January 4, 2005

Mayor Sam Katz and Executive Policy Committee:

<u>Re: Opposition to amending Plan Winnipeg to re-designate the Waverley West area from a rural policy area to a neighbourhood policy area</u>

What is behind the conniving between City Hall and Premier Gary Doer concerning urban sprawl vis-a-vis Waverley West? The more you look, the more you realize the failure of the NDP and City Council to contain urban sprawl. In 1986, when Gary Doer was Urban Affairs Minister under Howard Paulley's government Doer said, and I quote, "The city's refusal to impose adequate limits on suburban development may force the Province to pass legislation curtailing the City's control over urban development." Whatever happened to that notion? At that time, Doer charged that the City was serving the interest of developers and ignoring sound urban planning. Not only that, but he also suggested that urban sprawl (in 1986) was costing an extra $100 million per year in providing basic services such as police, fire, schools, garbage collection, water and sewer infrastructure.

Today, I wonder, what's the connection between Doer's government and Ladco, the developers, whereby the sprawl industry maintains its grip on the housing market by funneling sums of money (both legal and illegal) to politicians to maintain sprawl interests? What I'm talking about is the disgusting push towards the development of Waverley West, which even the Winnipeg Free Press suggests is "putting the cart before the horse" in encouraging suburban sprawl. If urban sprawl cost $100 million per year in 1986, then how much is it costing in 2004?

As Elizabeth Fleming from the Council of Women has stated, "urban sprawl has been described as a land use pattern characterized low-density and/or uneven physical development occurring at the fringes of urbanized areas, as well as the disinvestment and abandonment of older urban areas".

Joe Hirschhorn, former Director of Environment, Energy and Natural Resources at the National Governors' Association, clearly indicates that any attempt to control suburban sprawl has failed and it may be too late to save what we, as Canadians value - including public green space, rural lifestyles, farmland, and social capital. What's most interesting is sprawl is not just propelled by market forces, as some would have us believe (such as Peter Holle from Frontier Centre for Policy Alternatives who says that sprawl is a smart way for cities to grow, or Libertarian John Collison who

says that sprawl is "merely a function of free choice by those who own property and those who would buy it") That's bullshit! The fact is, that within the housing market, supply influences demand much more than demand influences supply. And if you don't want to live in the suburbs, you have few choices. Even if you would like to live in neighbourhoods where there are trees and parks and where you are close to downtown, you are forced to live in suburbia because that is where housing is built. Furthermore, media is so biased against the inner city by consistently focusing on crime, high taxes, and squalid conditions, that you are discouraged from living downtown - especially if you have children!

I've always assumed that the "sprawl industry" consists of land developers. What I had never thought of, and what is fact, is that the industry also consists of home and commercial builders, real estate agents, lawyers, banking and financial institutions, road builders, and planning professionals. These are closely tied to car salesmen, fast food restaurants - so much so, that much of the Canadian economy is tied to the further development of urban sprawl. In the past, those involved in urban sprawl interests understood that they had to spend money to control local planning and zoning systems to keep sprawl in the forefront of civic development. Would-be developers know that any planning amendment or zoning change can vastly increase the value of the land overnight. Wherever there was government planning and zoning regulations the sprawl industry lobbied hard to change the legislation to make it either illegal or too expensive to build true alternatives to sprawl.

I don't generally feel conspiratorial, but then I never realized that there is something sinister that controls the development of sprawl. If citizens care enough, they must organize and fight this propaganda, including the fantasy that there is so much land that sprawl is o.k., or even worse, that they are protecting the property rights of Canadians (which are not, by the way, included in the Canadian Constitution). In fact, the business sector profits from sprawl and that's why they support it. Why does the NDP, then, which represents labour - not business - continue to support urban sprawl?

But even more horrifying is the fact that sprawl kills people! In the United States there are approximately 300,000 premature deaths resulting from the sedentary lifestyle that sprawl encourages (I always wondered why there weren't any sidewalks in suburbia. That's because no one walks or cycles anywhere, but only uses the car!). Sprawl, cars and health are definitely interrelated. Furthermore, urban sprawl is killing our natural environment -

farms, small towns, and much, much more! Profits of urban sprawl and development is ultimately killing the happiness and longevity of citizens!

Thank you.

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