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# FAST FACTS

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## Winnipeg Must Pay More Attention to Good City Planning Principles

In 2001, the City of Winnipeg published its Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision. The Plan is designed to guide planning and development policy for twenty years. It lays out strategies for promoting residential development downtown, density focused growth, neighbourhood revitalization, affordable housing, and plans for transportation infrastructure, including a rapid transit network for the city and the promotion of active transportation (walking, cycling, etc.). The principles of the Plan were enshrined in an act of Council, which stated that no council decision should go against the outlined principles. However, the goals of the plan are wide-ranging and not prioritized, making enforcement difficult. The plan does have provisions for measuring outcomes, but these have not materialized. Rather than actively pursuing the plan as an overarching framework, the current administration seems content to cherry pick ideas out of the plan in the cases when it suits their needs, and amend it when it does not.

It is unfortunate that this administration does not take Plan Winnipeg more seriously because it incorporates sound urban planning principles that, if followed, would make Winnipeg a more desirable place to live. The City should place the role of city planning front and centre in its infrastructure and development decisions, and ensure that city

planners are retained and well positioned in the civil service. Unfortunately this does not appear to be the case.

The recent departure of another senior city planner reinforces concerns about the administration's commitment to robust planning principles. Jim Paterson has been a planner with the city for over 20 years and was previously the Acting Director of Planning Property and Development. Paterson had applied to fill the position permanently, but instead the position was filled by Mayor Katz's friend and associate Phil Sheegl, a Winnipeg property developer. Accusations of patronage were further fuelled by the fact that the hiring process was overseen by Alex Robinson, who was acting Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) at the time. Robinson, prior to being appointed acting CAO, was a fulltime political advisor to Katz in the Executive Policy Committee Secretariat, and returned to that position after the CAO position was filled.

Concerns have been raised regarding Sheegl's credentials for the position. Sheegl's background is not in city planning, but real estate sales and development, with his most recent project being the development of Sky Condominiums on Waterfront drive. His background is particularly



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## *FAST FACTS continued ...*

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problematic as the interests of developers and the public can often be at odds. Although it is not clear that Paterson was the right person for the job, it is hard to believe that the city could not attract someone with a more suitable background than real estate development.

This is only one of the questionable moves by City Hall recently that downplays the importance of good city planning. The promotion of a new stadium in South Point Douglas by the Mayor is another example of a decision that appears to be poorly thought out and potentially damaging to the city's revitalization efforts. Studies have repeatedly shown that stadia are an ineffective way of generating any sort of meaningful urban revitalization. Furthermore, the project would impose significant infrastructure costs on the city, and the proposal completely disregards the research undertaken by the City's Planning, Property and Development Department regarding the development of a secondary plan for the area (a secondary plan is an in-depth plan for how a particular area of the city will develop).

The research found that the residents of the community had "a general feeling of optimism about the future" and that the city should be encouraging mixed use development, including an expansion of the residential component. This type of development has been shown to generate urban revitalization – but a stadium in the area would effectively quash any such mixed-use development.

Another questionable decision was the approval of the Chief Peguis Trail expansion, which would see the highway extended from Henderson Highway to Lagimodière Boulevard. The highway extension between two Winnipeg suburbs is justified by the City due to the increased traffic generated by the initial leg of the highway that passes over the Red River and connects Main Street to Henderson Highway. This traffic-generating aspect of the project is a good example of a well-known concept in traffic planning

circles: "induced demand" or "supply-generated demand". The widening or construction of new roads to solve traffic congestion problems often fails because better roads induce people to use their cars more often and to locate their homes and business further from work and amenities. So, the "improvements" have the opposite effect: they increase traffic and urban sprawl. Building bigger roads is not the solution.

The initial cancelling of Rapid Transit and the development of the Waverley West suburb are additional examples of decisions that have the potential to impose significant costs on the City for many years to come. The social and environmental costs of these projects may be less than the benefits, but, contrary to urban-planning principles, there is no systematic mechanism at the City to evaluate if this is the case.

There may however be some cause for optimism. Government officials have substantiated rumours that a deal for a rapid-transit corridor from downtown to the University of Manitoba is its final stages, and the consistent public criticism of the proposal to locate the new stadium in South Point Douglas seems to have silenced its promoters to the point where it is unlikely that the project will go ahead. Despite all this, the systematic problem still remains - rather than being seen as the driver of development policy, Plan Winnipeg continues to be treated as an afterthought to be whimsically amended.

As oil prices remain high and concern for global climate change grows, comprehensive long-term planning is increasingly relevant; Winnipeg would do well to reevaluate the priority it assigns to city planners and the planning process.

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