Executive Summary for
Winnipeg Heritage Conservation Districts Draft Report

Introduction

The City of Winnipeg began exploring the creation of Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs) over the winter of 2013/14 as part of an overall updating to the City's heritage program. To assist in the investigation, the consulting team of HTFC Planning & Design, in association with SPAR Planning Services and Historyworks were engaged. After much research and consultation with target stakeholders and a Technical Experts Committee, the *Winnipeg Heritage Conservation Districts Draft Report* was completed in May 2014, and provides recommendations as to how HCDs could work in Winnipeg.

Although Winnipeggers have long advocated for HCDs, and Council has created HCD-like zones, the appetite of the current political regime towards the concept has not been gauged. Nonetheless, HCDs seem an important tool in the City's heritage program, which would allow a more flexible and comprehensive approach to celebrating our city's past. In order to engage in meaningful critical debate on the subject, it is recommended that the existing report be twinned with a Draft HCD *plan* that would demonstrate the real-world implications, benefits and challenges an HCD would bring, (likely again in the Case Study neighbourhood – Armstrong's Point.) Once both of these components exist, the necessary documents can be prepared for Council's consideration.

The Winnipeg Heritage Conservation Districts Draft Report

The report consists of two documents:

1. Winnipeg Heritage Conservation Districts *Policies and Procedures Framework*
2. Winnipeg Heritage Conservation Districts *Phase 2: Case Study – Armstrong's Point*

While the Policies & Procedures Framework advises on mechanisms Council could use to establish Heritage Conservation Districts, the Case Study begins testing various ideas in a Winnipeg neighbourhood presumed suitable for a district – Armstrong's Point. While numerous concepts are explored, an actual HCD Plan is not included in this report. Salient points from each document are outlined below.

Part I: Policies and Procedures Framework

Before devising any form of Heritage District in Winnipeg, it was crucial to examine examples from other cities to grasp the fundamentals. Nationally and internationally, HCDs are extremely common, with many jurisdictions having them in place for 30+ years. Therefore, precedents showing how and why other cities developed HCDs were readily available, and the team compiled information on HCD goals/objectives, formulation, regulation, benefits / challenges, etc.

The report's **Comparative Analysis** section outlines the findings of comparing HCD approaches from six cities – Victoria, Edmonton, Toronto, Minneapolis, Portland and Sydney, Australia. This mix of Canadian and international examples were chosen because of their parallels with Winnipeg in terms of size and heritage policies, and/or for their longevity and pioneering approach.

Some key points noted from this comparison include:

- All but one of the cities have longevity with HCDs (30+ years); some are already renewing/revisiting policies after having cycled through benchmark stages.

- Cities are evenly divided on legislative approach to HCDs – half were prescriptive; half were relaxed.

- Most cities make it a practice to demonstrate the benefits of an HCD, and almost all rely on thematic frameworks within which to contextualize Districts. Almost all have staff or an 'expert-led' designation processes, although increasingly community-driven processes are being considered. Toronto is the exception here – it relies on community members to nominate and lead designation of an HCD.

- Most cities have Official Community Plans (OCPs) or similar city-wide visioning documents, from which the direction/basis/support for HCDs arise. Half also have official city-wide heritage plans to further direct HCDs. In all but one case, the cities apply these types of overarching plans through small area plans to capture HCDS, instead of through zoning by-laws.

- Cities tend to vary greatly on staffing, funding and resources allocated to HCDs. Most have dedicated funding for HCD plans/policy, as well as post-creation funding. Only Toronto has financial incentives for *individual* HCD properties, and is the only city with staff positions dedicated to HCD services.

With an understanding of how other jurisdictions create and operate HCDs, the report proceeds to probe these principles in the Winnipeg context in the **Situational Analysis**. Here, the City's readiness to take on HCDs from a legislative, budgetary and HR standpoint is gauged. It is interesting to note that forerunners of Heritage Districts exist in Winnipeg, including the Exchange District and other special precincts. While these are managed through zoning regulations, instead of under an Official Community Plan (OCP) as is common in other jurisdictions, their existence attests to the fact that HCDs are not a foreign notion to Winnipeg. In fact, interest in creating Heritage Districts appears in various Council documents since 1995. The study also confirms the City of Winnipeg Charter makes explicit Council's authority to designate HCDs at present, if it so wishes, through traditional land development mechanisms – secondary plans, zoning regulations, etc.

Therefore, having demonstrated precedents, the existence of interest, and power to create HCDs in Winnipeg, the report addresses the unknown variable – the mechanism or 'how to' - via **20 Key recommendations.** These cover all aspects of a potential HCD program including establishing definitions,

guidelines and eligibility, citing policy within existing legislation, funding, staffing, etc. Some highlights include:

- Heritage Districts should be developed as the primary vehicle for conserving and celebrating areas of historical and architectural significance in Winnipeg. As investments in Winnipeg's collective future, their goal would be to guide change in historic areas.

- A thematic framework should be established in order to identify/prioritize proposed districts and ensure eligibility is determined through consistent rationale and criteria.

- HCDs should, in general, be at the urging of the community. A nomination process should be developed, and could follow the current nomination process for other historical resources. Nominators should be expected to include sufficient evidence to demonstrate the proposed district's significance in the nomination forms. This may mean entail hiring a consultant to undertake research, etc. Public Service expertise would be combined at critical junctures.

- HCD plans should flow from existing Official Community Plans (OCP) so as to inherit the context and knowledge base found in city-wide policy legislation. Winnipeg has an adopted and functioning OCP in OurWinnipeg and Complete Communities, which share a language on conserving and celebrating areas of architectural or historical significance, and align with the intent of an HCD. Additionally, the Draft Heritage Resources Management Plan, completed in 2010 for the Heritage Branch, also echoes these policies, and if adopted, could function as a City topic plan/city heritage plan. Despite the fact that Council can, if it so wishes, create HCDs within existing Charter powers now, (using the historical approach of regulating through zoning as was done in the Exchange District et al.) linking HCDs to OCPs at a macro level lends a deeper well from which to draw when making decisions. For example, an OCP will outline rationale and intent of a policy to extrapolate from, which exceeds the simple explanations put forth in regulatory elements. This connection back to over-arching policy brings certainty and consistency to decision-making processes. Working down to the micro level, individual HCD plans could be adopted by Council as schedules of Complete Communities, and be carried out via neighbourhood plans.

- Each HCD will rely upon a plan to identify baseline elements such as geographic boundaries, cultural heritage value, conservation objectives, policies and guidelines, etc. Due to varying factors in each HCD, each plan will be different.

- Development guidelines for renovations, new construction, demolitions, etc. in an HCD would be introduced only if intended to implement stated HCD policies. In such cases, development standards and/or design guidelines, with a design review process would be introduced. A city-wide advisory committee should be established to review proposals, which could fall to, or be a sister committee of, the existing Historical Buildings and Resources Committee. A district-specific committee may also be created if a community desires a post-designation role.

- Funding for the designation of HCDs should be provided as a means of investing in our City's heritage. Parameters could be determined, in part, by monitoring contributions of staff time, etc. during a piloting phase. If community contributions are required, opportunities to partner with external organizations or other levels of government should be identified. Financial assistance to individual properties within an HCD could be provided through existing Tax Credit programs, conservation grants, etc. Various incentives could also be provided for the district as a whole, including variance relaxations, transfer of development rights, etc. District-wide enhancement programs could also be identified including capital, operational or beautification projects funded by Council or other partnerships.

Part II: Case Study – Armstrong's Point

The Winnipeg neighbourhood of Armstrong's Point was selected as a test case to begin exploring the findings from the *Situational* and *Comparative Analysis* outlined in the *Policies & Procedures Framewor*k. Two workshops and one Open House were held within the community over the winter of 2013/14 in order to discuss various topics, and voices of both support and concern were heard. Although the case study did not result in the development of a Draft HCD Plan, it did work towards establishing/confirming eligibility of this neighbourhood as an HCD via valuing exercises with community members, and development of a District Statement of Significance. Boundaries for a potential HCD were proposed, and preliminary feedback from residents regarding opportunities/challenges was collected.

To some extent the questions posed to community participants were to introduce the concept of HCDs and increase awareness. Because the study was exploring an as-yet hypothetical topic, questions could only investigate high-level thinking. Finer grain details addressing specific legislative direction, regulation, levels of support required, etc. can only be debated after a more in-depth exercise.

Some highlights of the feedback include:

- Armstrong's Point's historical buildings and the people associated with them are of the most significance to residents, followed closely by streetscapes, landmarks and views.

- Community-led nomination of HCDs is viable, and residents valued participation in an expert-led designation process. However, funding from governments or other sponsors was preferred over relying on communities to rally monies for HCD designation.

- There is a preference for moderately prescriptive HCDs, instead of purely commemorative ones.

- There is strong support for HCDs captured in district plan policies, (as reflected in the Policies recommendations above) and little preference for capturing through zoning regulations.

- Support was shown for HCDs to address building alterations and infill development, likely through special zoning and/or design guidelines. Residents supported working within these guidelines, and recognized this could lead to increased wait for permits, costs, etc.

- Financial incentives were the preferred method of assistance for HCDs, followed closely by district-wide capital improvements over expedited service or zoning relaxations.