effectiveness

The theme that is evident throughout this report is one of building connections through collaboration to make Winnipeg

more livable for everyone. By using the Universal Design Guidelines and other policy and implementation tools, the City is bringing together transportation and land use, departments who only occasionally collaborate on projects, private developers, municipal politicians, and the public. The city now is seeing voluntary compliance with many of the standards evident on non-binding applications in


Use of textured pavers, Bridewater Lakes.

the development community. Essential to this process was the administrative mandate to create the Universal Design Steering Committee, an Administrative Coordination Group and the Planning Executive Advisory Committee, somewhat formalizing inter-departmental cooperation.

Planning Executive Advisory Committee (PEAC) Structure
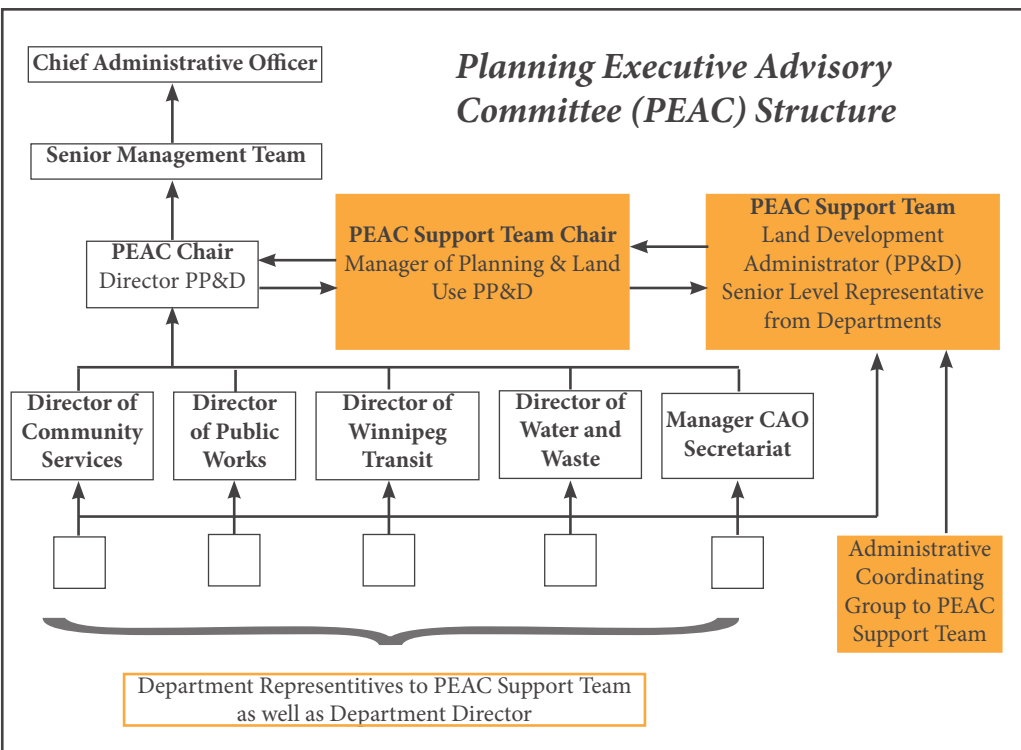
Orange indicates new structure introduced through the *Integrated Planning Model.*

Lessons Learned

Initially, the City of Winnipeg approached developing universal design guidelines, accessibility standards, and city policy with the vision of meeting an end-goal; a point where Winnipeg could be considered accessible and age-friendly through inclusive design. However, it is now recognized that creating an age-friendly city is not simply a goal, but an ongoing process that should have implementation measure to meet city milestones.

In the early years, there was little buy-in from the private sector and accessible design in new development and redevelopment projects were rarely considered applicable. Essentially, the losses were considered too great for private
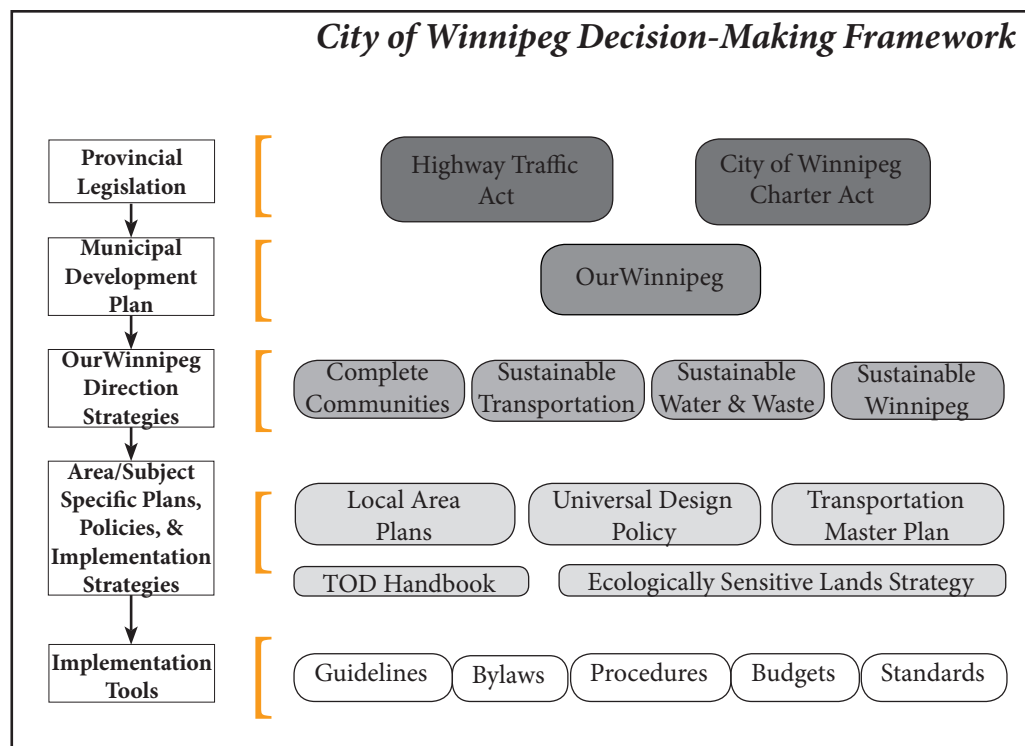
developers to develop in a way that met even the most basic accessible design guidelines. Municipalities must recognize their inherent ability to take calculated risks and evaluate new universal design concepts and demonstrate the feasibility of such projects to build confidence in other sectors.

Application

A somewhat formalized process is needed to ensure that all necessary staff and departments are aware of the scope and impacts of specific projects to various user

populations in Winnipeg. Identifying and breaking down these silos in municipalities continues to be an ongoing challenge. Designing a city-process matrix like the one below is an excellent way of visually communicating the different systems of organization at the scale of planners, politicians, and other city staff. The commitment to become an accessible and age-friendly city does require considerable political buy-in. City staff can demonstrate to politicians the urgency of reforming policy to design cities to be more inclusive of a wider range of citizens consistent with human rights code. Municipalities should continue to look for new opportunities to work across levels of government and sectors. Although this report

Walking path through Safeway parking lot, Osborne Village.

City of Winnipeg Decision-Making Framework

Provincial Legislation	Highway Traffic Act City of Winnipeg Charter Act
Municipal Development Plan	OurWinnipeg
OurWinnipeg Direction Strategies	Complete Communities Sustainable Transportation Sustainable Water & Waste Sustainable Winnipeg
Area/Subject Specific Plans, Policies, & Implementation Strategies	Local Area Plans Universal Design Policy Transportation Master Plan TOD Handbook Ecologically Sensitive Lands Strategy
Implementation Tools	Guidelines Bylaws Procedures Budgets Standards

concentrated on universal design, the inter-departmental collaborative process adopted by the City of Winnipeg has improved function on a multitude of initiatives.

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Resources

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