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AN URBAN RENEWAL SCHEME IN WINNIPEG



John J. Farrugia, B. Arch.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, whose continued encouragement and unselfishness has made this study possible.

PREFACE

This report is respectfully submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements leading to the degree Master of Architecture in Community Planning.

This study is divided into six parts. In Part One the subject and purpose are defined. This involves a general introduction to Urban renewal along with the definition of the physical boundaries of the area under study. Part Two consists of an investigation into the historical, physical, social and economic aspects of the Main-Osborne area. In Part Three, the findings and conclusions of Parts One and Two are assessed and a Master Development Plan is proposed. In Part Four a particular district within the Main-Osborne area is selected and its projected development within the limits of the Master Development Plan is illustrated in detail. Part Five summarizes the findings and conclusions of this study, while Part Six includes the appendices and bibliography.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The subject of this report is An Urban Renewal Scheme in Winnipeg. The area to be considered is bounded by Main Street on the east, Broadway Avenue on the south, Osborne Street - Memorial Boulevard on the west and Portage Avenue on the north.

Before commencing work on this study, the questions of practicality and economic feasibility arose. Since this is basically an academic study as opposed to the type which must be carried out in the real world of a Civic Planning Commission, I feel that certain restrictions which reality imposes on the civic body are not as binding on the author of this study. If we are to prevent the imagination from becoming stagnant or warped, it must be allowed to go beyond the limits of practicality and current economic conditions. If the imaginative spirit and the inquiring mind are forever held in check they may well lose their ability to go beyond that which we already have, and so halt any form of progress.

Therefore, although careful consideration has been given to the economic feasibility of executing all of the proposals included in this study, where the situation demands, these bounds have been transcended in keeping with the opinion expressed in the preceding paragraph. Therefore, this report should be treated as a guide rather than a hard and fast rule.

Because of the limitations imposed by the time available and the physical size of the

study area, a complete investigation of the downtown district was not possible. Therefore, certain assumptions and projections regarding the possible development of the surrounding land have been made. These are, however, not based entirely on official information, but rather they have been arrived at after visual observation of existing development facts and discussions with interested persons.

URBAN RENEWAL

The slow processes of growth have given our cities a commonly recognizable pattern. At the centre there is the business district in which most of the city's activity and wealth, both economic and cultural, are concentrated. The central zone of the city is the principal meeting and exchange point for the surrounding districts. The size and number of the districts which this central area serves vary widely according to its geographic location, topographic conditions, and ease of communication. The proximity and relative size of other cities, each with its own central district, will also contribute to the size, content, and sphere of influence of a particular central zone.

Each central area is, to a varying degree, at the centre of a radial system of roads and is the scene of the most intense land use and highest land and rateable values within the city boundaries. Particular trades or activities tend to be grouped together within certain streets or districts, although there are no hard and fast boundaries set up. There is definite overlapping and mixing of activities as well, but to a lesser degree.

Between cities, great differences exist in the make-up of their central districts, in the proportions of land used for particular purposes and in the size of the central district in relation to the total area of built up land.

The function of being the locality's major exchange point has led to the growth within every central zone of a most complicated pattern of land uses, many of which are inter-dependent.

In general the central area embodies most of the commercial activity as well as the cultural centre, the theatre, art gallery and concert hall. The facilities available for these cultural activities may vary greatly from city to city, but in some degree they exist in the central district of most cities. Also in the central zone we generally find the administrative buildings of the city, and perhaps the Province.

Immediately adjacent to the central core is a rather loose, ill-defined ring which includes the original residential districts of the city. This is a zone in which time has caused serious erosion. Commercial and Industrial land uses have penetrated to the point of suffocation into these original residential blocks. Open spaces have been built over. Streets, originally designed for the horse-drawn carriage and the man on foot, are now choked with fast moving automobiles and trucks. In fact these central areas, which contain the most archaic road system in the city, now carry the highest concentration of vehicular traffic.

As a result of this penetration of commercial and industrial functions into the older residential districts, and because of the age and generally run down condition of many of these 19th century residences, this fringe area between the central core

and the new residential districts has lost its attractiveness as a desirable residential zone. This is especially true when speaking in terms of the single family residence which is an almost non-existent commodity in this fringe area.

Because this is generally a rented space district with an ever decreasing percentage of owner-residents, property becomes neglected and decay sets in. Property values fall and overcrowding is rife. A residential slum is forming.

Beyond this fringe lie the predominantly residential areas. These zones or rings have developed in two waves. The first boom occurred during the years 1920 to 1929 and the second since the end of the second world war. This latter residential development is distinguished from that which occurred in the fringe zone by a lower density of land coverage and smaller homes. Zoning has also separated the various land uses in the newer districts. The post World War II zones reflect the changing pattern of our lives.

The automobile plays a major role in new subdivision design, in the street widths and their layout. We now have freeways, perimeter routes, limited access routes, underpasses, overpasses and any number of methods for relieving traffic congestion. However, the central core, the nucleus or meeting place for the whole city and its environs is still operating on a framework of streets and services as obsolete as the horse and buggy itself.

Because of time limitations, it has not been possible to investigate one very important and interesting aspect of the decaying central core, and that is the immense cost of its inefficiency. It represents a large tax burden while realizing only a small revenue. In addition, the wasted man hours, the gallons of fuel, the depletion of nervous energy, the high budgets required by the police, health, building safety, and fire departments, the private and public welfare agencies: all these result from urban blight, and its effects soon spread to surrounding districts.

As the dilapidation and undesirability of the central core, both as a place of residence and as a place of commercial activity increase, the revenue decreases, yet the same services must be maintained. As the heart of the city falters these costs increase and the mounting burden of taxation moves outward towards the suburbs to be borne by home owners and businessmen there in ever increasing amounts. It is a vicious cycle which will eventually find the central core bankrupt, as far as property tax return is concerned, and the rest of the city paying for its upkeep.

Fortunately, Winnipeg has not sunk to this level of deterioration as yet, but studies by the Metropolitan Planning Commission reveal that certain sections of the city are in the crisis period already. These districts are ripe for urban renewal. That portion of the central core covered in this report does contain

an area which the Planning Commission denoted as being "ripe for redevelopment".

An observational trip through Winnipeg's central district during rush hours will immediately reveal the crying need for re-study and replanning of the traffic systems in this area. I believe that Winnipeg's central core has reached the stage in its development where no piecemeal expediencies can be substituted for an overall development program. It would constitute a moral, social and economic failure to avoid this fact.

Although the problem of replanning may appear to be very complex, in general the planning goals facing most central business districts are very few and can be simply stated.

1. The most productive use of the land.

This includes the gradual up-grading of the area, with respect to its cultural or social influence as well as its economic value; the flexible grouping of uses to minimize distances and servicing difficulties; the stimulation of private enterprise and the discouraging of deleterious uses.

2. A free flowing, non-conflicting circulation pattern.

This would include a road system, with primary, secondary, and throughway, routes capable of handling a free flow of public, private and service vehicles to and from, as well as around, the central business area. This also involves separation of truck, pedestrian and auto movements with provision for vehicle