Brief to the Executive Policy Committee
Re: **Plan Winnipeg Amendment: Waverley West**
File EP-1.1 (PW 2/2003)
January 4, 2005

The Design Charrette - A Flawed Plan

In May 2003 I took part in a design charrette organized by the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba. The aim of the charrette was to design a plan for the large tract of land known as Waverley West. The participants in the event were divided into three teams, and each was to come up with a design for the whole area, or a portion thereof, in accordance with the principles of smart growth: compact urban form, mixed use, good public transit, bikeways, walkable neighbourhoods and a range of affordable housing options. It was an interesting exercise, although a flawed one. While the participants were encouraged to look at the totality of the environment within the borders of the new community, they were not allowed to look at the impacts on areas just across the line or in other portions of the city, most importantly, the downtown. Such a large addition to the area zoned as residential should be considered within the context of the whole city, and the best time to do that would be during the next Plan Winnipeg review that should be starting soon. The land should not be considered in isolation apart from its context.

None of the three groups was able to come up with a design for the entire area. That vast track defies the imagination and any attempt to see it as a smart growth community. Each group worked on a smaller portion, either the northeast section, where development makes more sense, or a strip along Waverley St to accommodate the needs of Ladco, whose lands are in the southern portion. A walkable community presupposes that there are places that one might walk to - stores, schools, libraries, parks and community centres. These were all worked into the design, but a serious flaw appears when we try to move from the concept to the reality. In reality there will have to be a sizable increase to the population to support a commercial centre and all of these amenities, and the community will have to be developed rapidly, not just at the rate of 200-300 houses a year. People who move into the area believing it will be a walkable community, will not likely be willing to wait decades to get the schools and other promised amenities.

One would have to wonder, however, whether a smart growth community will ever emerge in Waverley West. The builders are looking for more land right now to build houses similar to those in other developments in the area. Will this rush to accommodate builders prove to be a barrier to innovative planning?

Downtown First vs. Waverley West

The first principle articulated in the last Plan Winnipeg is downtown first. The proponents of Waverley West argue that they are not taking anything away from that principle, for the development will appeal to people who would not want to live downtown in any case. That argument is flawed. If Waverley West is to be developed as a compact, higher density neighbourhood, it will in fact be competing with the downtown for those who are willing to live in compact communities. Although the planners dutifully trotted out plan Winnipeg to bolster their arguments, the fact is that many of those

policies would be violated by the development of Waverley West. We need to increase the density of the city we have, not spread it out more. One of the reports that has now apparently been withdrawn from the website stated that Waverley West was expected to draw people from the surrounding communities such as Linden Woods, Fort Garry and River Heights. This could potentially have a negative affect on those neighbourhoods.

The Argument that we are running out of lots in the Southeast Quadrant

Builders have no current need for the redesignation of the entire tract of land. If the builders are in urgent need of more land to develop in the southwest sector of the city, a plan should be drawn up for a compact community in the north east sector of Waverley West, and there is plenty of time to do that in conjunction with the upcoming Plan Winnipeg review. In any case houses should not be built on the land until a plan for a walkable community is in place. Opening up the whole area will encourage a strip of development along Waverley, a move that will militate against the development of a smart growth, walkable community. If you want higher density, you have to plan for it. If the whole area is opened up all at once, there will be relentless pressure from the developers to build on their own lands, regardless of any sustainable development plan. If the province wishes to cooperate with Ladco, some land swaps could be arranged, so that development could unfold in an orderly fashion. If the time line for the development of the whole area is 20 years or more, we have plenty of time to think about what we want to do with this huge part of Winnipeg. Keeping the majority of it designated as rural keeps our options open.

Population Considerations

It has been stated that Winnipeg's population is growing, but that it is the trend to smaller household sizes that is also driving the need for more housing units. The reports that cite this figures and projections omit discussion of two very important facts.

1. The trend toward smaller households means that there will be more single occupant households. Downtown living could appeal to the single individual, and more effort should be made to attract these people into the core. We need to see more affordable to moderately priced housing to attract single professional people to the downtown area.
2. The reports ignore the fact that most of the projected population growth in Winnipeg will come from increases in the aboriginal and immigrant population. It appears that there will be no social housing in Waverley West, and the kind of homes being contemplated will be beyond the financial capacity of most aboriginal and immigrant families.

Keeping Development Within Winnipeg

Many of the families that chose to move outside of the city are looking for a large lot of at least half an acre if not more. This is not the kind of development that is being planned for Waverley West. For these families, Waverley West will have no effect in stemming the exodus. There are also those who are looking for lower property taxes. Unless the development is subsidized by other Winipeggers, Waverley West will not appeal to these people either. The only way in which we can keep more young people, in particular, within the city is to make our city a more vibrant place to live. We need to

create places in the core where interesting things are happening. The areas near the downtown universities and colleges are prime areas for this kind of development.

Transportation

The extension of Kenaston to accommodate the area is not the only cost of accommodating the transportation needs of the planned community. Other routes such as Pembina Hwy will require widening, in the very places where there is little room to expand. Of course the communities are supposed to be accessible by public transit, and it is hoped that many of the residents will take that option. However, extending this transit service unfortunately comes at a cost to some of the poorest segments of the population. For decades the city has not exactly been adding transit service. They have been spreading it out by reducing service on existing routes in order to add new routes and route extensions. This means less frequent service to other routes closer to the core of the city. The dilution of the service takes its toll on ridership, and thus has an adverse environmental impact.

Summary

Approving an amendment at this time to designate the whole of Waverley West as residential would be a serious mistake. There are still places in Winnipeg where builders can build, and those who want to build in the southwest sector of the city will not be very much inconvenienced by waiting until Plan Winnipeg comes up for consideration not very long from now. If we are looking for a smart growth community, no development on this land should be allowed until that plan is in place. Even if we look to the next Plan Winnipeg, it would be a mistake to redesignate the entire area as residential. It makes sense to so incrementally in response to the needs of the city.

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