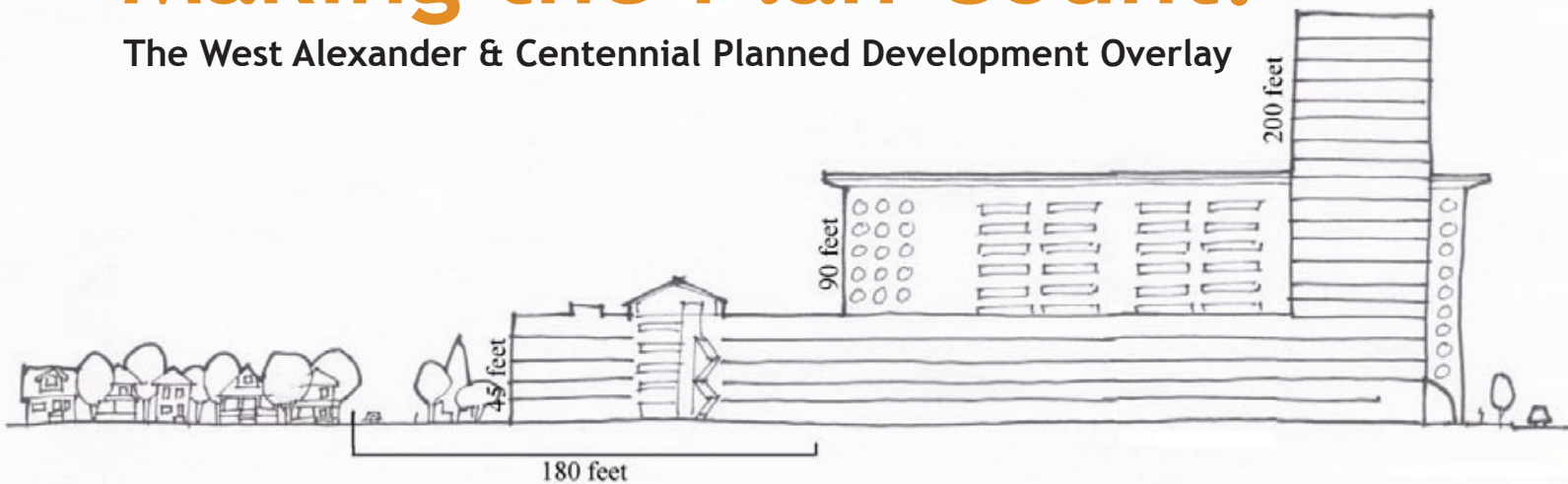


# Making the Plan Count:

## The West Alexander & Centennial Planned Development Overlay



### CONTRIBUTORS

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“PDOs take policies embedded in secondary plans and make a regulatory framework.”

MICHAEL ROBINSON,  
CITY OF WINNIPEG

### ABSTRACT

Secondary plans have been used in Winnipeg since the 1970s. They help to articulate planning issues and conditions of particular geographic areas of the city. Secondary plans are not, however, always easy to interpret, and it can therefore be difficult to regulate the policies embedded in them. Planned Development Overlays (PDOs) are tools that help standardize secondary plan policies, by translating these policies into zoning language and making them a part of the underlying zoning bylaw. PDOs offer the opportunity to regulate a number of conditions including land use, dimensional standards, siting and design. This case-in-point examines the most recent PDO in Winnipeg: The West Alexander & Centennial (WAC) PDO-1. This PDO is one of the first in Winnipeg to be used to support a neighbourhood plan. The WAC PDO-1 does not address design as does the Provencher PDO-1, but addresses several land use and dimensional standards that were important for this area; which has seen conflicts between the needs of residents and large institutions. The WAC PDO has invigorated dialogue on development and design in these two unique neighbourhoods, and its implementation should significantly decrease the number of development-related disputes in the area.

## BACKGROUND

Winnipeg's planning department has been using secondary plans since the 1970s. These plans can be effective tools to capture planning issues and conditions particular to local neighbourhoods, but they are not always easy to interpret for regulatory purposes. In reviewing a secondary plan, it can remain difficult for developers to understand their possibilities and constraints, and it can also remain difficult for planners to evaluate proposals clearly. PDOs are relatively new tools in Winnipeg that create a regulatory framework from the policies embedded in secondary plans. This process provides the opportunity to strengthen a number of standards related to land use, dimensions, siting and design. These conditions are difficult to address using Winnipeg's underlying zoning by-law, especially in areas not served by urban design review. Only downtown and Provencher Boulevard have urban design review processes.

### *PDOs in North America*

Tools similar to Planned Development Overlays are used in other jurisdictions.

### GOALS OF THE WAC NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN:

- Support and encourage the growth and development of local institutions
- Protect and enhance the quality of residential neighbourhoods
- Maintain a balance of complementary land uses
- Create and reinforce a well designed, livable, integrated community
- Encourage building design, site layouts, and urban design features which promote safety, accessibility and contribute to the uniqueness of the community
- Promote affordable and varied housing choices

Source: West Alexander & Centennial Neighbourhood Plan

The tools can be referred to as Planned Unit Development (PUD) Overlay Districts, Development Overlay Districts and Planned Development Overlay Zones, to name a few. They all guide standards of a particular plan area, but they vary in scale and type. Some are used to support mixed use development; some prioritize form and design; while still others articulate local policies (as secondary plans do in Winnipeg). Some Canadian jurisdictions build PDOs into their secondary plans, by providing an implementation section that spells-out the necessary zoning by-law changes.

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### PARTICIPANTS IN THE WEST ALEXANDER & CENTENNIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN:

Centennial Neighbourhood Improvement Committee | McDermot Sherbrook Residents Committee | Red River College, Downtown Campus | Health Sciences Centre | University of Manitoba Bannatyne Campus Business owners: Myers Drugstore, Reidiger Foods, Young's Trading | Residents of West Alexander and Centennial Neighbourhoods | International Centre for Infectious Diseases | Citizen Liaison Committee, Canadian Science Centre for Animal and Human Health | Central Community Centre and Burton Cummings Community Centre | Rossbrook House | Winnipeg Health Authority, Community Outreach Services Manitoba Family Services and Housing | Winnipeg Police Services | City of Winnipeg Public Works Department | Winnipeg Transit

## *PDOs in Winnipeg*

### **What is the policy basis?**

Winnipeg's Zoning By-Law 200/2006 applies to the entire city, with the exception of downtown. This underlying zoning bylaw is a one size fits all document that sets the minimum standards for development, and since it regulates all types of development in all parts of the city, it is general. Neighbourhoods are distinct, however; and they sometimes need special protection that the underlying zoning by-law cannot address. In light of this, the PDO-1 tool was developed to provide a means to alter development standards, in unique or special circumstances, in order to achieve local planning objectives. A PDO-1 zoning district can be designated when additional zoning controls are needed to meet those objectives.

### **How did PDOs get their start?**

Some PDOs have been included in the City's underlying zoning by-law for years, but the tools have received new support. During the most recent review of the zoning by-law, the City of Winnipeg researched different zoning tools that other cities were using. The City's main consultant on this project, Clarion and Associates, brought forward new ideas from their experience in writing zoning by-laws across North America. Their advice helped frame the incorporation of neighbourhood-based PDOs in Winnipeg's zoning by-law.

### **HOW PDOs ADDRESS DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN STANDARDS:**

In Winnipeg, PDO districts may develop their own development and design standards, which do not have to comply with the underlying Zoning By-Law.

PDO-1s can specify the following types of development and design standards:

- Total residential density
- Site dimensions and area
- Building height
- Size and floor area ratio for each use category and use type
- Yard requirements
- Separation spaces
- Parking requirements for each use category or use type
- Architectural and site design requirements
- Performance criteria
- Landscaping requirements
- Regulations pertaining to accessory structures
- Signage requirements
- Environmental regulations, which may include such things as flood proofing, noise attenuation, and servicing requirements

PDO-1s may also specify the conditions under which the above regulations apply.

Source: Winnipeg Zoning By-Law 200/2006



Figure 1: Young's Trading, a business stakeholder in West Alexander, and participant in the WAC neighbourhood planning process.

## FACTS OF THE CASE

In Winnipeg, PDOs have only recently begun to be used to help implement neighbourhood plans. The WAC PDO-1 is one of the first to make local neighbourhood development and design policies part of the zoning by-law. The WAC PDO-1 provides the closest thing to a ‘guarantee’ that policies will be applied.

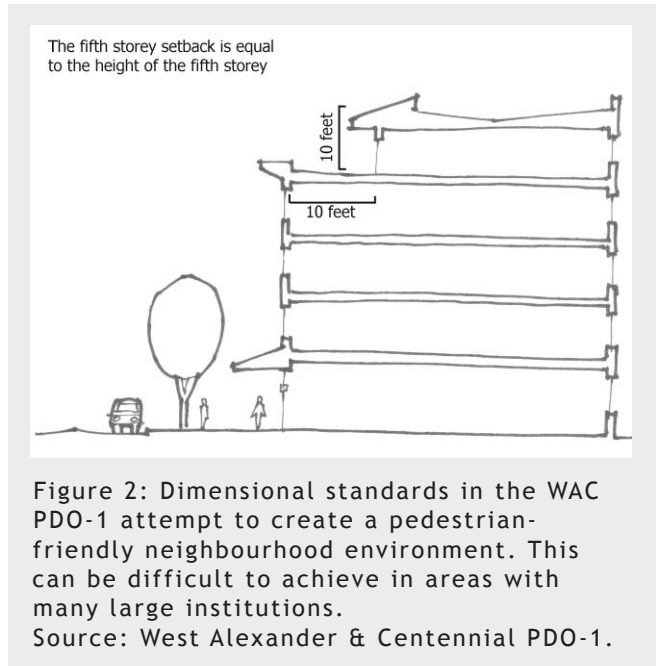
The WAC PDO-1 began with a request from the City’s Zoning Administrator, who requested zoning policies to be developed along with the WAC secondary plan. City planning staff (Michael Robinson) developed the first draft through a collaborative dialogue between planners, zoning staff and administrators, and the City’s legal department.

All stakeholders who participated in the neighbourhood plan (on the steering committee and at open houses) were informed that there would be a PDO subsequent to adoption of their neighbourhood plan. At the time of this writing, the draft PDO is going through the public hearing process.

### STEPS TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WAC AND OTHER PDOS IN WINNIPEG:

1. Public hearing at local Community Committee
2. Approval from Standing Policy Committee
3. Approval from Executive Policy Committee
4. Final approval from City Council

Source: Michael Robinson, City of Winnipeg



“Residents commented that they like the protection that the PDO-1 affords them.”

MICHAEL ROBINSON,  
CITY OF WINNIPEG

According to the principle planner in this case, feedback received from the community on the PDO was positive. Residents commented that they liked the protection that the PDO-1 affords them, especially its help in restricting objectionable uses and creating a more pedestrian friendly environment.

Although the Ward Councilor is familiar with the WAC PDO-1, it is a new concept for other politicians at City Hall, so it is not known how councillors are likely to respond.

### ***Strengths and Weaknesses of the WAC PDO-1***

The WAC PDO-1 is based on an in-depth neighbourhood plan, and incorporates multiple stakeholder views. This type of foundation (which is not always provided by simpler plans and studies) increases the likelihood that values and expectations are as ‘shared’ as possible, and that stakeholders will understand and support the PDO.

The WAC Neighbourhood Plan has a combination of requirements (must, shall, will statements that have the force and effect of by-laws) and encouragements (may, should statements without legal effect). The WAC PDO-1 distils these into requirements and makes it easier for:

1. Investors to understand the scope and form of acceptable proposals
2. Planners to evaluate proposals
3. Decision makers (City Council, Board of Adjustment, Appeal Committee) to make consistent decisions

A recent case illustrates the regulatory benefits of the WAC PDO-1. Between

implementation of the neighbourhood plan and approval of the PDO, areas residents tried unsuccessfully to challenge the lot size of a new housing complex which they believed exceeded guidelines laid out in their recently completed neighbourhood plan. The existence of the PDO may have helped prevent this dispute by making expectations more clear and enforceable.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Encourages local discussion about development and design
- Helps ensure implementation of neighbourhood plan policies
- Encourages collaboration between planning, zoning, legal staff
- May streamline development approvals

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Little inclusion of design
- Could be perceived as adding a layer of complexity to development process

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Could reduce development disputes
- Could serve as a model for other neighbourhoods

#### **THREATS**

- Stakeholders could change their minds about details before implementation
- Requires City Council support
- Requires planner resources

Lot size is one of several conditions addressed in the WAC PDO-1. Others include limitations on surface parking lots, unwanted development (such as car dealerships and drive-thrus), and the scale of uses like clinics, restaurants and retail sales. Parking and dimensional standards are particularly complex issues in this area because of the presence of many large institutions, such as the Health Sciences Centre, other medical facilities, and Red River College. Figure 4 illustrates a specific example of the way dimensional standards are addressed in the WAC PDO-1.

Another PDO - The Provencher PDO-1 - includes requirements such as architecture and site design, landscaping, façade treatment, building entrances and signage. The WAC Neighbourhood Plan also identifies a number of design guidelines for new development in the area. These include preserving street patterns and the



Figure 3: Some dissimilar land uses in West Alexander sit adjacent to one another with little physical transition.

mature urban architectural character of existing areas; reinforcing the relationship between buildings and the street; and using compatible building materials. Did the design considerations in the WAC Neighbourhood Plan make their way into the WAC PDO-1? It may have been possible to include some of them, but unlike Provencher boulevard, the most pressing issues in the West Alexander and Centennial neighbourhoods are land use, scale of development and support of a

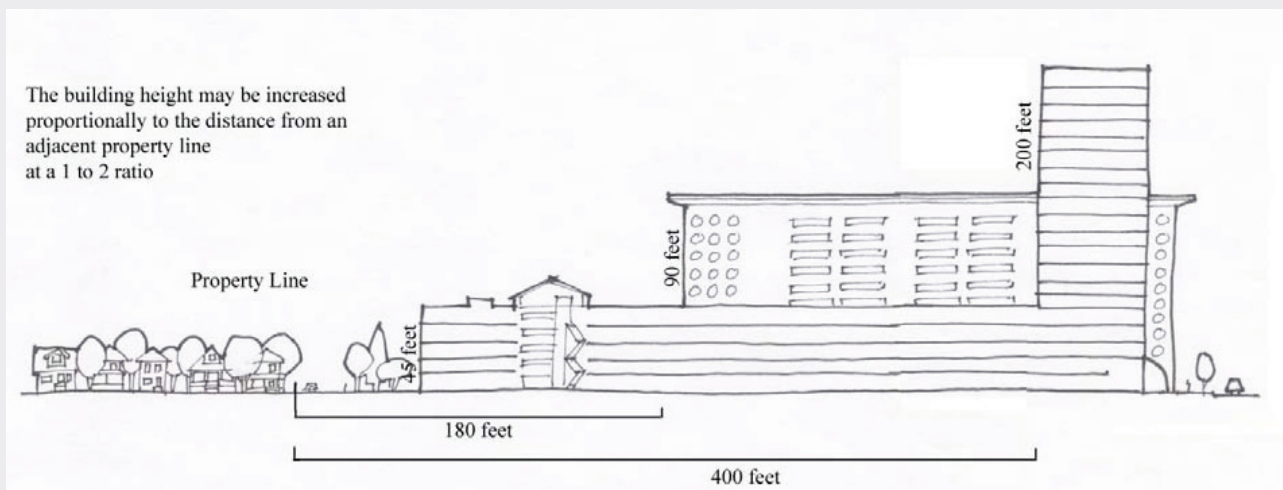


Figure 4: Neighbourhood housing meets large institution. The WAC PDO-1 has developed methods to address institutional growth while preserving sightlines and natural light, through massing and dimensional standards. Source: West Alexander & Centennial PDO-1.

pedestrian environment. The question of design regulations in the area is unresolved for now - perhaps in part for that reason. Design could have greater emphasis in the future if it remains an issue for stakeholders. In any case, with tools now in place, it should be possible for planners to negotiate design needs with developers through approval processes.

New PDOs are planned for Corydon Village (upon the completion of a neighbourhood plan), and Transcona. If a large number of PDOs are implemented in Winnipeg, there could be a perception that they add complexity to development. Whether this is true or not is unclear. Some planners have said that PDOs actually reduce complexity by clarifying requirements. This is an issue that will only be resolved once planners and others assess the outcomes of PDOs over time.

### CONCLUSIONS & LESSONS LEARNED

There are strengths to the WAC PDO-1 as well as questions around how it (and PDOs in general) will play out over time. At this point, it appears that these tools are a useful way to supplement the underlying zoning by-law, and make neighbourhood plans clearer and easier to regulate. The WAC PDO-1 has invigorated dialogue about development and design in the West Alexander and Centennial neighbourhoods. And, if the document is adopted, development disputes in these neighbourhoods should decrease.

In future PDOs in Winnipeg, it may be worthwhile to attempt to include more content related to design, if it is a priority identified by stakeholders. The Provencher PDO-1 could serve as a useful model to study to determine the strengths and challenges of this. An interesting feature of the Provencher PDO-1 is its use of a design review process. The history of this process is mixed, and the right model needs to be found for each neighbourhood. And, political will in the city remains weak with respect to design regulations. In spite of these constraints, the City is slowly moving forward in the area of design, and it is an issue that appears to be gaining attention at the neighbourhood level.

As a result of the WAC PDO-1, some city councilors have become interested in the potentials PDOs may offer neighbourhoods in their ridings. It will be interesting to see how PDOs are developed, constituted, managed and evaluated in the coming years in Winnipeg. After more of them are completed, their various features and benefits will become easier to evaluate. In the meantime, if they are based on thorough planning processes, PDOs appear to offer substantial value to neighbourhood stakeholders and their plans.

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Thank you to Michael Robinson; and also to Martin Sandhurst, Linda Ring, Kurtis Kowalke and Marsha Christiuk, who all provided information in some form for this report.