

CASE - IN - POINT

Taking the Pulse of Practice

Spring 2005

Building the Capacity for Regional Planning in the Manitoba Capital Region ... Exploring the Role of the Provincial Government in Bottom-Up Regional Strategizing and Policymaking.

By Erin McCleery & Linda McFadyen MCP (A MPPI - UMCP Collaborative Initiative)

Abstract

In recent years, the environmental and fiscal impacts of land-use development on the broader region have become a site of concern and inquiry within the planning discipline. In order to address these concerns strong provincial governance and leadership is necessary to actively support the development and implementation of regional policies and plans. While effective regional planning must involve the participation of multiple stakeholders, provincial governance plays a crucial role in delivering the necessary resources and guidance to achieve regional planning goals within the public domain.

The purpose of this project is to examine the role of the Provincial Government in developing and initiating regional strategies within the context of the Manitoba Capital Region. The case study will look at the experience of Linda McFadyen, a practising planner and the Assistant Deputy Minister with Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade, in developing a framework for Regional Strategies, a new section of legislation that is currently being proposed for the revised Planning Act.

The Regional Strategies framework developed by the Provincial Government may be classified as an example of 'best practice'; whereby through a bottom-up planning approach, the provincial government helps to demonstrate both a commitment to and leadership in enabling and encouraging the development of regional strategies within the Manitoba Capital Region.

Inside...

Examining the role of the Provincial Government in regional planning in the Manitoba Capital Region

Outline...

Theoretical Underpinnings

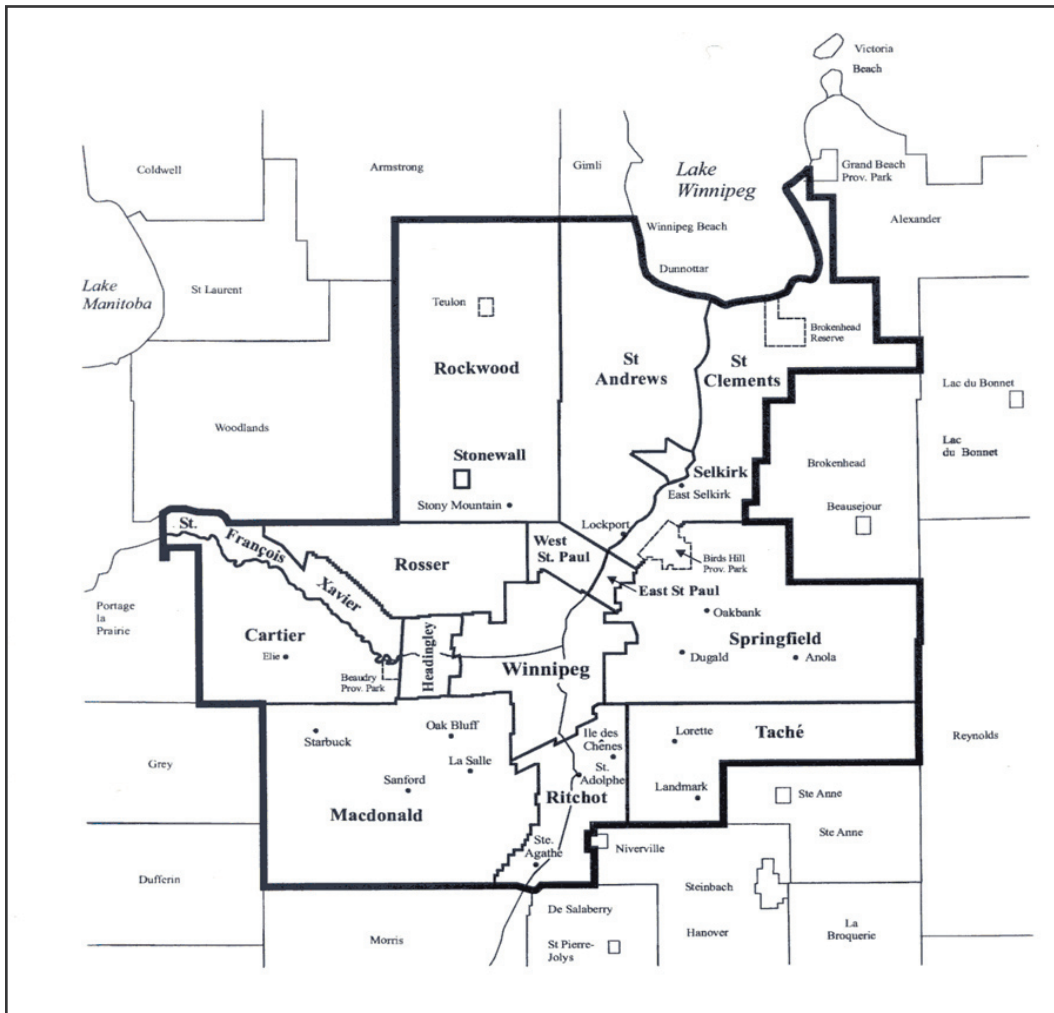
Historical Overview


Role of the Provincial Government

Regional Strategies Framework for the Manitoba Capital Region

Introduction

In an era that is characterized by decentralized planning systems and bottom-up planning processes, the ideological values of regional planning have also shifted to reflect the greater appreciation for inclusiveness and flexibility within the planning process. While it is evident that sustained provincial leadership and commitment to regional planning efforts is critical in promoting and strengthening the Manitoba Capital Region, a key challenge of the present provincial government is how to approach regional issues. Mainly, how can the provincial government demonstrate leadership on regional issues, while at the same time reflect the shifting values of planning such as bottom-up and consensus building strategies that currently abound the field of planning? The following case-in-point examines regional planning practice in the Manitoba Capital Region and more specifically the current practice of the Provincial






Government in developing the Regional Strategy framework for the revised Planning Act. The document considers the Provincial Governments efforts in undertaking a bottom-up planning and consensus building approach to regional issues in the Capital Region.

Theoretical Underpinnings

A regional planning framework is critical in encouraging a cohesive relationship and balance between rural and urban areas within any given region or territory. In general, regional planning is concerned with the interrelated social, economic, and environmental impacts of development and planning activity on large areas. Hodge and Robinson (2001) cogently explain that regional planning at its core, 'reflects a palpable response to the real-world problems of land-use development' (p.6).

While there is no single definition of regional planning, and rather it is wide-ranging in both theory and practice, Hodge and Robinson nevertheless identify five key characteristics to describe regional planning.

First, regional planning is large scale, and it is about responding to development needs that affect large areas. Second, regional planning is interrelated and it is concerned with the impacts of development on the social, physical, economic, and environmental quality of large areas. Third, regional planning requires balance and is concerned with the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Fourth, regional planning is normative and it is about prioritizing development activity. Fifth, regional planning has implementation potential and it is made effective through the availability of resources and power to execute planning objectives (p.10-12). The authors also provide a typology of regional planning in Canada, in which they identify two main types: (1) Rural and non-metropolitan and (2) Large urban and metropolitan regions. Of particular relevance is the latter category, and specifically the Manitoba Capital Region can be considered a city-region. A distinguishing feature of city regions is that their spatial impact extends far beyond the boundaries of the central city, whereby a process of decentralization of people, employment, and services begins to occur in suburban, exurban, and rural areas. City regions represent a distinct spatial phenomenon and the increased development in peripheral areas create significant planning problems such as increased congestion and pollution, declining central cities, and the fragmentation of municipalities that tend to compete against




one another on issues such as transportation, taxation, and growth management (p.298-301). In order to address these planning problems, regional planning strategies must be developed and implemented to achieve the integration of various parts of the region, to ensure economic competitiveness, and to balance development and economic needs with social and ecological ones.

While the need for regional planning is evident, what has become open to debate in recent years is the way in which regional planning is undertaken and implemented. Post-modern planning and its necessity for bottom-up planning processes and the inclusion of multiple stakeholders has permeated the domain of regional planning and has ultimately resulted in a shift in ideological values. No longer can regional planning strategies be simply imposed on municipalities, but rather a process of consensus building must occur that involves the participation of diverse citizens and stakeholders to develop regional planning objectives and strategies collectively (Hodge and Robinson, p.3).

Historical Overview of Planning in the Manitoba Capital Region

The province of Manitoba has a rich history of regional planning, and as early as 1911, with the formation of the City Planning Commission, a co-ordinated regional focus was initiated to respond to the development needs affecting larger areas within Manitoba. The City Planning Commission included representatives from Winnipeg, surrounding municipalities, the Architects Association, Real Estate Exchange, and the Province, and it represents one of the first known major collaborative efforts involving various stakeholders and public and private agencies organized to address regional concerns.

Since then a range of planning strategies have been devised and implemented in the province which have had a significant impact on the establishment of a co-ordinated regional perspective. Of particular importance is the adoption of the Metropolitan Winnipeg Act in 1961, which resulted in the creation of Metro-Winnipeg, and which included Winnipeg and its 11 surrounding municipalities. Under the Metro system, the individual municipalities maintained authority over matters deemed local, while the Metropolitan Corporation co-ordinated services deemed regional (MB Intergovernmental Affairs, 2002, p.16). Also at the same time, the Winnipeg Additional Zone was created which extended eight kilometres from the metropolitan authority's boundaries





and which gave the City of Winnipeg land use and planning control over the zone. The purpose of the Additional Zone was to prevent suburban sprawl and to control the development in the immediately surrounding region. Soon after, in 1972, the City of Winnipeg Act was adopted and resulted in the official amalgamation of the 12 Metro municipalities into one municipality – the City of Winnipeg. The Winnipeg Additional Zone was eliminated in 1991 (Hodge and Robinson, 2001, p.281).

A more recent innovation was the designation of the Manitoba Capital Region and the formation of a Capital Region Committee in 1989 by the Province of Manitoba. Still in effect today, the main purpose of the committee is to address regional issues of mutual concern, and it is comprised of Reeves and Mayors from the 16 municipalities, along with provincial officials. In 1996, the Province of Manitoba in partnership with the public and the region's 16 municipalities released the Capital Region Strategy, which identified policy areas and actions to guide regional decision-making. Over the following years, the province was involved in a variety of initiatives intended to develop and implement regional and sustainable development principles into decision making, and in 1998 the province adopted The Sustainable Development Act.

In 2001 the Provincial Government appointed a Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) for the Capital Region to examine and report back to the government on policies for a regional plan. RPAC issued a public discussion paper in 2002 entitled: *Strengthening Manitoba's Capital Region: General Principles and Policy Directions*, to be considered by the government, the public, and the municipalities in the area. After consulting with various stakeholders and through multiple public meetings RPAC issued its final report to the government in 2003 entitled: *A Partnership for the Future: Putting the Pieces Together in the Manitoba Capital Region*. The report represents an extensive provincial undertaking and accomplishment in developing a cohesive and shared agenda for improving regional planning efforts in the Capital Region. Underpinning the report are two sets of policy recommendations to encourage regional development in Manitoba. The first set of policy initiatives focus on building and strengthening ties between the City of Winnipeg and the surrounding municipalities. The second set of policy initiatives focus on developing more clear and comprehensive planning and land use strategies for the region.

The latest development in regional planning in the Capital Region is the Provincial Government's current undertaking in reviewing the Planning Act and proposing a separate framework for





Regional Strategies. The primary goal of the proposed section of legislation is to encourage and enable regional planning amongst interested municipalities in the Capital Region. The Regional Planning Strategies Framework is the central focus of the case-in-point report, and will be examined in more detail in the following sections of this document.


Areas of Concern and Interest in the Capital Region


Current planning thought and practice recognize that all land use development and expansion present significant implications on the social, physical, economic, and environmental facets of a broader region. Therefore, no longer can planning consider land use development an isolated matter confined to the geo-political boundaries in which the particular development is located. In the context of the Manitoba Capital Region there exists specific areas related to land-use development that warrant a regional focus in planning. Water-related issues such as water quality, surface drainage, and flooding have significant impacts of land-use development. In particular, flooding is a major concern in the Red River Valley, and the desire to develop land in areas subject to flooding raises key regional implications. Another significant area of interest is rural residential development, which raises issues regarding loss of agricultural land, declining central city, servicing, environmental impacts, and most crucially the true costs of development, which includes a discussion on the long-term environmental and financial impacts of maintaining infrastructure. More recent regional concerns in the Manitoba Capital Region include transportation, mosquito abatement, municipal sharing of recreational facilities, sewer and water services and tax sharing strategies.

While the issues outlined above do not represent all the regional issues affecting the Manitoba Capital Region as a whole, they nevertheless provide insight into the importance and urgency of regional planning efforts in the region.

The Provincial Role

The province plays a crucial role in regional planning, and in general it is responsible for setting the boundaries of planning regions, delegating resources for plan preparation and implementation, co-ordinating decisions and actions, and creating appropriate governance mechanisms (Hodge and Robinson, p. 364). In particular, Hodge and Robinson argue that provinces are responsible for creating effective mechanisms to enable the city-region meet its goals and respond to immediate and prospective regional challenges. However, the authors maintain that provincial






governments must emphasize process, inclusiveness, and flexibility as much as structure, and rather than focusing on constraining and imposing institutional mechanisms, it must focus on voluntary and co-operative agreements among both private and public stakeholders (p. 365). Basically, a new governance approach is being proposed to address regional planning issues, and one which is characterized by a provincial government that is a facilitator and enabler of regional goals.

In context of the Manitoba Capital Region, the current provincial government has demonstrated such a commitment, whereby it is currently proposing a more flexible and enabling governance mechanism for regional planning, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. A key objective of the Manitoba Provincial Government is to shift the focus of regional planning from earlier controversial debates to one that is rooted in consensus building. For example, rather than focusing on urban sprawl discussions which has received considerable debate amongst the various municipalities in the past; the province is trying to build consensus by shifting discussions on issues that all municipalities can agree on, such as water quality and the environmental protection of Lake Winnipeg, all of which ultimately addresses the issue of urban sprawl. By examining the broader perspective, it takes away from the notion of competition between municipalities and focuses on issues of mutual interests, such as the environmental impact of development, which has implications on all municipalities.

The main challenge for the province is to find a way to encourage the municipalities in the direction of better regional planning, and to help them realize the benefits that are in it for them. This in turn requires a fundamental change in attitudes about the region. In order to move away from a sense of competition and contention amongst municipalities that tends to culminate around discussions on regional planning, the province is trying to foster consensus building and to encourage municipalities to consider the long-term impacts of development and sustainability in the Capital Region.

Regional Strategies: Enabling Framework for the Manitoba Capital Region


In view of current and prevailing post-modern planning principles, which call for inclusiveness and flexibility in the planning process, the Province has developed a bottom-up approach to addressing regional planning in the Manitoba Capital Region. Specifically, the Province has



developed a framework for Regional Strategies, a new section of legislation that is currently being proposed for the revised Planning Act, and which is currently under consideration by the Internal Legislative Review Committee.

The purpose of the Regional Strategies is to enable co-ordination of planning on a regional basis. Under these arrangements, two or more municipalities can come together, either voluntarily or through the encouragement of the Province, and form an agreement in order to address one or more regional issues, such as infrastructure, transportation, or regional housing and residential lots. The municipalities would come together and develop a regional strategy that would have to be consistent with the Provincial Land Use Policies. Once it is consistent with provincial policies, the municipalities would then start to develop their local land use plan within a regional framework, and this will ultimately require the municipalities to consider and examine the regional implications specific to their area. It is important to note that the Regional Strategies Framework does not require the Province to identify and determine the regional strategy for the municipalities, and instead the interested municipalities would through consensus identify their own policies and goals to be included in their own distinct regional strategy. Essentially, the arrangements provided for under the Regional Strategies section of the Planning Act provides a forum for discussing regional issues, as well as provides municipalities with the necessary resources and support to prepare a regional plan.

The Regional Strategies Framework reflects the Province's commitment to bottom-up planning processes and the enabling legislation ultimately allows municipalities to initiate a regional partnership with other municipalities through consensus. Further, because it is an enabling framework, the Province is not requiring that all 16 municipalities of the Capital Region be part of a Regional Strategy. It is the understanding of the Province that the Regional Strategies Framework is part of an incremental process that enables interested municipalities to take initiative and ownership over regional issues affecting their area. The province is trying to facilitate groups working together on certain issues and to build partnerships, so that those municipalities can ultimately realize some successes on a regional basis. Rather than imposing a regional strategy framework on the entire Manitoba Capital Region, the Province is focusing on consensus building and on planning successes, to break down some of the barriers of contention between municipalities and to instead develop positive leadership and partnerships



amongst the municipalities.

The Regional Strategies Framework represents a shift in regional governance from previous imposing and institutional tactics to contemporary and innovative approaches based on consensus building and voluntary participation. While the Province is confident that this bottom-up approach is a step in the right direction, they are also aware of the limitations of an enabling and non-imposing strategy such as the one they are proposing. Potential risks are that municipalities may not choose to adopt a regional framework or it may take longer for regional goals to be realized since it is dependent upon voluntary agreements and co-operation between the municipalities. However, having said that, through gradual change and an incremental process, as is provided for in the Regional Strategies Framework, the Province believes that the divisions amongst municipalities will become diminished and strong regional partnerships will slowly be created. As such, the bottom-up process undertaken by the Province is not just about developing and implementing regional plans, but it is also about fostering a long-term paradigm shift, whereby regionalism is legitimized and accepted amongst all the municipalities.

Conclusion

The Regional Strategies section proposed by the Provincial Government for the revised Planning Act, is a policy framework that encourages municipalities to consider regional issues and supports municipalities working together and creating partnerships around one or more regional goals and policies they identify. This is an example of 'best practice' in planning, whereby through a bottom-up approach, the Provincial Government is encouraging and enabling regional planning in the Capital Region and is ultimately bringing a regional perspective to the forefront of planning through consensus building and cooperative processes.

Postscript

Following the completion of this case-in-point report, the revised Planning Act was introduced on April 25, 2005, and which included the new section called Regional Strategies as discussed in this report. Under Section 5 of the Planning Act, municipalities may develop a regional strategy for the area under their jurisdiction, in order to improve and co-ordinate land use and development, and to promote co-operation between municipalities in the delivery of services and infrastructure within the region.



References

Hodge, G & Robinson, I. (2001). *Planning Canadian Regions*. UBC Press, Vancouver.

Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs (2002). *Planning Manitoba's Capital Region. The Planning Framework in Manitoba's Capital Region: A Brief Historical Perspective*.