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The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal

A Summary of the State of the Inner City Report: 2005

Trouble in Winnipeg's inner city is often in the news. And far too often the response to bad news is a call to crack down on the people who live there.

A new two-part study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba indicates that there exist other, more promising and effective approaches.

CCPA-Manitoba's *State of the Inner City Report: The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal* shows that where strong and effective community-based and community-controlled organizations emerge, and where these community-based organizations (CBOs) are adequately funded, positive change begins to occur.

Part I of the report, *Policy Considerations* deals with a wide range of public policy issues, particularly housing, employment, and education. Part II, *A View From the Neighbourhoods*, is a close examination of three inner-city neighbourhoods: Spence, Centennial, and Lord Selkirk.

Community-led renewal

Each of the community profiles underscores the benefits that arise from the presence of community-based organizations and the problems that remain unresolved in their absence.

Spence

Established in 1997, the Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA) promotes neighbourhood clean-ups, provides small amounts of funding for neighbourhood projects which are decided by people in each neighbourhood area, and goes to peoples' homes to welcome them to the neighbourhood and invite their involvement when they move to Spence.

It has established working committees on matters of importance to the community—housing, safety, and community economic development, for example.

Since its establishment here has been a very significant improvement in the neighbourhood's housing stock: over 100 houses renovated over the past five years by three housing organizations. Fourteen infill houses have been built over the past three years (including the first two accessible infill houses to be built in the inner city), with another 10 planned this coming year; and 30-35 small housing grants per year for each of the past 4 years, a total of \$50,000-60,000 per year, supporting improvements in rental and privately-owned housing. The change in the physical appearance of the neighbourhood is obvious.

Two years ago Aboriginal residents in the Spence neighbourhood established the Inner-City Aboriginal Neighbours. I-CAN has mobilized large numbers of Aboriginal people with regular general membership meetings, neighbourhood feasts and various cultural activities. The group has established a neighbourhood softball team, the IC Arrows, which has been very successful in promoting Aboriginal peoples' involvement. I-CAN also organizes a day at the beach each summer for neighbourhood children, families and individuals; has sponsored pow-wow and drumming lessons, Ojibwa classes, computer classes and baby-sitting classes; has organized several dry socials and nights out with bowling and billiards; works with the University of Winnipeg Aboriginal Students' Association to sponsor an annual pow-wow at UW's Duckworth Centre; and is in the process of planning a large Aboriginal language conference. I-CAN now has over 120 members, and

a 12-person elected Board that reports to the SNA Board.

Centennial

With the support of the Winnipeg Foundation, the Centennial Neighbourhood Project, headquartered in Dufferin School, an elementary school on Alexander off Isabel, seeks to involve the residents in enhancing the socio-economic circumstances of the area in order to improve the educational prospects of neighbourhood children. The five-year Centennial Neighbourhood Project was launched in the Fall of 2003. Since the launch organizers have gone door-to-door in the neighbourhood to invite residents' involvement. They have organized neighbourhood barbecues, established a neighbourhood newspaper, created a Resource Centre in Dufferin School that is open to area residents and has become a centre of resident activity. Most recently, elections were held for the Centennial Community Improvement Association, a resident-based Board which will make decisions about the direction of neighbourhood revitalization.

Lord Selkirk Park

The Lord Selkirk Park neighbourhood lacks the sort of community-based organizations that have and are being established in Centennial and Spence. Crime, drugs, and poverty take a terrible toll on the community, and while there are a number of important community agencies in operation in the area, there is no overall plan that is developed and guided by the community. The North End Community Renewal Corporation is working to put together a holistic ten-year, comprehensive plan to turn Lord Selkirk Park around. Although struggling to find the long-term funding to ensure that they can work consistently over ten years, they have pulled together the various agencies to increase the extent to which they are working together, have hired an organizer to work in the development, and are developing a resource centre to serve as an organizing centre, similar to what the Centennial Neighbourhood Project has done at Dufferin School. This is a genuine opportunity for this troubled neighbourhood.

What works

Community-based solutions work best when people in the community are involved, when they participate in deciding upon what is to be done and how, and when they themselves are hired to do the work when employment opportunities arise.

The provision of adequate housing, for example, is an important part of a comprehensive, inner city anti-poverty strategy. It is best done via community-based housing organizations, and with the use of a community economic development approach to create jobs and build community capacity. We need improved housing policies to ensure that this happens.

The creation of labour market intermediaries in particular is strongly recommended. We have many very effective inner-city employment development organizations. We need enhanced strategies aimed at connecting them with educational institutions and employers.

Education is an important part of a comprehensive inner-city strategy. The inner city has *particular* characteristics that require specifically tailored educational approaches. One particularly effective approach that has emerged in recent years is Adult Learning Centres, which respond effectively to the fact that a disproportionate number of inner-city residents do not complete high school, but choose to pursue high school accreditation later, as adults. We need considerably more investment in these unique, community-based organizations, and policy aimed at ensuring that all inner-city residents have ready access to an Adult Learning Centre.

Multi-year funding of CBOs is still far from the norm, but there are small steps being taken in that direction. The provincial government, primarily through Neighbourhoods Alive!, has provided core, multi-year funding to inner-city community development corporations, like the Spence Neighbourhood Association and the North End Community Renewal Corporation. United Way of Winnipeg is now providing some multi-year funding, as is the Winnipeg Foundation in Centennial neighbourhood. This is a development that is very much to be applauded and encouraged.

What we can expect if we invest in community-based organizations and increased incomes in these ways over the long term is the creation, in time, of healthy mixed-income neighbourhoods in which people feel safe to walk the streets, in which schools are centres of community activity, in which recreational and employment opportunities are available for all, and particularly for youth, and in which there is a ready supply of comfortable and affordable housing, including rental housing, to meet all needs.

Recommendations

CCPA-Manitoba's *State of the Inner City Report: The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal* makes the following recommendations

1. More Stable Community Funding

- That a much greater proportion of the funding for community-based organizations (CBOs) and community programs and initiatives be core funding—by which we mean funding that enables organizations and programs to operate on a day-to-day basis, funding for staffing, rent, and equipment, for example—as opposed to project funding.
- That a much greater proportion of the funding for community-based organizations and community programs and initiatives be multi-year as opposed to short-term funding.

2. Improved Housing Programs and Funding

- That a much greater proportion of funding for inner-city housing be directed at social housing, by which we mean housing that has a subsidy attached that is sufficient to ensure long-term affordability for low-income families
- That to the greatest extent possible housing production be delivered via community-based housing organizations.
- That housing delivered by CBOs include a strong community economic development (CED) component, that includes local hiring and training and, to the extent possible, local purchasing of supplies.
- That existing Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation stock be repaired and renovated to improve the living conditions of its many tenants, and that this work be undertaken in a manner consistent with CED principles: hiring and training local inner-city residents to do the work and, to the extent possible, purchasing supplies locally.

3. Employment Development

- That the provincial government take the steps necessary to build an active partnership among the major actors in employment development—CBOs doing various kinds of employment development work, educational institutions, governments, unions and especially employers—to prepare and move large numbers of low-income inner-city residents into good jobs. These kinds of comprehensive employment partnerships are often called 'labour market intermediaries.'

4. Education

- That particular attention be paid to the educational needs of inner-city Aboriginal and immigrant and refugee children and youth, with the objective of creating the conditions in which they can thrive in school, and that this be achieved by following the advice of the Aboriginal and immigrant and refugee communities.
- That provincial government investment in Adult Learning Centres—not-for-profit, adult educational institutions that offer the mature Grade 12 diploma to adult school-leavers in a student-friendly environment—be increased very significantly, so as to increase the numbers of such Centres and the numbers of adult learners.
- That the location of Adult Learning Centres be the result of a planning process aimed at ensuring that all inner-city residents have reasonable access to an Adult Learning Centre.

5. Safety and Security

- That neighbourhood-based community policing—by which we mean 'cops on the beat' in neighbourhoods that they come to know well and in which they are able to earn the trust of residents—be established in all inner-city neighbourhoods.
- That many more structured opportunities for organized recreational activities—team sports, opportunities to engage in music and the visual arts, for example—be made available for inner city children and youth.

6. A Vision for Lord Selkirk Park

- That a major long-term rehabilitation and revitalization effort be undertaken in the Lord Selkirk Park Development, and that this include both the Development's physical re-design, and intensive community organizing and community development work to engage the involvement of residents of the Development, and that this be done in a manner consistent with the existing plans of the North End Community Renewal Corporation.

7. Childcare

- That new expenditures and plans for improved child care in Manitoba include directed funds to increase child care spaces specifically in the inner city.

8. Incomes

- That the minimum wage be increased to \$10 per hour in today's terms, and indexed.
- That Employment and Income Assistance rates be raised at least to the levels of 1992, and indexed.

9. A Comprehensive Strategy

We have listed eight separate recommendations in this concluding section. But these recommendations are not separate. They are interconnected. If we improve inner-city housing, we will promote greater residential stability, which will improve educational outcomes and increase residents' involvement in their neighbourhoods. If residents are more involved in their neighbourhoods, safety is increased. If we use a community economic development approach to the building of inner-city housing, we create more jobs, which not only improves incomes, but also improves educational outcomes for children. If we invest core, multi-year funds in inner-city CBOs, we will generate more community involvement, which will build more social capital, which will in turn improve safety and security.

The process of revitalizing the inner city will, of necessity, be a slow one. But the evidence is clear that action on each of the fronts recommended above will produce synergies that will magnify the positive changes that will follow.