

## Precinct 'K':

A proactive approach towards Suburban Development by breaking barriers and enabling meaningful discussion through collaboration

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### Abstract

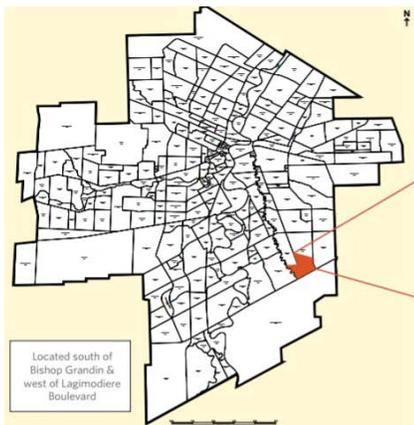
#### Key words:

Suburban  
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Planning Process  
and Collaboration

In an era where Greenfield development is commonly branded as 'urban sprawl' suburban development must proceed carefully through a collaborative and sensible planning approach. The process used in the creation of a secondary plan for Precinct 'K', located in south-east Winnipeg is one such example. Despite significant challenges, the entire planning process was commendable where a plan was produced collaboratively leading to most of the stakeholders groups including the City, the Consultant, the Developer, local Landowners and special interest groups (i.e. Save Our Seine), being satisfied with the final outcome which culminated with a community committee motion for the development of a Seine River Greenway Secondary Plan. This project demonstrates the importance of communication and community engagement in the planning process. In 2013, the consultation process was initiated by the MMM Group through a series of open house events, workshops and stakeholder engagements, in an attempt to foster an environment of trust between their clients and the various stakeholder groups. This environment provided a new level of transparency between the stakeholders which created a sense of respect and understanding among participants. It also helped them to more clearly understand each other's point of view and thus, allowed MMM Group to concentrate on establishing policy and design options which suited the development and protection needs of all the stakeholders more aptly. In collaboration with James Platt from the City of Winnipeg, Bryan Ward from the MMM Group (the Consultant) and Marc Brown from the Genstar Developments (the Developer), this research examines the case of Precinct 'K' as a best planning process by engaging all the concerned groups from the start.

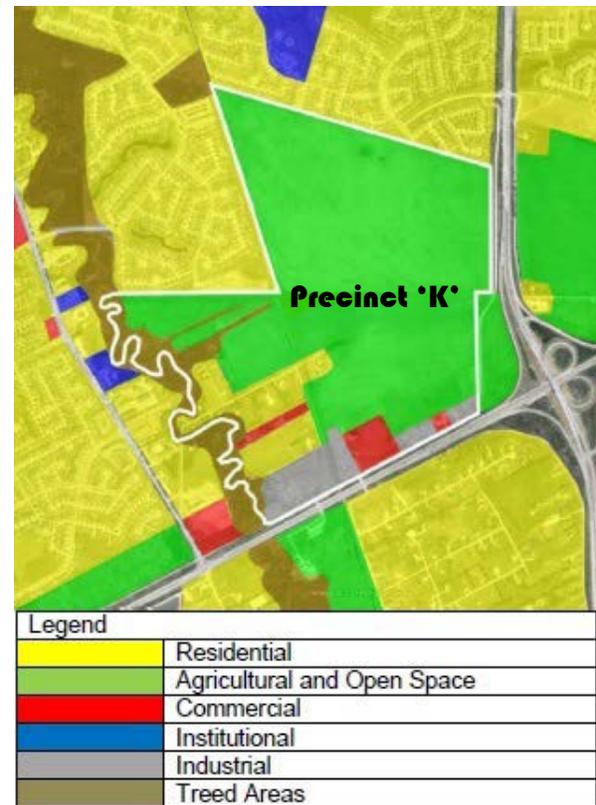
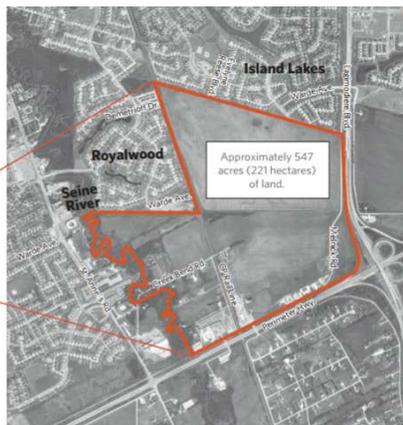
## Background

As per, the City of Winnipeg's Development Plan, OurWinnipeg the proposed land area is identified as a 'New Community', and is meant to accommodate the City's growth. The City's 'Complete Communities Direction Strategy By-law' identifies the subject lands as a 'Precinct'. Prior to development occurring within a Precinct, Complete Communities requires the creation of a plan to ensure new communities are well planned developments offering opportunities for mixed land uses,



Boulevard, Perimeter Highway lies on south and the Seine River spreads across the west side. In recent years, the primary land uses in Precinct 'K' has been mostly agricultural/vacant agricultural and limited warehousing towards the perimeter. The site area is approximately 547 acres. In early 2013, Genstar Developments obtained the northern ~240 acres from Manitoba Housing Rehabilitation Corp.

The subject land is zoned primarily as RR5 – Rural Residential with portions along the perimeter



Existing Land Use Map. Image retrieved from: Precinct K Plan-Background Report by MMM Group Limited, 2014. <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/viewpdf.asp?sectionid=376199>

Context and Location of Precinct K. Image Retrieved from: MMM Group (2014). [http://www.mattallard.ca/uploads/2/5/4/8/25485544/precinct\\_k\\_open\\_house\\_boards.pdf](http://www.mattallard.ca/uploads/2/5/4/8/25485544/precinct_k_open_house_boards.pdf)

assortment of housing types, parks and interconnected open spaces, employment alternatives and transit accessibility that promotes walkability within the diverse neighbourhood (OurWinnipeg and Complete Communities Direction Strategy, 2011).

Located in the south-east of Winnipeg, Precinct 'K' was a fragment of the City of St. Boniface before the City of Winnipeg was established in 1972. From the mid-1980s until the 2000s, the area adjacent to the north of Precinct 'K' was developed as the Island Lakes neighbourhood, east side is bounded by Lagimodiere

zoned M2 – General Manufacturing. It was discovered that while the M2 properties had zoning rights allowing them to intensify manufacturing/industrial uses, they lacked piped sewer, water, or land drainage and are only accessible by way of a non-urban standard roadway. Principally, most of these properties cannot obtain development permits for more intensive uses until their services are upgraded to an urban standard. In light of this it was quickly determined that the Precinct Plan could progress further in one of two ways: either by creating a small

manufacturing hub in the Melnick Road area or by designating the lands for alternative use and put efforts towards purging these small manufacturing properties (Platt J., 2013).

## Challenges Faced

At first glance, some might say a Plan for Precinct 'K' represents as an unnecessary expansion outpacing the population growth by the Winnipeg Free Press (Young, D., 2014). To which, James intelligently explains that "Planning is never a bad thing" and "as planners it should be our conscious responsibility to work towards developing and adopting secondary plans that accommodate the growth of our city into the future." (Platt, J., 2015). The process of developing a plan for Precinct 'K'

was made especially challenging by the following:

**Fragmented Ownership.** According to the site survey, it was identified that large portion of the land was held in fragmented ownership, including farmers, land speculators, and those wanting a rural lifestyle close to the City. This made the consultation process more intricate.

**Multiple Landowners.** Besides fragmented ownership, there are several different stakeholders involved, mainly Manitoba Housing Rehabilitation Corp. (MHRC), Genstar Groups and Save Our Seine (SOS) and satisfying the requirements of each and every group was not an easy task.

**Proximity to Seine River.** In an urban Winnipeg fabric, about 50km riverbank frontage is offered by the 25km long meandering Seine River, which is a major natural zone and needs to be preserved (Seine River Greenway Study, 2000)

**Existing residences along Seine River (Creek bend Road).** There exists four residential properties on Creek Bend road that are constructed very close to the Seine River, making it challenging to obtain public lands for recreational development along the river corridor. One stakeholder in particular, 'Save Our Seine' expressed interest in the City acquiring land along the Seine River to incorporate into a new Trail System (New Communities and the Seine River, 2013).

**Existing industrial/commercial uses along Perimeter Highway.** Special attention needed to be paid

towards integrating the existing industrial/commercial uses with the new residential development.

**Railway crosses the subject land.** There lies CP Rail Emersion line crossing right through the subject land bisecting the Precinct along north-south. Two rail crossings currently existed within the planning area. Early consultation with CP Rail revealed no new net crossings would be permitted.

**Special Interest Groups.** Perhaps, the biggest challenge faced in the Precinct 'K' planning process was engaging and collaborating with special interest groups. The most vocal and well-organized group with special interest in the Planning area was Save Our Seine (SOS). In the past, SOS had aggressively lobbied to protect a significant portion of the Seine River forest from development just north of the Planning Area. Their interest in Precinct 'K' focused on protecting natural amenities and corridors connecting to and along the Seine River. SOS made their

## 7 (du/ac)

ACCEPTABLE AS STANDARD ACCORDING TO THE LAND USE POLICIES.

Leading to **2360** (approx.) residential units in total.

Possible Development Scenario. Retrieved from: Precinct Plan By-Law, Schedule 1, 48/2014

interests known early in the process by attempting to discredit the planning process being undertaken by the Consultant; even suggesting that the City and Developer were colluding with each other to develop the Seine River Corridor (The Blog post run by David Watson, former SOS President, December 2014).

## Approach and Interactions

In an attempt to dispel accusations and suspicions of collusion with either the Developer or SOS, the City of Winnipeg insisted that all communications be shared with all stakeholders and that one point of contact be established for



Treed Areas.. Image Retrieved from: Precinct K-Precinct Plan By-Law, Schedule 1, 48/2014. <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/documents/docext/bl/2014/2014.48.pdf>

each group. Using this approach, stakeholders realized that they were as much a part of the process as the City. The stakeholders slowly became less suspicious of one another and dialog between groups became less adversarial.

The Consultation process was mainly set up at 5 levels:

**Stakeholder Meetings.** This meeting included various representatives from all the identified City departments. The main agenda of this meeting was to create an open conversation atmosphere which would assist in understanding the interests and priorities of diverse stakeholders, in order to be on a same page throughout the planning process (MMM Group report, 2014).

**Landowner/Stakeholder Meeting.** An hour meeting was conducted in 2013, where all the land owners were engaged in a discussion about the Precinct plan while their feedback and comments were gathered. It was a procedure to convince the stakeholders that the presented vision would address the local context (MMM Group report, 2014).

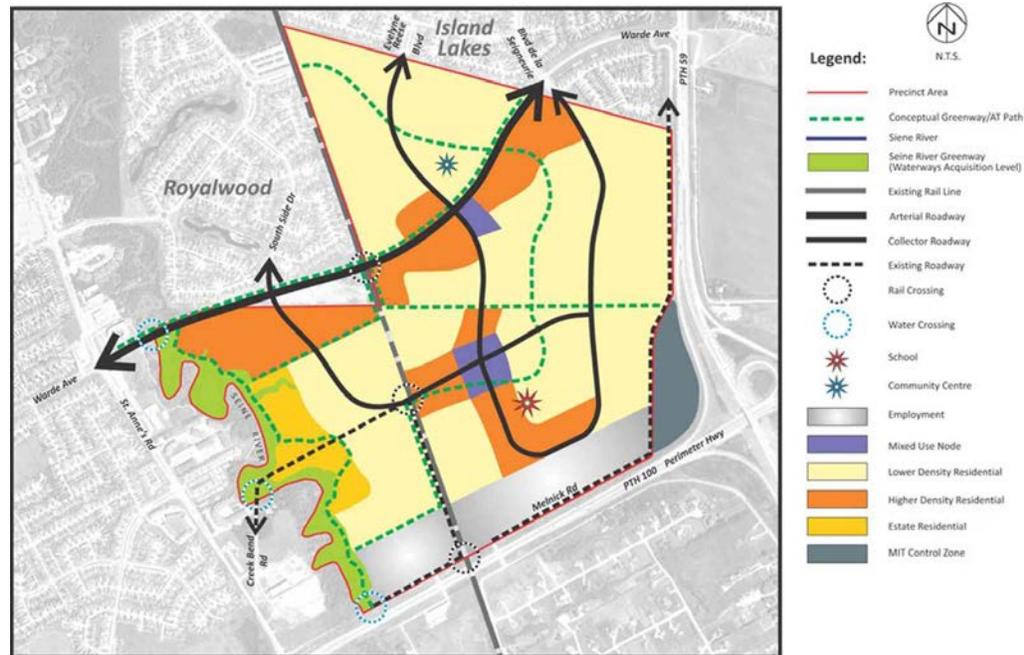
**Landowner/Stakeholder Workshops.** In order to receive a clear vision of how land owners want their properties to be developed in future and to educate them about the best complete community practices, certain workshops were held in 2014. The level of mutual respect and trust created by previous engagements, facilitated in making this kind of critical interaction possible. In order to explain the undertaken planning exercise, a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' was made available to

everyone. During the workshop, a break out group workbook was also distributed and the attendees were asked to complete two tasks followed by several questions regarding recommendations of guiding principles for Precinct 'K' and identification of future potential land uses with conscious consideration towards road connections and greenspace (MMM Group report, 2014).

**Public Open Houses.** This event was properly advertised in the Lance community newspaper inviting

network made it more clearly for the public to interpret the functionality of the Precinct Plan. Public open houses are generally conducted in order to maintain the level of transparency among the public about the development projects in their vicinity by exchanging their views, needs and desires of future development (MMM Group report, 2014).

**Online Survey.** The drafted Precinct Plan and the public reviews and critical appraisals from the open house were further posted online to



Land Use and Transportation Concept Plan. Image Retrieved from: Precinct K-Precinct Plan By-Law, Schedule 1, 48/2014. <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/documents/docext/bl/2014/2014.48.pdf>

public's active involvement in reviewing the drafted Precinct Plan that highlighted the amalgamation of existing residential and commercial development with new neighbourhoods with preference given to the preservation of natural area all around the Seine River. The details of land use policies along with maps and infrastructure

reach out the broader audience and gather their feedback thus further assuring the transparency level (MMM Group report, 2014).

## Outcomes

Due to high levels of transparency, Genstar respected SOS's concerns over the protection of the Seine River

“It was quite rewarding to take an innovative/modern plan to the public hearing with virtually no opposition. I think that was a direct result of a collaborative process and a commitment to communicative efforts”.

- Marc Brown, MCIP, Development Manager  
[Genstar Group]

corridor and agreed on preserving it. However, prior to the hearing the City had explained to SOS, and the Councillors, that it was not the role of this precinct plan to include details for protecting the Seine River or developing recreational facilities along it. It was also explained that more than one Secondary Plan can be adopted for any area of land (in fact, there is an area in the north west portion of Winnipeg that is subject to at least 4 different Secondary Plans, each dealing with different/separate issues). Following the presentations at the hearing the Community Committee moved to have the public service prepare a Secondary Plan for the Seine River Corridor, extending from well beyond the Precinct 'K' planning area. This suggestion to create such a plan was formally suggested by the former president of SOS himself (Platt, J., April 2015).

The developers after considerable case analysis, have come up with three phase development strategy for the Precinct 'K' Plan.

**Phase 1:** It includes Fraipont, located south of developed Island Lakes and was designated provincial land bank formerly. Presently, there are no existing residences or businesses on Phase 1 land and poses no such complications in integrating existing local infrastructure with the new

neighbourhood (New Communities and the Seine River, 2013).

**Phase 2:** The entire land piece in island Lakes that exists south of Fraipont comes under Phase 2 development. There are only two existing houses in Phase 2, apart from few commercial lots on Melnick Road, thus simplifying the development process (New Communities and the Seine River, 2013).

**Phase 3:** the undeveloped land in Royalwood, situated south of the Warde Avenue and north of the

Perimeter Highway falls under Phase 3 development. Addressing infrastructure accessibility remains the major concern in these two phases. At least, one new retention pond will be requisite for Phase 2 and Phase 3. Moreover, a brand new sewer and water connections needs to be incorporated in the existing service grid (New Communities and the Seine River, 2013).

The long term goal of Precinct 'K' is to establish a new community that is well-connected and offers the options for safe active transportation by planning continuous North-South trail that connects and include Bois-des-esprits to the North without compromising on the existing Greenways (SOS, 2013). Apart from developing a sustainable environmental plan, in order to implement any plan successfully it should be feasible economically.



Land Drainage Plan. Image Retrieved from: Precinct K-Precinct Plan By-Law, Schedule 1, 48/2014. <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/documents/docext/bl/2014/2014.48.pdf>

According to the cost benefit analysis performed by MMM Group alongside conceptualising the Precinct 'K' Plan, "the new complete community is estimated to generate net revenues of \$114.8 million to the City of Winnipeg under the 20-year build out time frame. The relatively low cost of operating to service the proposed

be established. In case of Precinct 'K', consensus between Developers, Consultants, City and SOS on the need for a Seine River Secondary Plan resulted in highlighting the excellence of planning process that needs to be practiced more often.

**Community Partnership.** The working together environment calls for action which determines

in the conceptualised plan (Practicing the Collaborative Process, 2014).

**Level of Media Involvement.** When big development groups are involved, in this case MMM group and Genstar, it is generally hard to maintain confidentiality from media. However, if transparency is maintained between the



Precinct K- New Royalwood/Island Lakes. Image Retrieved from: New Communities and the Seine River by Save Our Seine River Environment, December 2013. <http://www.saveourseine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/New-Communities-and-the-Seine-River.pdf>

residential densities and the existing regional infrastructure are mainly the two driving factors behind producing positive revenue for the City" (Precinct K Cost Benefit Analysis, 2014).

## Lessons Learned

**Collaborative Planning Approach.** The biggest obstacle pivoted in the case of Precinct 'K' was fragmented ownership because with multiple landowners comes various requirements, goals, desires, ideas and visions for a new development and they may not be necessarily coincide with each other's. Therefore, in order to come up with a secondary plan that mutually satisfies all the potential challenges without much negative conflicts, collaboration between all the involved stakeholders must

the passion about any planning or development issue. Once the matter is identified, there is a need to build a base of common knowledge that projects mutual respect, trust and acceptance thus facilitating the collaboration start-up. Engaging the community towards a shared vision could further make any development plan a success, also not ignoring the fact that the vision should address the future possibilities. During the planning process, it is extremely crucial to sustain the collaborative efforts in order to maintain the transparency throughout the planning practice. Strategic Planning could be another driving force that propagates the step by step comprehensive process by providing a framework. Lastly, evaluation at every planning phase helps towards building confidence

stakeholders from the start, there is no need for actively pursuing media coverage. Bryan Ward, Senior Planner from the Planning and Development Unit at MMM Group Limited also confirmed that "for Precinct 'K' plan they did not approach media at first place because they didn't felt the need to justify their planning approach, but they responded to media inquiries as they came in. On being specific, CBC did contact Genstar directly at one point in the project and spoke with Marc Brown, Development manager at Genstar Groups to get the insight of the Precinct 'K' Project" (Ward, B., March 2015). To which, Marc responded very positively by inviting their TV crew to his office and answered whatever questions they had regarding the development of Precinct 'K'. He also provided them a copy of

their land use map for Precinct 'K' and was more than happy to answer questions to ensure that accurate information was being conveyed. (Brown, M., April 2015).

**Working with Special Interest Groups.** Challenges including fragmented ownership, crossing the Seine River (Warde Ave Extension) and integrating mfg/industrial in the south were not-uncommon and can be overcome through good clear decision making. However, successfully working with Special Interest Groups requires more than just good decision making. It requires an honest commitment to engage and listen. MMM Group could have easily ignored SOS altogether and simply fight out their differences at the Public Hearing. Instead, they accepted the challenge and engaged SOS in earnest (Platt, J., April 2015). With assistance from the City, MMM Group communicated with SOS more openly and honestly thus making the entire planning process exceptionally successful.

## Resources

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Precinct K- Planning Outcome: Bonavista Neighbourhood Plan, Presented by Bryan Ward of the MMM Group. Image Retrieved from: The Lance Community Newspaper Article, Bonavista Subdivision Unveiled (Misseghers, T., 2014). <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/lance/Bonavista-subdivision-unveiled-273577691.html>