Residential Infill Strategy: Design Guidelines & Location Criteria

Public Engagement Summary

September 2020

Background

Building on the priorities identified in the Residential Infill Strategy's Implementation Action Plan, the City of Winnipeg asked for public input on residential infill design guidelines and location criteria to help ensure that new development in Mature Communities is compatible in form, scale, and design, and to help determine when and where density changes should occur on residential streets.

Promotion

Public engagement opportunities were promoted using the following methods:

- City of Winnipeg website;
- News release (French & English) – Monday, September 9, 2019
- Twitter posts (6 English, 6 French) with 78,700 followers – September 9 to October 10, 2019;
- City of Winnipeg public engagement newsletter with over 5,100 recipients - September 13 & 26, 2019
- Newspaper ads (The Herald, Lance, Metro, Sou'wester, Times & La Liberté), September 11, 2019
- Facebook ads, (French & English) – September 13 – 27, 2019

Key findings

- Building height, lot coverage, and overall size of new housing in established neighbourhoods is considered by many to be too large and out of character with the context of the established block.
- Tree protection and preservation, as well as provisions for planting new trees and landscaping were identified as important considerations that support compatible infill development.
- Higher density development should occur at street corners, near transit routes and other higher intensity uses, such as commercial or other high density residential.
- Design elements considered to contribute most to new housing being compatible with the established context are: building height, front yard setbacks, side yard setbacks, building façade materials, lot coverage, and main entrance elevation.
- A more predictable environment for development was identified as a priority by residents and developers alike
- There was a strong desire to better align the objectives of infill with policy and bylaws to support predictability in process and outcomes.

Engagement activities

Date	Activity	Details
September 10 – October 10, 2019	Online survey	As the primary data collection tool during this round of engagement, the online survey targeted specific design issues related to design guidelines and intensification criteria. Over 2,000 Winnipeggers responded, as outlined in the accompanying postal code map.
September 24, 25, 26 & October 1 & 3, 2019	Open houses (5)	Public open houses were organized in each of the community committee areas to drive feedback through the online survey and allow residents and members of the project team to discuss some of the details being considered.
October 19 & November 2, 2019	Stakeholder workshops (2)	The workshops focused on dialogue and the exchange of ideas regarding building design issues and intensification criteria in a small table discussion group format. Each table included participants from a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives. Stakeholder workshops included representation from neighbourhood residents' associations, community groups, design professionals, and builders/developers.

To learn more about the Residential Infill Strategy, please visit winnipeg.ca/infillstrategy

Winnipeg

What we heard online and at open houses

The survey focused on particular design elements that the City wished to receive feedback on. The table below outlines the summary of this feedback. In some cases, the findings from the survey and open houses differed from the findings of what we heard through stakeholder workshops. As such, the City has aimed to balance the findings of all engagement events to refine the recommendations.

What we heard	How this information was considered
Making **side yard setbacks** contextually appropriate was identified as a high priority.	We have recommended that greater side yard setbacks be established on narrow properties to address this.
Respondents strongly supported that the City require **new trees to be planted** if existing mature trees on a site cannot be maintained (69% 'Yes,' 21.3% 'No'), but were not generally in agreement over whether the City should require **minimum landscaping expectations** (47.1% 'Yes,' 40% 'No').	We have recommended that tree protection measures be considered on a site where redevelopment is proposed and that landscaping requirements should apply to new single family residential development.
A strong majority of respondents (69%) said that it is 'Not important' that all buildings on the street have a consistent roof pitch. A majority of respondents (58.9%) said that the City should not regulate the **type of roof pitch** that can be built on a street.	We have recommended that roof pitches will not be regulated through a design review. However, roof pitch style should consider adjacent properties in terms of minimizing overall building mass impacts.
A majority of respondents (54.5%) said that it is 'Not important' that the City regulate the **height of main floor entrances**. Respondents were evenly split between main floor entrances being regulated at a maximum number of feet (40.2%) based on basement egress/fire code, and having no restrictions at all (40.6%).	Results from our workshop indicated that main floor entrance height was one of the more important design elements that helped a new developments remain compatible with established houses in the neighbourhood. As such, we have recommended that the main floor building height not exceed more than 4 feet.
A strong majority of respondents (71.4%) felt that the City should ensure that windows in new developments are placed to ensure **adequate privacy** for adjacent neighbours.	Recommendations will encourage window alignment to be offset from adjacent properties to limit the possibility of direct sight lines between homes.
A minority of respondents thought that buildings should not have **rear attached garages** (30% said this was 'somewhat' or 'very' important. If rear attached garages are encouraged, a majority of respondents (55.1%) said that they should be based upon the size of the lot.	Recommendations will allow attached garages at the rear of single family houses. The rules of lot area coverage will be consistently applied and any portion of a building constructed above an attached garage will count toward the lot area coverage of the principle building in order to mitigate massing impacts on abutting properties.

Stakeholder Workshops

Workshop #1 – Discussion Summary

The event focused on grouping people with various backgrounds and expertise to comment on and discuss examples of recent infill development. Images of buildings were provided to participants and they were asked to identify their top two design elements that they felt contributed to the building being contextually sensitive, and which two design elements contributed to the building being not contextually sensitive. This exercise was repeated for four single family homes, as well as two images for duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and small scale apartments.

Based on the images that were reviewed the design elements identified as most important for determining compatibility and fit (starting from most important) were:

- Building height
- Front yard setbacks
- Building façade materials
- Lot coverage
- Main entrance elevation

Elements that were of medium importance included:

- Roof pitches
- Landscaping
- Parking

Elements that were least important in determining compatibility included:

- Side yard setbacks
- Distance between house and garage,
- Privacy

When participants indicated that they felt the development was contextually sensitive, the top three design elements that contributed to this were: **front yard setback** (aligned well with neighbouring properties), **building height** (in scale with neighbours), and **lot area coverage** (not imposing for adjacent neighbours).

When participants indicated that they felt the development was *not* contextually sensitive, the top three design elements that contributed to this were: **building materials** (detracted from neighbourhood look/feel), **lot coverage** (imposing on adjacent neighbours), and the **main entrance elevation** (being too high).

Workshop #2– Discussion Summary

Participants from a variety of professional disciplines and those with personal experiences with infill development were grouped at eight separate tables. The intent was to ensure a well-rounded conversation on the issues associated with where and what type of infill development should occur within 'mature communities.'

Participants were provided workbooks to provide feedback on where they believed a variety of housing typologies should be located in residential neighbourhoods. The typologies included single family dwellings and the subdivision of lots; duplex housing, triplexes, fourplexes and small scale apartments. Maps of two different generic neighbourhoods were provided to give people a visual context for where they might decide to locate certain housing typologies (see Appendix E). The first neighbourhood was meant to portray a lower density neighbourhood with predominantly single family homes, while the second represented a neighbourhood with a mix of densities.

For each housing typology (lot split, duplex, triplex, etc.), participants were provided with a list of site and/or location characteristics to comment on in order help determine an approach that should be considered when a certain form of development was proposed at a certain location. For example, with lot splits, participants were asked if they felt lot splitting should be allowed as of right, should be based on precedent, be allowed for a specified number of lots on the block, for a specified percentage of lots or "other." A list of the questions asked is available in Appendix E.

The general sense was that lot splitting should be allowed in both the low density residential neighbourhood and the mixed density residential neighbourhood provided that it was done with good design that fit the character of the block and did not overbuild the site. Other factors such as infrastructure capacity, preservation of character through such elements as landscaping were also identified by participants. Many felt that the City should base a decision to approve a lot split by using a percentage or a set number of lots on any given block. For the mixed density neighbourhood, several respondents indicated that while they felt lot splits could be easily accommodated, these lands would be better preserved in order to consolidate for higher density development.

Many participants determined that two-unit housing (e.g. duplex) was an appropriate use that could be permitted in low density neighbourhoods as an alternative to lot splitting. Some felt that two-unit dwellings might offer a better design solution than two-single family dwellings as it would reduce wasted space between buildings and allow greater opportunity to accommodate setbacks, landscaping, and other desired site design features. Fifty-foot-wide lots for side-by-sides were generally supported and up/down duplexes were thought to be appropriate on lots that were 40 feet wide or less. Twenty-five foot wide lots for a duplex were felt to be too narrow by some participants. Good design was a common theme that many spoke about that would help two family housing fit in with the low density context. Some indicated that improvements should be made within the community where the development is occurring, such as establishing parks and other community amenities. Some felt that residents should be consulted on any proposed development.

Many participants felt the same about the mixed density neighbourhood as they did about the low-density neighbourhood; mainly that quality design was a priority factor that would influence the degree of compatibility with the established character while ensuring adequate space for trees and parking. Many felt that two-family dwellings would fit in a mixed density neighbourhood and saw very few problems with introducing it.

Many participants also felt that a well-designed triplex was not all that different than single or two-family housing and that design solutions could be contemplated to ensure an appropriate transition between triplex and single family. Design was the key element that would ensure context sensitivity. Certain locations were preferred, such as corners or near high frequency transit. Parking was felt to be important and that careful consideration should be given to reducing parking requirements where appropriate. Triplex's were viewed as being less desirable when located mid-block, though some felt it could work within a certain context or neighbourhood type. One individual noted that the conversion of older homes to triplexes should be considered.

In the mixed density neighbourhood example, triplex housing was seen as being more readily accepted provided the design was compatible. Some felt that triplex housing would serve well as a transition between single-family and higher intensity uses.

Many respondents felt that the conditions associated with appropriate location for a fourplex were consistent with those of a triplex. Design was a key consideration for determining appropriate locations of four unit dwellings. Parking availability became noticeably more pronounced with the fourplex from triplex and was noted as something that should be considered in site design and compatibility. Lower parking ratios may be considered when site is located in close proximity to high frequency transit. Neighbourhood consultation was seen to be important. Green space was also noted as a consideration for the fourplex dwellings.

In the mixed density neighbourhood, feedback about the fourplexes revealed that the majority of respondents felt the same measures should be taken for fourplexes as triplexes as most felt they were fundamentally very similar. Determining appropriateness for a fourplex should be based on an appropriate lot width. Again, design was noted as an important consideration that would lend to the development being considered compatible. Ensuring that parking needs are adequately addressed was also noted.

Many respondents provided feedback indicating that apartment blocks could work within lower density neighbourhoods subject to following certain criteria. These criteria (in addition to the ones proposed) included: where the massing was reasonably comparable to adjoining properties, larger lots where appropriate parking could be accommodated, mixed use development with commercial at grade and residential uses were located above. Design was once again important and entry location was noted as specific element to be considered. Consultation with the neighbourhood residents and following a neighbourhood plan was deemed important.

Many felt the same about where apartment housing should be located between the low density neighbourhood and the mixed density neighbourhood. Emphasis should be on ensuring that the form and scale is acceptable in relation to nearby properties and surrounding area.

Generally speaking, there was a desire for greater communication and consultation with the neighbourhood residents. The development of neighbourhood (secondary) plans that reflected neighbourhood priorities were deemed important.

Overall, the exercise provided insight into how and where new development might be considered and the results were used to help formulate recommendations for the draft location criteria.

Next Steps

Feedback gathered to this point will be used to help inform the development of the Small-Scale and Low-Rise Residential Development Design Guidelines, which will be presented for public feedback in Fall 2020.

Appendices

Appendix A – Design Guidelines & Intensification Criteria survey questions

Appendix B – Survey feedback summary

Appendix C – Postal code map of survey respondents

Appendix D – Workshop 1 materials

Appendix E – Workshop 2 materials