

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

STRATEGY FOR A TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT,
BRANDON, MANITOBA

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

October 1972



PREFACE

Having lived and worked in Brandon, I have found that this community has a number of qualities in its physical features and character which have not been understood or utilized to contribute to a vital urban core. The lack of such a vital urban centre has recently led several businessmen to promote a roof over the main street. This attempt is an indication at least at the local level, for a need to perpetuate and revitalize the drawing power of the downtown area, even though their concern in this case is motivated primarily through competition with recently established suburban shopping centres. This concern of the businessmen led me to seek other viable alternatives which would have a long term benefit to the community at large. In order to determine valid redevelopment alternatives, objectives were determined within the local socio-economic and political structure. This has led me to believe that objectives have little impact on such development if the variety of personal concerns cannot be optimized at the early stages of the decision making level.

This thesis is thus an attempt to study the variables that influence the numerous stages of planning and implementation, and to determine through priorities possible sets of strategies for the development of a town centre such as Brandon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have provided help, information and advice during the course of this thesis. I would particularly like to thank the following:

Mr. Bob Allsop, Campus Planning, University of Manitoba,

Mr. E. J. Aronovitch, President, Aronovitch and Leipsic, Developers and Real Estate,

Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, Director, Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg,

Mr. Elmhurst, Representative, Community Hotels Ltd.,

Mr. Tony Eshmade, Consultant Engineer,

Mr. J. V. Fitzgerald, President, J. V. Fitzgerald Assoc. Quantity Surveyors, Management Consultants,

Mr. George Murray, Sec.-Treas., Brandon Chamber of Commerce,

Mr. Don Rosborough, Rosborough Southam Assoc., Developers,

Mr. Dennis Scott, City Manager, City of Brandon,

Mr. John Whiting and John Pelletier, Municipal Planning Service.

Special thanks are extended to;

Professor Eric Lye, my advisor, who provided new insights and prodded me on throughout this thesis,

Mr. Brian Bancroft, of Smith Carter Partners, whose major contributions were his professional opinions and establishing contacts with a variety of people both in his office and professionals in other fields,

Dr. Martin Yeh, who directed the research portion of this study so that it remained manageable for the purposes of this thesis,

To my friends, Terry Maunu, Jannie and Merth for their moral (sometimes immoral) and physical support, ideas and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Establishing the Context

Historically the old community had two characteristics; it brought people together and it had a clearly understood structure. European villages were built around a common green, which was the community place of entertainment, central water supply and marketplace. Around this were the church, public buildings and shops.

This sophistication was never really achieved on the prairies. Towns grew up along railway lines and town centres developed in a fairly compact area parallel to or next to the railway. Within this compact area all the trade and commerce took place.

In Brandon this originally happened along Pacific Avenue. Gradually it shifted to Rosser Avenue. This area was the social centre of the region and people came here to get their mail, to do their banking, and invariably used 'going to town' as a social occasion.¹

The role of the downtown as a socialising agent has diminished. In our modern communities with running water, telephones, television, radio, mail delivery, milk delivery,

¹Tom Mitchell, 'Historic Development of Downtown Brandon' a paper prepared for an unpublished report, 'Brandon Overhaul Party 71', Brandon, Manitoba, section 10.

drive-ins, and supermarkets, this informal social contact has been lost. Our lives have become more introverted and private. Public life which has always been so important is almost non-existent. Complicating the problem is the insidious takeover of the downtown by the automobile, pedestrians are relegated to narrow strips along the margins of the street.

As a regional centre, Brandon's prime attraction is its shopping and service facilities. The recent establishment of the two shopping centres on the outskirts of Brandon is a result of the market potential in Brandon.

From a national average, regional centres should attain retail sales of \$1,000 per person. Brandon has a population of 180,000 in its trading area. It should thus attain sales of \$180,000,000. However, 1970 saw only \$45,000,000 in retail sales. There are several factors to which this could be attributed. Brandon's downtown merchants, who have had until now a captive market, are notorious for poor service and quality of merchandise; and have been complacent to the physical comfort or the aesthetic or sensory experience of shopping. As a result many people in the area have been bypassing Brandon and going to either Winnipeg or Minot.²

What was once a proud and handsome streetscape has been allowed to deteriorate. Garrish signs, poorly designed

²Commission on Targets for Economic Development, 'Manitoba to 1960', Winnipeg, March 1969, p. 471.

false fronts, unimaginative window displays, and characterless lighting of both streets and buildings now predominate. Parking and servicing of these stores has become increasingly inefficient.

The downtown is still the most vital piece of real estate in the region in terms of taxes, employment, and as a focus for social, economic and civic life.³ It is essential that this area maintain and reinforce its position. However, to accommodate this change, a new framework must be developed. This does not suggest that the existing one should be demolished, neglected or alienated from the rest of the community. On the contrary, there should be a continuity from the historic structure to a dynamic urban structure. The sophistication of the people of this area is slowly changing, creating a demand for more and better amenities, such as public facilities, entertainment and retail goods, as well as the environment in which these services are to be provided.

Last summer under the Opportunities for Youth program, public opinion interviews were conducted to determine the image and community characteristics of Brandon.⁴ As a result of this study it became obvious that even though Brandon exhibits some fine buildings and spaces, it still lacks what could be termed a 'community place'. This would

³Underwood McLellan & Assoc. & D. F. Pinker Assoc. 'City of Brandon--Urban Renewal Study', 1967, p. 69.

⁴Brandon Overhaul Party 71, Section 9, unpublished report, 1971.

be a place where people could come with the opportunity to meet other people, a place to watch other people, to window shop, to go to a movie, or to have a cup of coffee--a centre that would provide a variety of activity.

Case Studies

The proposals to be presented are all attempts to come to terms with our long harsh winters. There is nothing new about climate controlled shopping centres. There are, however, few climate controlled, comprehensive town centres. The ones that have been carried out are very successful, but require courage on the part of the elected officials in carrying out a planning idea. It is only through the dedication and cooperation between the various sectors involved that any positive steps can be taken in improving our environment.

Rochester, New York--Midtown Plaza

This is a centre city development utilizing public air rights to link existing, expanded and new facilities through a system of malls. The city leased land from private enterprise and constructed a parking structure. The developers placed their facilities over this parking structure. The city also provided the required relocation of services, street diversions, and improvements. What was a run down and dying centre, where no development had occurred in more than twenty years, became a strong core

which has spurred new development around it.⁵

Cumbernauld Town Centre--Scotland

This centre is presently developed for a population of 25,000, but with expansion is anticipated to support a population of 70,000 people. The concept here again is three dimensional planning, separation of pedestrian from vehicular and servicing traffic. This facility houses shops, meeting halls cinemas, professional offices, restaurants, a hotel and town administration. It was developed by a government sponsored development corporation which repays a long term loan through leasing portions of the development to private enterprise.⁶

Scandinavia

The Swedes and Norwegians have a similar climate to ours and have learned that grouping functions under one roof is more logical than building unrelated separate entities. To house these activities they have created some of the most vital, exciting environments of the north, again through a combination of private and public involvement.⁷

⁵Victor Gruen, 'The Heart of our Cities', New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964, pp. 300-321.

⁶Architectural Review, 'Cumbernauld', no. 142, November 1967, pp. 440-445.

⁷Skelmersdale Development Corporation, 'Town Centre', S. D. C., 1966. Institut for centre-plan laegning (danish), 'By Centre Menneske', Lyngby, Denmark, 1965. Ralph Erskine, 'Two Lectures by Ralph Erskine', Dean J. A. Russell, Professors C. de Forest and R. Zuk, University of Manitoba, 1963.

Thunder Bay, Ontario

Closer to home the Thunder Bay Urban Renewal Scheme has just been sent out for tenders. The scheme is a good model to investigate in terms of its scope and public-private involvement. It is set in the core of Port Arthur. Considerable demolition of non-substantial structures has taken place with the property reverting to the city. The substantial structures have remained intact. Through a system of enclosed and open malls, new construction and existing facilities are welded together into a cohesive complex. The site is sloping and parking is provided under the main circulation level. The parking is being leased from the developer by the parking authority. As well the city leases public facilities within this complex. This unique combination of private and public involvement will give Thunder Bay a vigorous town centre which will act as a springboard for future development in the downtown.⁸

Procedure

The investigation of the strategies for the development of a town centre in Brandon was carried out in four stages.

The vehicle by which the first stage was initiated was an opportunities for youth grant to study the feasibility of a downtown redevelopment. As co-ordinator of an interdisciplinary group of students, the prime objective was to

⁸Adamson & Assoc., 'Thunder Bay Urban Renewal Project', Oct. 15, 1970.

gather data that would provide a basis for this thesis. Through this I became familiar with particular problems in the community. In order to establish a dialogue with the merchants and city government, our group organised a street festival. This also indicated the level of activity that could be anticipated in a town centre. Data which was collected through interviews with civic officials, merchants and the public; surveys of the downtown historical development, downtown property assessments and the development of an economic model of the retail structure was compiled in the report, 'Brandon Overhaul Party '72'. This report, along with other existing reports,⁹ formed the basis of the second step of the investigation.

This second stage consisted of modelling the variables that could affect the development of a town centre. Goals and objectives for this development were determined from the data collected in stage 1, noting that they vary in relation to the different sectors of the community. Alternatives were developed on the basis of these goals and objectives. They were evaluated from a purely functional

⁹Municipal Planning Branch, 'Brandon Downtown', Dept. of Urban Development and Municipal Affairs, Province of Manitoba, April 1971; Municipal Planning Branch, 'City of Brandon-Infrastructure for an Urban-Industrial Centre', Dept. of Municipal Affairs, April 1970; Underwood McLellan & Associates Ltd., D. F. Pinker Assoc., 'City of Brandon--Urban Renewal Study', 1967; R. A. M. P. Committee, 'Rosser Ave. Mall Project', Consolidated Report, April 1971; W. L. Wardrop & Associates Ltd., Read, Voorhees & Assoc. 'Brandon Area Transportation Study, Dec. 1, 1970.

standpoint as well as by applying cost-benefit analysis techniques. This analysis was instrumental in deciding on one particular alternative.

Stage three was concerned primarily with the planning and implementation strategy of the alternatives chosen. This strategy was developed in conjunction with planners, developers, quantity surveyors and economists and led to the recommendations presented to Brandon City Council in order to obtain feedback. The presentation consisted of a look at the townscape, good and bad; ideas developed in other urban centres of similar scale; a description of the analysis; a presentation of the planning concepts; financial feasibility study and recommendations to the city.

The final stage was concerned with developing the architectural ideas and strategies. The emphasis was placed upon expression, definition and character of the various circulation systems.

CHAPTER 2

DATA COLLECTION

The first stage involved the collection of data. Sponsored under the Opportunities for Youth program, the product was a 130 page report entitled 'Brandon Overhaul Party '71' as well as audio, audio-visual and visual material. Due to the bulk of this report it has been omitted from this paper but may be obtained from the author.

The contents of the report and methodologies are as follows:

(a) a description and evaluation of the instant city street festival. The evaluation was obtained through interviews and public feedback.

(b) a public opinion poll was conducted orally from a prepared questionnaire. This survey was concerned with such things as the image of Brandon, services, amenities and shopping habits. Since it touched on highly subjective issues the survey could only be used as an indicator of public opinion.

(c) in order to establish the historic development patterns and history of the significant downtown buildings, a masters history student carried out the research.

(d) a political science student interviewed civic officials in order to chart the political and power structure

as well as land ownership and leasing procedures between the City of Brandon and private enterprise.

(e) a city planning student with a major in economics researched the economic characteristics and directions for retail trade in Brandon.

(f) a sociology major attempted to establish the social characteristics of the community from data available from Statistics Canada, provincial and local surveys.

(g) a survey was conducted of people working downtown to serve as an indicator of the demand for housing in the downtown area.

(h) people counts were conducted at various points downtown to establish the concentrations of activity and people movement.

(i) in order to estimate the property values in the downtown, assessments of the properties concerned were acquired and tabulated.

This data was collected as it was not readily available in other reports or published material in a digestible form. This formed a portion of the data to be used in the later stages.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Stage two involves the development of a methodology by which alternative development plans can be formulated and evaluated. The methodology is based on a development model (figure 2) from which strategies were developed. A strategy in its simplest terms is a plan: a plan is the arrangement or ordering of articles within a specific framework. Thus the strategy referred to in this thesis is the combination of variables which could affect the development of a particular town centre in the most desirable manner. The dependent variables are the possible facilities or infrastructure requirements of a community. The independent variables are the forces that affect the dependent variables. These can be interrelated with costs and benefits and represented by the formula;

$$(C_1 + C_2 + \dots + C_n) + (F_{f1} + F_{f2} + \dots + F_{fn}) \leq \\ (B_1 + B_2 + \dots + B_n) + (F_{d1} + F_{d2} + \dots + F_{dn})$$

where:

C refers to costs (quantifiable)

F_f is the friction variable which refers to the difficulty of implementing a scheme due to complexity, red tape, political expedience, priorities and personalities (non-quantifiable)

Fd is the desirability variable which refers to the qualitative objectives of each sector involved (non-quantifiable) (contained in the list pages

B is the benefit or return on investment (quantifiable).

In public expenditure the economic costs and benefits are not always the controlling factors. Implying quantitative values to qualitative variables would, in order to minimize bias, involve massive surveys in order to approximate the value system of that segment of society affected by the redevelopment. It is therefore proposed that the variables be utilized to compare the relative merit of a particular scheme.

Selection of Alternatives:

The selection of alternatives was based on, (a) the urban land use map (overlays figure 1), (b) the Brandon Centre Development Model (figure 2), (c) the objectives and criteria as they relate to each sector (table 1, p. 22). The urban land use map (figure 1) is a series of overlays containing the various land uses. This indicates development patterns and the presence of 'soft' areas where development could occur the easiest. This particular map shows a concentration along Rosser Avenue with some development occurring along ninth street on the fringe of the downtown area. Thus even though Rosser is primarily retail,

ninth street contains a variety of hotels, parks, elderly person's housing, municipal and provincial building and city hall, which indicates a shift in development.

The Brandon Centre Development Model includes the infrastructure requirements of the city which could locate in this area. Since this calls for significant new construction and since there is significant vacant land between Princess and Rosser Avenues, development could take place in this area.

Objectives and criteria were established for the development in terms of the sector or group of people involved (table 1, p. 22). The basic breakdown of the sectors was in terms of consumers, (being the persons using the facilities provided,) and producers, (being the parties involved in providing and operating the facilities and services). As illustrated in the tables each sector has its instrumental objectives which it would use to judge the desirability of a scheme. The underlying objective is Victor Gruen's recipe for a successful urban centre, 'diversity, vitality and compactness'.¹⁰ Shifting development south of Rosser could help achieve this.

¹⁰Victor Gruen, 'The Heart of our Cities', Simon & Schuster, New York, 1964, p. 28.