



CASE IN POINT 2009

South Basin Lake Manitoba Secondary Plan

CONTRIBUTORS

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“A unique partnership has resulted in a ground breaking secondary plan”

ABSTRACT

The South Basin Lake Manitoba Secondary Plan, passed by RM Council in April of 2009 was the result of a unique partnership involving the Portage la Prairie Planning District Board, Portage la Prairie RM Council, Intergovernmental Affairs and University of Manitoba City Planning students.

The South Basin is a complex mix of natural phenomena and human interest. The world renowned Delta Marsh covers over 50,000 acres. The area also has fertile agricultural land, an interregional community pasture, rural residential properties, a Hutterite colony, and burgeoning cottage areas. The plan was drafted as a four-month studio project that engaged students to create a plan designed to accommodate growth while enhancing environmental conservation. Innovative policy directions accommodate wind farm development, allow accessory on-site industry on agricultural land and holds cottage development to a high environmental standard.

The experience of this study demonstrates that an RM, public sector planners, academics and students could successfully collaborate in this type of process. Lessons learned through analyzing what worked and what didn't from the student, academic and professional perspectives will inform possible future projects.

Background, Context and Facts of the Case

The South Basin Lake Manitoba Planning Area (figure 1) is a complex mix of natural phenomena and human interest. The world renowned Delta Marsh (figure 2) covers over 50,000 acres. A large percentage of the planning area is fertile class 1, 2 and 3 agricultural land, including a community pasture that extends eastward into the RM of Woodlands. Other features incorporate rural residential properties, a Hutterite colony, and burgeoning cottage areas. In 2008 there were two proposals for wind farm developments that were never realized but may come up again in the future. All of these interests require detailed attention to properly manage environmental protection and future growth. In 2006 the RM passed The Portage la Prairie Planning District Development Plan which recognized the unique needs of this area. The plan, created by Lombard North Group called for a secondary plan for the South Basin Lake Manitoba Planning Area.

The 2007 Master of City Planning (CP) cohort was engaged to work in partnership with Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA), the Portage la Prairie Planning District (PLPPD) and Portage la Prairie R.M. Council to create a secondary plan. The work was completed as part of the Regional Planning Studio led by Robert Nicol with input and administration from Dr. Ian Wight. The South Basin Project, was unique in that the studio class was to serve as the



Fig 1. Delta Marsh, Source: G. Goldsborough

Reference Map 1 - Area Context
South Basin Lake Manitoba Secondary Planning Area

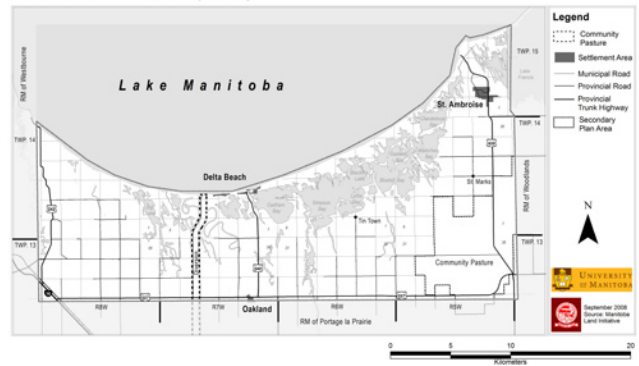


Fig 2. South Basin Lake MB Planning Area

“project consultant” and was responsible for producing an entire document that was meant to be adopted by an R.M. Council. Within the partnership the students excelled and were able to create a plan that, with some revision became policy. The plan received second and third reading in late April 2009.

The project was born out of a mutual need and timing. The University of Manitoba was looking for a studio project and the Portage La Prairie Planning District needed a consultant to undertake the secondary plan for the south basin. James Platt through contact with Ian Wight was aware that Ian was looking for a studio project for the January session. James Platt and Don Malinowski, both with IGA discussed the prospect of having the studio class serve as a consultant. The idea was presented to the department of City Planning, the PLPPD and IGA as a project funder. Ian felt confident that the studio class would be up to the task. Once an agreement was secured, a proposal was drafted by CP based on terms of reference prepared by the PLPPD who appeared to be quite enthusiastic going into the project. Upon acceptance of the proposal by the PLPPD and IGA for funding consideration the project commenced in early January 2008.

The studio group consisted of thirteen master 1 planning students: Chris Baker, Barbara Besner, Sarah Cooper, Devin Clark, Karin Kliewer, David Kuxhaus, Richard Mahé, Becky Raddatz, Vicki Reaney, Marli Sakiyama, Robyn Webb and Kaeley Wiseman. The students were charged with creating a plan that was

first reading ready. This being one of the first rural secondary plans in the province there was little history and precedent to draw upon. The initial stages of this process included background research and simply understanding what a rural secondary plan was. David Palubeski, president of the Lombard North Group, was engaged to explain the intricacies of secondary plans. He also reviewed and provided feedback on early iterations of the plan. Early on in the process the students found that organization was becoming a problem. John McNairnay, a planner with years of experience, was brought in to discuss project management. The group assigned two project managers; Karin Kliewer and Marli Sakiyama to manage groups within the collective and ensure that production ran smoothly and deadlines were adhered to. John became an informal member of the overall team as he stayed on for review and consulting purposes throughout the process.

With “bright green” environmentalism as the underlying theoretical principle, plan making began with key informants providing presentations about the area. These experts were invited near the end of the process to review and comment on the plan. Following these inputs students conducted additional background research. Once the initial planning study was complete, the next step was community engagement. An innovative stakeholder consultation was designed and carried out in partnership with Dr. Daniel Buckles from Carlton University, Ottawa. Dr. Buckles was brought in to facilitate a Social Analysis Systems (SAS2) style engagement (figure 3). This first of two community



Fig 3. Community Engagement in PLP

engagements had stakeholders discuss their concerns, which provided an avenue for capacity building. The second engagement, designed by students, allowed the public to show their level of support for draft policies generated from previous work. SAS2 was created by Dr. Daniel Buckles, Dr. Jacques M. Chevalier and Michelle Bourassa. This is an innovative philosophy for community engagement with a set of technique that can be adapted to fit any situation or community group, worldwide.

...people learn how to bring problem-solving and dialogue into their communities and workplaces by mobilizing people and rich knowledge from diverse sources. It helps people inquire into situations that do not lend themselves to easy solutions designed by experts alone (Social Analysis Systems, 2009).

Along with incorporating SAS2 into the project, a student, Vicky Reaney along with Don Malinowski were invited present the experience in Ottawa at the 2008 SAS2 conference. They discussed the roman carousel technique used throughout the engagement in Portage la Prairie. During the roman carousel process participants formed groups based on interests and discussed two of eight proposed policies. Written responses to guiding questions were gathered and discussed, leading to the development of a group presentation on each policy. Representatives from every table then visited other tables to obtain additional feedback on the policies from those groups. Everyone had an opportunity to hear and comment on all policy discussions. This project was the first in the Province of Manitoba to make use of SAS techniques. It enriched the process and the final product for all concerned.

Conclusions and Outcomes

On April 18, 2008 in Portage la Prairie, students presented the first draft of the South Basin Lake Manitoba Planning Area Secondary Plan (figure 4) to a joint gathering of the Portage la Prairie Planning District Board and the R.M. of Portage la Prairie Council. The Plan includes the following policy sections that were well received by the group: Natural Features and Processes, Agricultural Polices, Cottage Development, Residential Development and Recreational Development.

IGA was pleased with the first draft as it reflected the collective inputs of many stakeholders. After submitting the first draft, Chris Baker was hired as a planning consultant via a summer internship to update and make revisions to the plan. The planning district board, IGA and RM council had various comments and requests for revisions. Working closely with the planning district board and IGA work commenced

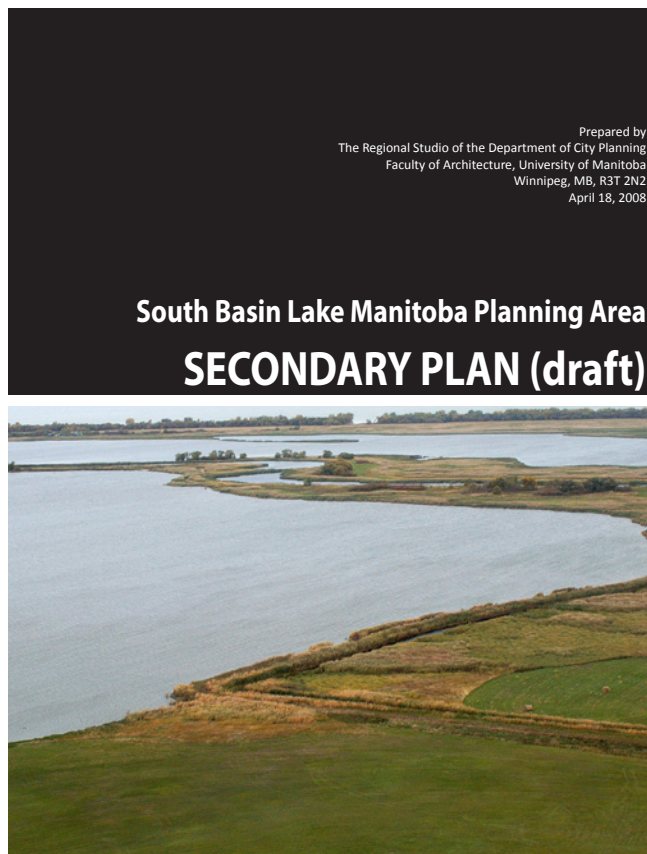


Fig 4. South Basin Lake Manitoba Secondary Plan (Draft)

early in May 2008. As mentioned, most of the policies were well received and changes were minor. Along with these changes, the 8 reference maps required attention along with further editing. The Plan received first reading in August 2008. In anticipation of second reading it was distributed to various agencies in the provincial government for comment. Sheri Grift, a Land Use Specialist with the Land Use Planning Knowledge Centre with Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) mentioned the agricultural polices are strong, recognizing agricultural land as a finite resource. She also mentioned the plan addressed the issue of recreation and agricultural land including possible conflicts and harmonies. An issue that MAFRI had with the plan is the environmental restrictions on environmentally sensitive land overlapped agricultural lands, in some cases, restricting agricultural development. This has been addressed and MAFRI was satisfied as there was no objection at second reading.

Lessons Learned

An issue with the project was how a planning team made up of students was expected to undertake a comprehensive planning process in a real life setting, including design and execution of engagement processes, when they are just learning such things. The University and the client overcame this issue and made the project work by putting in place all of the supports that were necessary, both in terms of budget and expertise. This was a key to the project's overall success.

The Portage Office of IGA recognized the challenge of maintaining an appropriate balance between academia and professional practice. As the Portage Office often represented the client's interest (PLPPD and IGA) their focus was to ensure that the plan was completed in accordance with project terms of reference. To that end it was necessary to stress the "practice" side of the project to CP. In addition, it was IGA Portage's intention that the studio class sufficiently experienced what it was like to serve as a project consultant. Students took on the role

of consultants with enthusiasm and vigour. It was a mutual desire to complete a plan that was first reading ready.

Academic pressures were to explore new and innovative ideas and propose a plan with experimental and highly progressive environmental features. In the end this was overcome by the students' collective aspiration to address stakeholder desires and create a plan that would eventually become policy. This disconnect resulted in the research of bright green environmentalism through the texts *World Changing* by Alex Steffen and *The Natural Step* by Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti, eluding to the main lesson that can be taken away from this experience. Concluding a four month studio project where the group is charged with completing a plan from start to finish must be an efficient and focused project. A very real difficulty was the attempt to integrate academic obligations with client needs, which did not always achieved ideally. This is something that must be given adequate attention in any such future endeavours. The main learning experience comes from professional style practice much like that of working for a planning consultant creating such a plan. The real life setting gave the planning students a unique opportunity to experience relationship building with the community, government and Council while comprehending how important this was to the overall success of the project. Within the Master of City Planning program there seems to be time for more academic projects in other courses and studios. While these are integral to ones education, Chris Baker found creating the secondary plan in a professional type environment to be a one of the most valuable components to his education. In the future it would be advantageous to make greater efforts to ensure that the "practice" side is more prominently considered at the front end and maintained throughout the entire process.

The SAS2 engagement techniques worked well as one of the creators was requested to lead the process. The use of this engagement technique for the first consultation was not fully carried through to the second. The

intention was that the students would follow through with a second SAS2 style engagement. This however was not the case. The technique is sound and works well in practice, however, therein lies the problem. SAS2 works so well because it is complex. To implement it properly requires formal training. In the students limited capacity to be able to receive formal training in the technique, the decision was made to move away from a formal SAS2 engagement.

Collaborations, if well designed and nurtured can yield great things, meet mutual needs and be very enjoyable. This is the case for all the organizations involved. Students felt they had a rich learning experience, professional planners enjoyed the experience and the PLP planning district and RM council have a secondary plan that highlights the needs of the south basin. The experience of this study helps establish rural secondary plans as an integral component to regional planning. It demonstrates that an RM, public sector planners, academics and students could successfully collaborate in this type of process. The U of M Department of City Planning encourages live planning projects within the province and is open to playing various roles in these opportunities.

References

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First Draft of the South Basin Lake Manitoba Secondary plan can be found at <http://www.regionalplanning.ca/>

The South Basin Lake Manitoba Secondary Plan can be found at <http://www.ptgplanningdistrict.ca/>