Flora Place, Winnipeg:
Integrating the public and community sectors in a place-based approach to affordable housing

Abstract
The challenge of achieving adequate and affordable housing is a good example of what some researchers have termed a “wicked problem” – a problem of such complexity that it cannot be addressed in isolation by any one sector. Policy development processes that are both multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral are needed to successfully address social, economic and environmental problems. A place-based approach to housing policy involves attention to scale and the variations of local experience. Attention to place is a means of harnessing local capacity and local knowledge in a way that recognizes the importance that communities play in securing well-being.

Flora Place in Winnipeg’s North End was constructed after World War II to house returning soldiers. It was meant to be temporary, and rehabilitation of the site has been needed for some time. Redevelopment was funded through the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) with $3.6 million granted to the Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (WHRC) to provide affordable accommodations for low-income households and persons with disabilities. The Flora Place community was consulted throughout the development process and the final project reflects their influence. While it may appear that the length of time it took to redevelop Flora Place would not make it a “best practice”, there is the potential to learn a great deal from the experience.
**Facts of the Case**

After World War II, the houses at Flora Place were constructed by the City to house returning soldiers, with the intention that the housing would be temporary. In 1980 CMHC and MHRC entered into a 30-year agreement with the City to operate and renovate the 100 units. In 1999/2000, 72 of the units were demolished and MHRC negotiated an end to the agreement. Since its inception, Flora Place has changed from one level of government to another – and the problems associated with redevelopment passed from one level of government to another.

A feasibility study was done approximately 10 years ago. The proposal was elaborate, unrealistic and too expensive. At the same time as units were demolished, WHRC agreed to manage the property for the City. In the fall of 2004 the City approached WHRC to consider being the proponent to redevelop Flora Place. Through extensive collaboration with the community, other professionals and the three levels of government, WHRC has redeveloped the site and it will be completed in August 2007.

The project involves the construction of 28 new one-story townhouse units and the complete redevelopment of a 2.05 acre residential site at 1 Flora Place in the Dufferin neighbourhood. The new units, which

The site, indicated in blue, is bounded by Sinclair Street to the east, Tommy Prince Park to the south and west, and Flora Place and Selkirk Avenue to the north. Shown in red are the remaining original houses that will be demolished when construction is complete.

**Neighbourhood:**
Dufferin

**Number of Units:**
16 1 bedroom units
8 2 bedroom units
4 3 bedroom units

**Cost:**
- Construction and development costs = $3.5 million
- Land value = $200,000
- Provincial Rent Supplement = $700,000
- Amount financed by WHRC = $800,000
- Total cost = $4.4 million

**Contributions from:**
- City of Winnipeg
- Province of Manitoba
- Government of Canada
- WHRC
Facts of the Case

will replace the existing single-family dwellings, will include 16 one-bedroom, 8 two-bedroom and 4 three-bedroom designs. The foundation will be concrete slab, so that all units will have grade level entrances. All units will be “visitabile” by people with mobility-related disabilities, and at least four of the units will be fully accessible for people with disabilities. The project will also include a laundry facility and meeting area for the tenants.

The total estimated cost of the project is $4.4 million with the actual construction and development costs projected at $3.5 million. The majority of the financing was obtained through the federal and provincial governments, with $400,000 from the City from its housing initiative, which includes the cost of demolition. The estimated land value, donated by the City, is approximately $200,000. The Province is providing Rent Supplement at an estimated cost of $700,000. WHRC obtained financing of approximately $800,000 to cover the rest of the costs. The funding was coordinated through the WHHI.

For development to move forward, the land required rezoning. The city then gave the land (2.05 acres) to WHRC to manage. The first step was to invite the surrounding community to a community meeting and ensure that they were aware of what was happening. The Flora Place community helped to decide the layout of the new units and other features. Security was an issue because the property is next to Tommy Prince Park, and fences were added on three sides of the site. The units were also arranged to mostly face each other, to give the benefit of “eyes on the street”. Pets are allowed, and there is room for gardens – both important features to the current residents.

To ensure the smooth relocation of current Flora Place tenants, WHRC is providing temporary housing in vacant apartment units located in some of its nearby buildings. Some Flora Place residents have decided to stay in their current accommodations. To keep the rents affordable for low-income households, the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC) will provide rent supplement assistance for 24 of the 28 units that subsidizes the difference between the approved market-rental rate charged by the landlord and the rent-geared-to-income paid by the tenant.

Flora Place Site Plan

Flora Place: The Timeline

1947: 100 original units constructed

1980: CMHC and MHRC enter into a 30 Year Agreement with the City of Winnipeg to operate and renovate the units

1982: Agreement amended to 25 years

1990s: Feasibility report conducted

1999/2000: 72 of the units were demolished and CMHC negotiated an end to the agreement; WHRC agreed to manage the property for the City
Context

A Place-based Approach
Access to adequate and affordable housing is essential to the health and wellbeing of individuals. When people are well housed, their family and community life is more stable, enabling greater opportunities for good health, educational performance, job security and community safety.

Instead of managing people and places out of difficulty, governments have come to manage a heavily segmented and uncoordinated set of social and economic functions (Walsh, p.5). Disadvantaged places and people are not able to segment their problems into the discrete administrative units by which government has segmented its functions (Walsh, p.5). Blanket measures for urban renewal threaten a healthy localism. Planning and development frameworks that are based in local character and culture are necessary for developing solutions to local problems and issues.

More recent research is highlighting the importance of a place-based understanding of social policy as one solution to these kinds of “wicked problems.” A place-based policy approach entails developing mechanisms that enable policy-makers to access local knowledge held by community residents and their networks (Bradford, 2002). It is the local setting where many problems originate. It is also the place where innovative solutions are to be found.

A place-based approach to housing policy involves attention to scale and the variations of local experience. Attention to place is a means of harnessing both local capacity and local knowledge in a way that recognizes the role that communities play in securing well-being. Without attention to place, there is a danger of developing a one-size-fits-all approach to housing that risks meeting nobody’s needs.

Housing is an Integral Policy Issue
The challenge of achieving adequate and affordable housing for all Canadians - a “wicked problem” – is a problem of such complexity that it cannot be addressed in isolation by any one sector (Bradford, 2005). The characteristic of a wicked problem is the insufficiency of information about what to do, and a lack of coordination between a variety of actors. Traditional top-down solutions directed through an isolated policy silo are no longer appropriate. Increasingly, policy development processes rooted in shared expertise and experience that is both multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral is needed to successfully address social, economic and environmental problems.

Community-based housing policy is an integral approach to community development, embracing a multi-perspectival way of looking at the world. The community decides what types of homes are needed, the housing priorities of the community and WHRC incorporates the needs of the community within the constraints of government policy and financial viability.

“Integral means whole, complete, integrated... (it) means acting, thinking, relating and producing, in an aligned way, with a consciousness that sees the world as a complex interconnected system.

Becoming integral, embraces what has worked before, what obstacles have been overcome and what has been visualized before. Becoming integral means going beyond all past formations — structures/patterns/processes — so something new emerges.”

Source: http://www.integralcity.com/DiscoveryZone/index.html#Global_Intelligences

Flora Place:
The City approached WHRC to consider being the proponent to redevelop Flora Place

October 2005:
Prairie Architects selected

November 2005 to June 2006:
Tenant relocations

June 2006:
Demolition of existing units

September 2006:
Construction begins

November 2006:
Official funding announcement of $3.6 million

August 2007:
Construction completed and residents move in
Developing the Plan

Flora Place is unlike most development projects because it is an existing community. Early proposals had taken the traditional top-down approach, did not involve collaboration with the existing and surrounding community, and made promises that could not be kept. The current plan rests on the needs of the community, the idea that communication is key and learning from the mistakes of the previous attempts at redevelopment.

The stakeholders essentially remained the same - the province, the city and WHRC – but the neighbourhood association played a much more collaborative and prominent role in the redevelopment of their community. Accordingly, a number of steps were undertaken by WHRC in response to the needs of the community and they are as follows:

- Because the existing homes were torn down, it was important that each resident was met with one-on-one to arrange for their relocation until the new homes are ready for habitation. Overall, about half of the residents were relocated to other WHRC properties.
- The residents are provided with a monthly newsletter that explains the progress on the construction of the site and gives advice on moving and cleaning. Workshops were conducted to help residents with moving and downsizing.
- The residents will be given tours of the new units before they move in.
- A social worker from the city was available for residents to express their concerns and apprehension about the redevelopment of Flora Place.
- WHRC worked closely with the Flora Place Tenants Association Inc. There were monthly meetings.

By incorporating the multiple perspectives of the individual, the community, the government, and other professionals, an effective strategy can be obtained for neighbourhood revitalization.

THE INTEGRAL CITY

A city (and neighbourhood) can be viewed through multiple lenses. The four perspectives shown in the figure embrace: the subjective, or personal intentions and development; the objective, or individual traits and behaviour; the intersubjective, or culture, family and relationships; and the interobjective, or the work, professional associations and civics.

Figure 3: Integral View of City

Source: http://www.integralcity.com/DiscoveryZone/index.html#Anchor-Meshworking-14210
The Implications for Governing

Canada is weak in the area of cross-sectoral policy learning and public participation, as well as goal setting, coordination and problem-solving. Our tradition is that each actor works alone. To solve issues of affordability and other housing-related problems, institutional supports are required for all actors to work together to address the problem – namely a collaborative approach.

A place-based understanding of complex policy problems recognizes that “one-size-fits-all policy delivered from above” does not support solutions. Accordingly, centralized government is not a solution, but neither is decentralized government. Instead, as Bradford observes, “the goal is collaborative governance” (2005). Given the complexity and the interdependence of these issues, there is a clear need to work across societal and governmental sectors and societal levels. Because of the complexity of the problem, and because housing intersects with so many areas of social and economic policy, there is also a need for governments to work horizontally within and across established jurisdictions.

The federal policy initiative that offers a precedent for future programming is the Urban Development Agreements. Across two decades, the UDAs have levered private and public investment to deliver significant downtown revitalization (Western Economic Diversification Canada, 2004). An important feature of the twenty-year Winnipeg UDA process has been the steady cultivation of strong networks of community-based organizations and resident involvement in projects (Silver, 2002). This outcome is reflected in the design of the new 2004-09 UDA, which emphasizes Aboriginal participation and includes, among its Guiding Principles, recognition of “the need for community-driven approaches to urban development.”

In the case of Flora Place, the WHHI and the WHRC are the local organizations directly involved in the development of affordable housing, and the organizations that have incorporated the place-based approach into the framework guiding the development of Flora Place.

WHHI
The WHHI is a partnership established by the Government of Canada, the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg to address homelessness, declining housing stock and the revitalization of Winnipeg’s older neighbourhoods. The WHHI is a single-window office for community organizations to access information on government-funded housing and homelessness programs.

The WHHI was largely involved upfront in the process. The organization played a key role in securing the funding for the project, and once this goal was achieved they were able to step back and let the Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation (WHRC) lead the process.

WHRC
The Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation was founded by the City of Winnipeg in the late 1970’s, as a non-profit developer and manager of affordable housing in Winnipeg. They focus on housing projects that will help revitalize inner city neighbourhoods, including the Dufferin neighbourhood where Flora Place is located. The ongoing efforts to provide affordable housing requires the support and commitment of all levels of government, and working closely with communities and residents to determine housing needs and to provide assistance in accomplishing community goals. The WHRA believes that “community participation leads to better local understanding of the housing revitalization process. This leads to better decision making at the local level, and better understanding by the residents on how various factors, including government policy, help weigh planning principles, shape and form the type of neighbourhoods in which they reside”. The WHRC followed this philosophy when they developed a plan to move forward with the redevelopment.
Lessons Learned

The problem of redeveloping Flora Place was inherited by the city. Politicians became involved, making promises. The feasibility study looked at the best housing that could be built on the site, yet it did not include the parameters of funding. The most important lesson learned was do not promise what you cannot deliver. Raising expectations early in the process hindered progress later on. The community was understandably disappointed that it was not feasible. This leads to the next lesson learned.

It is crucial that the resources are available and in place. It must be known how the housing will be paid for, which determines the kind of housing and the number of units. Honesty is a part of this process – putting the project in the proper realistic context. The community was told that the initial study was not feasible, yet options were given to the community and decisions were made incorporating the community’s decisions.

Communication with the existing community was key. With their role as property managers, WHRC wanted to ensure buy-in from the community. To achieve this they did a number of things outlined in the Developing the Plan section, mainly holding monthly community meetings. The frequent meetings help to offset any disappointments that arose during the development process.

Collaboration with other organizations and professionals was a necessary and beneficial tool. The WHHI played a more prominent role in the beginning of the new process, but remained on board for support to WHRC. The Flora Place Tenants Association Inc. was integral to the process, sharing information about the neighbourhood with WHRC, and the reverse held true as well. The tenants association shared what they learned from WHRC with the rest of the community. WHRC also brought in other experts to help with the process. They utilized a city social worker to help with the predominantly senior community in adjusting to the situation.

To recognize current perceptions was also important. WHRC recognized that the perception was the new units would be smaller than the old units because most of the people were moving from a 2 bedroom unit to a 1 bedroom unit. The fact is they are moving from a 400 square foot unit to a 600 square foot unit, and to clarify, residents were shown floor plans and will be given tours of the new units.

Investing in the Future:

Involving residents directly in the planning and rebuilding of their neighbourhoods. Through strategic planning, new and innovative approaches and a shared commitment, the WHHI and the community are helping transform inner-city neighbourhoods.

Source: http://www.whhi.ca/about.htm
Looking Ahead

Future affordable housing projects need to consider their impact on the community. The success of Flora Place demonstrates the benefits of collaboration between agencies, the three levels of government and the community. The uniqueness of place must be incorporated into the integral approach to planning.

The Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association (MUNHA) has incorporated the integral approach into the ongoing development of their housing plan. They are collaborating with all levels of government, the community, other professionals and additional institutions. They are identifying the needs of the Aboriginal community in Winnipeg and building flexibility into their framework. MUNHA, in fact, adopting an integral approach. They are “acting, thinking, relating and producing, in an aligned way, with a consciousness that sees the world as a complex interconnected system”.

The elements of an effective strategy are couched in an integral framework – the interconnected system that “embraces what has worked before, what obstacles have been overcome and what has been visualized before”. With the redevelopment of Flora Place, something new emerged; multiple perspectives were engaged, including the subjective views of the community and the objective lens of government.

Resources


Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
http://www.cmhc.ca/

Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association


The Integral City
http://www.integralcity.com/

Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative
http://www.whhi.ca/home.htm

Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation
http://www.whrc.ca/index.shtml

MUNHA: MANITOBA URBAN NATIVE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Collaborating with:

Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS)

Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI)

Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Manitoba (ANA)

Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF)

The City of Winnipeg


The MUNHA Housing Plan outcome is to:

Present the housing needs and challenges that face Aboriginal families in the City of Winnipeg;

Develop innovative solutions that address housing challenges, issues, and concerns;

To work as full and equal participants with its partners, associates and neighbors, in addressing shared issues and concerns;

Increase the capacity of MUNHA, its membership, and Winnipeg’s Aboriginal community to assume control and direction over matters that impact them directly in the Social Housing sector; and,

To demonstrate to key decision-makers in all ranks of government, and stakeholders, the community priorities within a five-year time period, so that they be able to better understand as to how they can best serve Winnipeg’s Aboriginal community.