

Case In Point

Promoting Regional Thinking & Cooperation:
Reflections on Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework

Taking the Pulse.....

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At its core, regional land use is a sociopolitical challenge. It is a question of whether we can integrate the needs, interests, and visions of multiple jurisdictions, sectors, and interests. It is also a question of how society addresses shared and competing interests.

Mckinney & Essington
2006: 10

Summary

Regional Planning is complicated as it goes across different jurisdictions and involves various stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector and different interest groups and local residents. The most intractable challenge of regional planning is the lack of consciousness for regional thinking and cooperation on certain regional issues, such as the protection of natural resource, the delivery of services, and the development of economic activities. This challenge also embedded in the regional planning experience of Manitoba's Capital Region. This Case-in-Point research will make a "best practice" case study to explore how the project of Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework promotes regional thinking and cooperation in the Capital Region. This case study should be timely and useful as it can summarize and share some lessons from the ongoing project of Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Framework with other regional planners.

Background and Context

Since 1940s, the Province of Manitoba has a long history of regional planning initiatives related with the City of Winnipeg and its surrounding rural municipalities. The formation of the Winnipeg Metropolitan Planning Commission in 1943 is considered to be the beginning that regional planning becomes a conscious formal activity of governments in Canada (Robinson & Hodge 1998: 10). From 1961 to 1972, the existence of Metropolitan Corporation of Winnipeg is one of a few examples that a regional authority with substantial planning powers is established between municipal governments and the provincial government in Canada. In 1972, the incorporation of the 12 municipalities of Metropolitan Winnipeg into Winnipeg Unicity is a typical regional planning strategy of forced large-scale amalgamation. In late 1989, the Province of Manitoba established the Capital Region Committee of elected officials, basically an advisory regional planning agency, as a new initiative to promote regional planning in Manitoba Capital Region which is now made up of 15 municipalities (Fig. 1). However, the progress regarding regional strategic planning and municipal partnerships in the Capital Region was relatively slow in the following years. In 1998, the provincial government

agreed with the recommendation of the Capital Region Committee of elected officials, to establish a Capital Region Review Panel to “undertake a review and making recommendations to the government respecting the effectiveness of the existing legislative, policy and procedural framework guiding land use planning and development, and the provision of services in the municipalities in the Capital Region” (Capital Region Review 1999: iii). In January of 2001, the provincial government released Planning Manitoba’s Capital Region: Next Steps as the response to the Final Report of the Capital Region Review Panel and a new regional planning initiative. In September of 2001, the provincial government appointed a Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) for the Capital Region to look into and report back to the government on policies for a regional plan. In the Final Report of Regional Planning Advisory Committee in 2003, the committee recommended two complementary sets of regional policy initiatives (A Partnership for the Future 2003: 14).

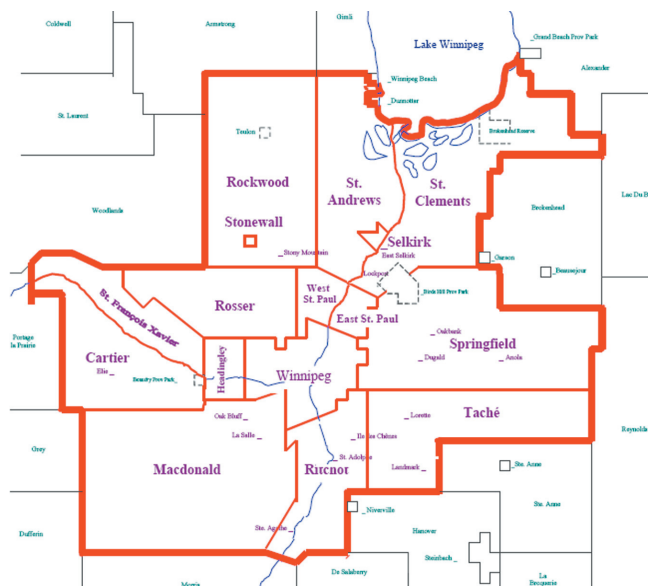
1. Recommend fostering regional thinking and cooperation, such as partnership, service sharing and tax sharing
2. Recommend establishing a clear and comprehensive planning and land use policy for the region, such as the statement of planning principles and the use of policy planning statements.

It is evident that the importance of fostering regional thinking and cooperation has been recognized in the next steps of regional planning initiative in the Capital Region. Efforts related with the recent research of regional planning situation in the Capital Region have provided the opportunities to develop a regional strategic plan.

Facts of the Case

In the recent years, the municipalities of Manitoba’s Capital Region have indicated the will and desire to participate in a comprehensive regional planning framework. In 2005, the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region Inc. partnered with the Province of Manitoba to develop a Regional Planning Framework. They formed a new level of cooperation between the municipal governments and the provincial government in regard with the regional planning issues in the Capital Region. Representatives from the provincial government were positioned in the Steering Committee of the Project. In addition, the City of Winnipeg acted as the lead municipal applicant who initiates the application to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) for support in developing a Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework. The goals of the Framework are to improve economic vitality, quality of life and sustainability in the Capital Region. In the planning process of the Framework, the use of

Cartier, RM (*now is not in the Capital Region*)
 East St. Paul, RM
 Headingley, RM
 Macdonald, RM
 Ritchot, RM
 Rockwood, RM
 Rosser, RM
 Selkirk, City



Springfield, RM
 St. Andrews, RM
 St. Clements, RM
 St. François Xavier, RM
 Stonewall, Town
 Taché, RM
 West St. Paul, RM
 Winnipeg, City

Fig. 1 Municipalities in the Capital Region

Source: Strengthen Manitoba’s Capital Region 2002: Appendix C

MetroQuest, a computer scenario based modeling tool, is considered as an innovative approach to foster the consciousness of regional thinking and cooperation in the municipalities of Capital Region. Based on the data regarding characteristics of Manitoba's Capital Region, MetroQuest will be customized into the unique WMCRP Quest. It can foresee and visualize the long term trends (40 years) on the identified key topic areas such as water quality, waste disposal and housing development. Clear targets and action plans will be developed for each key topic areas to guide regional planning policies and strengthen development plans of local municipalities, such as Plan Winnipeg. Currently, the project of Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework has finished the initial stage of goal definition and topic area frame-up. It is in the process of data collection and software preparation.

Challenges

With 15 different municipalities in the Capital Region, it is not very easy to build consensus on regional value statements when developing a comprehensive regional planning framework. Although there are several examples of inter-municipal cooperation in the Capital Region, such as the agreements between the Town of Stonewall and the RM of Rockwood for fire service and sewage lagoon, municipalities in the Capital Region have not indicated explicit consciousness of regional thinking and cooperation for regional issues such as resources protection, service sharing, and tax sharing. This is not unusual in the history of regionalism that regional thinking and cooperation are often impeded by the self-interest of different jurisdictions. Regional thinking can often evoke popular resistance since it is not friendly to people's sense of place (Ian 1998: 30). This requires the involvement of provincial government, who has sufficient governmental resources, in the development of the regional planning framework. In addition, in Manitoba Capital Region, small municipalities are not only unfamiliar with the process of regional cooperation but also lack information, skills, and knowledge to deal with scientifically complex issues and negotiation. The use of WMCRP Quest should contribute to provide

visualized information about regional challenges and priorities, engage stakeholders to understand the value of regional cooperation, and encourage constructive dialogues among different municipalities.

Lessons Learned

Although the project of Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework is at its interim stage of preparing the computer scenario tool WMCRP Quest, there are still several lessons we can learned from the project.

First, the City of Winnipeg acts as the lead applicant to FCM and plays a significant role to promote the progress of the project. As the capital city in the Province of Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg takes a prominent position in the municipalities of the Capital Region. It has more than 90 percent of population in the Capital Region (Statistic Canada 2001). And it contains a majority of social and economic development in the Capital Region. In the Capital Region, not only did a number of rural municipalities express their primary regional concerns about their relationship with the City of Winnipeg, but also the City of Winnipeg expressed its concerns related with the development issues on its fringes (Strengthen Manitoba's Capital Region 2002: 8). There are missed opportunities for service sharing as well as poor communications, even disputes. A strong working relationship between the City of Winnipeg and other rural municipalities in the Capital Region is very important. It is appropriate that the City of Winnipeg can make initiatives and have substantial influence to promote regional fusion which may benefits all citizens in the Capital Region.

Second, the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region Inc. have a strong relationship with the Province of Manitoba in the project. The Province of Manitoba holds the legislative authority for regional planning. No any regional planning initiative can go by substantial steps without the support from the provincial government. Planning regions only become effective planning entities to the extent that they are allocated 'governmental resources' by the province (Robinson & Hodge 1998: 11). The involvement of provincial government can

ensure the objectives and action plans of the Frame are consistent with provincial regional planning activities and provincial land use policy. On the other hand, as the municipalities in the Capital Region have not indicated the strong consciousness of regional thinking and cooperation (there are examples of disputes and lack of cooperation), the leadership of the provincial government can help to improve the relationships among municipalities in the Capital Region and better ensure the effectiveness of the Capital Region Planning Framework.

Third, the use of MetroQuest is an innovative and effective approach which can pin down the goals and objectives of the Capital Region Planning Framework. One of the guiding principles for regional cooperation is “to mobilize and engage people, to help them see what is at stake, and to evaluate how regional collaboration can help to address issues of common interests” (Mckinney & Kevin Essington 2006: 11). Nowadays, the rapid development of information technology has provided opportunities for scenario building softwares to be used to facilitate the process of regional planning. MetroQuest is a sophisticated scenario building tool which can engage decision makers and communities in an interactive planning process. It helps them to evaluate alternative future scenarios, create sustainable vision, and facilitate the implementation of regional plans (Website of Envision Inc. 2006). In Canada, the Cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, the Greater

Vancouver Regional District, and the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen are applying MetroQuest to facilitate their long term planning initiatives. At this point, the use of MetroQuest in Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework is in the trend of applying computer scenario-building tool to long term regional strategic planning in Canada. Current MetroQuest can visualize alternative scenarios and explore the trade-offs in ten key topic areas which include population growth, economic growth, water conservation and so on (Fig. 2). A customized MetroQuest for Manitoba Capital Region, the WMCRP Quest, may model future scenarios (40 years) on key topic areas which include water quality and supply, waste generation and disposal, infrastructure sustainability and cost, land use, transportation, economic activity, agricultural land preservation, municipal taxation, natural heritage, housing, recreation and Red River Valley flood plain protection. The application of the software will undoubtedly enhance the consciousness of regional thinking and cooperation on extensive regional issues in the Capital Region. In addition, along with the data collection and the customization of WMCRP Quest, small municipalities in the Capital Region can obtain valuable skills, information, and knowledge regarding the regional planning process. This may promote their involvement in the regional cooperation and encourage their dialogues with other municipalities.



Fig. 2 Visualize alternative scenarios and explore the trade-offs

Source: <http://www.questforthefuture.com/features.aspx>

Relevance to Planning

The establishment of Winnipeg-Manitoba Capital Region Planning Framework will be a milestone for regional planning in the Province of Manitoba. The project may have the consequence of improving the rating of regional fusion, “six degrees of interaction”, in the Capital Region from the level of coordination and collaboration to the higher level of partnership (Wight 1997: 10). City regions in other provinces in Canada may learn something valuable from the planning process of the Framework to engage local municipalities in a long-term strategic planning. For regional planners, the project provides an opportunity to study how the principal city, rural municipalities, and the provincial government to be engaged in an interactive planning process which is supported by the information technology. The mechanism of engagement, the collection and optimization of data, and the visualization and trade-offs of alternative future scenarios will be important for think about how the complicated regional planning process can be more collaborative, consensus-building, and mutual-learning.

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Other Resources

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