



Artistic rendering of Town Centre. Winnipeg Free Press (2012)

# Bridgwater Town Centre:

## Promoting a Healthier Lifestyle

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### Abstract

Suburban development needs to shift from being predominantly auto-oriented to promoting healthy living through active transportation within neighbourhoods. Despite the well known health issues linked to an auto-oriented life style, planners are challenged with how to create new residential developments that include a mixture of uses, to put everyday necessities within walking distance. Traditional approaches to suburban development have been shifting in the recent past; suburbs are no longer solely single family developments.

Bridgwater Town Centre is an example of a cutting edge concept, and the essential next step, to facilitating change in suburban development patterns in Winnipeg, MB. The promotion of healthy living is a large factor in the development of the Bridgwater Town Centre. There is an introduction of mixed use development that brings work, home, and leisure to a common place, and connects adjacent neighbourhoods through a series of active transportation trails, reducing the need for vehicular travel.

# Introduction

Traditional suburban developments were built as low density, single use neighbourhoods, with an abundance of detached houses. Land use policies have long been promoting and enabling single use development by segregating residential, commercial, and industrial uses. These constraints of development type have increased vehicular use, causing some major health concerns such as obesity. In recent conversations about design and planning new developments, health has become an emergent topic. Planners are interested in components such as active and public transportation, higher densities, and mixed uses (Grant, Craswell & Perrin, 2013). While it is unrealistic to condemn suburban development as a whole,



Traditional suburban development. Reddit (2012)

due to ongoing market demand, new suburbs can be developed more thoughtfully. Neighbourhoods in the Waverley West subdivision are starting to make the necessary positive change in suburban development.

## Background

In 2003, the Province of Manitoba, Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, and Ladco Company Ltd., began the visioning for Waverley West. As set out in the Complete Communities document, Waverley West is considered a New Community. It is stated in the document that planning for a new community will “ensure orderly, market aligned development that should provide opportunities for a mix of uses, a range of housing types, parks, places and open spaces, employment options and transit access within walking distance of diverse residential neighbourhoods” (City of Winnipeg, 2011).

The Bridgewater neighbourhoods can be seen as taking a new urbanist approach to suburban development. As set out in the Charter of the New Urbanism, policy and development practices should be modified

to support mixed uses, mixed modes of transportation, and create universally accessible spaces (Leccese, McCormick & Congress for the New Urbanism, 2000). As such, Bridgewater has designated approximately 50% of its lots to be accessible to people of all levels of ability. While traditional suburban features can still be seen in these neighbourhoods, and the ratio of vehicular use to pedestrian activity is still higher, there are more than the typical amount of multifamily residences as well. The development of the



Visible doorway. City of Winnipeg Planning, Property and Development Department.

Bridgewater Neighbourhoods is unlike anything Winnipeg has seen before. In addition to higher density development and increased opportunities for pedestrian activity in the four Waverley West neighbourhoods, the development of a Town Centre is slated to occur in the center of it all. The town centre will

considerably increase density, with over a 1000 multifamily housing units planned to be built. There will also be a mixture of uses including commercial, residential, office, and businesses (Province of Manitoba, 2010). The success of a mixed use development depends not only on the businesses that are located within it, but also on the density and accessibility of the place.

## Facts/ Outcomes

The development of Waverley West is unique in several ways. First, the funds raised by the Province for the development of the subdivision are being put back into the city in the form of inner city revitalization (Province of Manitoba, 2010). Second, there is an attempt to create a better suburban development that is inclusive of all populations.



Town Centre design sketch. Southwest Fort Garry Design Charette (2003)

The idea of the Bridgwater Town Centre came from public consultation processes at the onset of planning for the Waverley West subdivision in 2003. The resulting goals and objectives of the consultation included healthy living, promoting diversity, and encouraging smart growth. The public's input guided the development of a framework that became the collective vision of the community which includes housing diversity, higher density, and creating a walkable and easily accessible community (Rewniak, 2014). The design charette held at the University of Manitoba in the early stages set out what type of development stakeholders wanted to see in the Town Centre.

The Town Centre is planned to be pedestrian-oriented - promoting walkability, active transportation and overall healthy living. Centralized transit nodes are slated to be located in the Town Centre, making it easy and efficient to use transit (Winnipeg (Man.). Planning and Land Use Division, 2005). The Town Centre will also be connected to surrounding neighbourhoods by an extensive active transportation network. With over 80 Kilometres of pathways and sidewalks located throughout the neighbourhoods, this will be the largest

pedestrian network of any traditional suburban housing development in Winnipeg. While it may not be perfect, this suburb is trying to do something innovative for Winnipeg.

## Lessons Learned

True consultation and collaboration took place in the initial stages of project planning for the Bridgwater Neighbourhoods and Town Centre. The design charette held at the University of Manitoba in 2003 gave a

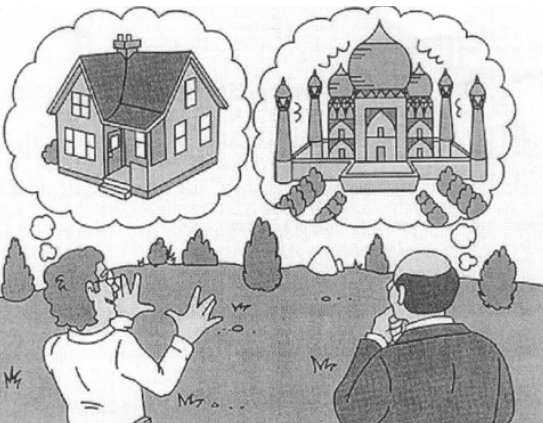


Artistic rendering of Town Centre. Winnipeg Free Press (2012).

variety of stakeholders the opportunity to shape the goals and visions for the area. Unfortunately, this initial exercise was not open to the general public, but was rather geared towards organizations, developers, councilors, and other parties with a vested interest. In the following years, open houses and workshops held were to educate rather

than receive feedback from the general community. In the later stages of development, the impact of outcomes from public hearings are less likely to be incorporated into the design. Comments at that stage would result in minor changes to the plans, if any.

It is also essential to ensure transparency about the details of any proposed development from beginning to completion. Any new development, or changes made to existing development, will ultimately affect residents in adjacent neighbourhoods. Increased population, whether in a low density neighbourhood, or a high density downtown, will inevitably impact infrastructure such as roads, and systems such as public and active transportation. In order for their to be discussion and an open dialogue about the impacts of development, the city at large needs to be made aware of development plans.



Collaborative discovery process prior to project development. Steve McConnell (1996).

Additionally, it is essential that all parties involved in development and planning processes have ongoing transparency and dialogue with one another to ensure that they are on track with the goals and visions that were established at the onset. This requires stakeholders to communicate their plans openly within themselves as well as with other stakeholders. Strong communication between the City planners, councillors, developers and designers plays a critical role in the outcomes of developments.

## Conclusion

Bridgwater Town Centre is the essential next step towards building more livable suburban developments and will act as a catalyst to building smarter developments in and around Winnipeg. The Centre may also inspire existing suburbs to become more livable by retrofitting to increase density and mix uses to decrease automobile reliance. Regardless of the outcome of Bridgwater Town Centre, moving forward, healthier lifestyles should be promoted in all North American developments and more options for active and public transportation should be made available to residents who choose to live the suburban lifestyle.

## Resources

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