MANITOBA HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION

Response to Our Winnipeg Plan By-Law No. 67/2010
Including Complete Communities, Sustainable Transportation, Sustainable Water and Waste and A Sustainable Winnipeg

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Manitoba Home Builders Association

The residential construction industry is a significant contributor to Manitoba and Winnipeg's economy. Over 20,000 jobs paying over $850 million in wages and generating $2.4 billion in activity occurs each year in this province from residential construction. The City of Winnipeg realizes over $1,000 in permit fees and almost $4,000 in property tax revenue from each new home. This totals $3 million in permit fees and over $10 million in property taxes every year.

The Our Winnipeg document states that 65.1% of Winnipeggers are homeowners. It also estimates that our city's population is going to increase by 180,000 people by 2031. The impact on our city will be even greater when one considers the outlying communities whose populations will utilize our facilities and infrastructure on a daily basis. Now, more than ever, we need to plan for our future. Our Winnipeg and the associated documents is a positive first step towards our future.

This 25 year blueprint is just that; a blueprint. As an industry that deals with countless blueprints, trust me when I say that there invariably needs to be alterations to the plan as we proceed with the implementation process. These are not final reports, they are just the beginning. Unlike previous iterations, this needs to be a living, breathing document, not one that gets placed on the shelf for 20 years. It is a guideline and a very good one. It was created through extensive public consultation, engagement and input. It was a very inclusive process, much moreso than some of my peers across the country have experienced in their cities. I look forward to the city continuing this practice as we proceed to the three core functions of the Action Plan.

My remarks today will be primarily concerned with those aspects of the five documents that impact the residential construction industry, whether it be new home construction or renovation. Food, clothing and shelter are three basic necessities. These 180,000 new residents are going to require approximately 83,000 new dwelling units by 2031. In addition to this, numerous existing homes will be replaced while tens of thousands undergo significant renovations. It is said in this document that Complete Communities celebrate diversity and provide housing options that accommodate a range of incomes and household types for all stages of life. Manitoba builders build the best new homes in Canada. Let us help. Let us help with infill housing, neighbourhood revitalization and the transformation of existing areas. Housing options are our business. Our builders travel North America and the world looking at new concepts, designs and styles. They know what is practical and possible in the Winnipeg market.

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In the Complete Communities document, there is a pledge to work upfront and effectively with partners. This is not a new concept to the City, nor is it unique to this document. The Planning Property and Development Department currently practices this philosophy every day of the week with the professional builders, developers and renovators whose skills and expertise they respect. Neither party presumes to know all the answers and it is only through constant collaboration between the public and private sector that our mutual goals can be realized. This approach is not only important relative to the creation and implementation of these five documents but also to the supporting materials such as the Ecologically Significant Lands Policy, Infill Developments Guidelines for Multiple Family Developments in Low Density Neighbourhoods and Local Area Planning Handbook, as listed within.

Winnipeg needs to grow up and to grow out – in concert with each other. This will require a coordinated approach of downtown growth and revitalization along with new development in outlying areas. All 180,000 new people and 83,000 new dwelling units are not going to be downtown; but a significant number will be. Builders and developers have been erroneously stereotyped as being only interested in urban sprawl. This is simply not true. Downtown is a priority for all of us and it is in the best interests of everyone that it grows and develops in tandem with the rest of the city. Bringing people and life back to the downtown is a tremendous goal, but one that cannot be done in isolation. People still need to be able to choose where they want to live; therefore, it is incumbent upon all of us to make the downtown and inner-city a more desirable place to live. Working downtown is 9:00 to 5:00; living downtown is 24/7. Changing one property at a time is not going to make an impact. We need to change one neighbourhood at a time. Vacant properties and derelict buildings need to be converted now. A true neighbourhood with the pride of home ownership is a safe neighbourhood. Government has the ability to establish favourable conditions to make these changes.

Rapid transit will have a significant impact on location and type of housing. The Manitoba Home Builders Association is proud to be involved in the Transit Oriented Development discussions. In order to maximize use, stops and associated facilities need to be efficient and appealing; they need to have mixed use, allowing but not necessarily requiring ground floor retail. Transit must be integrated into the residential and commercial. Given that Transit Oriented Development will require fewer automobile uses, the financial benefits should be shared by all parties. The Transportation Master Plan must be done in partnership with and in consideration of housing; neither can be planned in isolation.

Housing is a primary source of investment in mature communities. Recent communities are where the MHBA renovators could play an important role in contributing their expertise in keeping those areas practical and appealing. Manitoba and Winnipeg are widely known as the renovation capitals of Canada. RenoMark renovators maintain the highest standards and levels of training in the Province. Utilize their talents, education and skills to bring these mature and recent communities back to life. Saying that, we need a plan to deal with our growing infrastructure deficit. Taxing new homes and their infrastructure to pay for older homes and their infrastructure is not the answer. It merely spells failure for both.

New communities will continue to achieve a high standard of sustainability in planning, design, construction and management. Developers and builders promote natural resources, parks and public places in new developments through the planting of additional trees, creation of walking trails and the introduction of wetlands and native grasslands. The private sector is eager to work with the city to promote high quality living environments.

The Manitoba Home Builders Association prides itself on taking a leadership role in sustainability. The MHBA pushed the Province to move towards low flush toilets and tap and

faucet aerators. These had been the practice in new homes long before legislation was introduced. Public education for sustainable water and waste use will be more important than any legislation. We all need to do better.

Since 1990, the number of new homes in Manitoba has increased by 13.2%, yet the total amount of energy in these homes is 11.2% less than in 1990. Energy efficiency in Manitoba new homes has increased by 21.6% between 1990 and 2006. Greenhouse Gas emissions in Manitoba homes have decreased by 31.3%. Manitoba's new home builders have long been in the forefront of energy efficient technology, products and building practices. Homes built since 2001 require less than half the space heating energy of the oldest homes here, in spite of their larger average size. The reduction in Greenhouse Gas emissions and energy intensity per unit area in residential buildings compares favourably with any other form of construction or, for that matter, any other industry sector in the Province.

One area of concern that we do have with the five plans is the almost interchangeable use of the terms affordable housing and housing affordability. They are quite different; if not in strict definition, but definitely by common and accepted use. Housing affordability refers to the factors that impact the cost of home ownership, whether they be government imposed charges, costs of materials, labour, development charges, land prices, planning policies, mortgage rates, taxes and energy costs, for example. Affordable housing, in its most commonly used sense, refers to social housing or housing that is dependant upon subsidies, initiatives or other financial efficiencies in order to be built. We would offer to work with the authours to correct this inconsistency.

Another wording change that I would like to see occurs within A Sustainable Winnipeg. Although well intentioned and literally correct, it states that housing is not within the City of Winnipeg mandate but acknowledges that it is critical to the overall well-being of the city. It also states that the City is not in a position to take a leadership role. This is not true. Anything that occurs in this city; anything that is critical to our overall well-being – you have to take a leadership role. The Manitoba Home Builders Association takes a leadership role in housing. Every meeting, discussion or correspondence that I have had with city officials concerns housing. Let us continue to move ahead together as leaders in the critically important area of housing to make a better Winnipeg for all of us.

The entire Speak Up Winnipeg process has been commendable. The amount of participation in the planning and creation of these documents is astounding. City staff have crafted five excellent documents and I am certain that the next iterations based on comments received will be outstanding. However, I implore you not to stop here. This is just the beginning. Next comes the implementation and the city cannot and should not try to do this alone. The private sector can assist with the continued improvement to efficient and focused civic administration and government. Use our professional imagination towards the timing and scope of new development downtown; let us be part of the design of the centres and corridors in Transit Oriented Development; call on us to assist with the Major Redevelopment Sites. As it says in Complete Communities, "See the Possibilities".

Winnipeg's residential construction community knows what works and what doesn't. We have to; we do it every day and our jobs and the jobs of over 20,000 other people in this community depend on it.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with one simple question: "How Can We Help?"