

# Residential Infill Strategy: Focus Group Meeting Notes



**Date:** Thursday June 22, 2017

**Time:** 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.

**Location:** 4th floor, 65 Garry St., Winnipeg, MB

**Attendees:** 7 people in attendance

**Organizations\*:**

- City of Winnipeg Urban Planning and Office of Public Engagement
- JSU Properties Ltd.
- Carrington Homes
- Winnipeg Housing Renewal Corporation (WHRC)

\*Please note: not all attendees provided their organization or affiliation when signing in.

## Overview

The goal of this meeting was to connect with people in the development industry to discuss how we should conduct engagement for the infill strategy project.

The focus group discussions were based on the following questions:

- Who should we be talking to?
- What information should we be providing?
- What formats for engagement should we be using?
- This event was meant to inform the Urban Planning Division about consultation that is to begin in the fall of 2017.
- The meeting began with introductions, followed by a 5-10 minute powerpoint presentation by the Urban Planning Division. Once the presentation was complete the floor was opened up for discussions focused around the 3 questions. One member of the Urban Planning Division captured notes on a flip chart throughout the discussions.

At the end of the meeting it was communicated to the group that the notes would be typed up and sent out to participants for their record and to ensure that points were captured accurately. Further, the participants were encouraged to provide feedback, either to elaborate, provide clarity, or further explore ideas related to the conversation. No further comments were provided by participants.

### Who Should be Engaged in this Process?

- Need to engage City Council – Council Seminar

### What information should we be providing?

n/a

### What formats for engagement should we be using?

- What about use of surveys? One issue is that only people interested in infill will fill them out. A good approach might be to involve resident associations early and then have them be involved in engaging residents.

### Other Points Raised in Meeting

- As a developer, public consultation goes a long way:
  - Allows residents to be engaged in a development.
  - How to promote open houses?
  - Helps with future public hearing process and process in general.
  - The venue is very important – somewhere in the neighbourhood.
  - Door to door canvassing does not work well.
  - Has improved every single project (i.e. modified design, even lay out of units based on feedback).
- Not everyone likes infill development but it is NEEDED.
- The public has a false notion that infill development will result in a decrease of neighbouring property values. This needs to be dispelled.
- The public often has a perception that a development will increase traffic within the area. However, the public may not understand that the level of service (l.o.s.) in terms of vehicle trips per day is often far below the capacity a street can handle).

- Sometimes when people see large scale plans showing large areas appropriate for density it can shock people (e.g. - North St. Boniface). Might be better to prioritize specific corridors or segments of rather than shading in large areas.
- What does infill mean? Need to distinguish between what is modest change in density and what is intensification.
- Need out of the box thinking. Why can't a smaller lot be created on a street where all the lots are large? This is outdated thinking. And why can subdivisions only be supported where there are already examples on that street? How does this generate variation??
- Need public education. The public is very uninformed when it comes to development.
- NIMBY(ism) is a huge obstacle.
- The current approval process results in different rules/landscape for different areas of the city.
- Even lot splits, very minor development, which will create two houses where there was one face controversy.
- Should be more like Toronto. They have much more of an open mind to density.
- Planners in the City have different views of development in different areas. Not consistent. May be pandering to Councillor attitudes toward development.
- City Councillors are way too involved in the design of development (eg. - Plan Approval). However, these councilors have no expertise, background to make these decisions. There was an account where a planner had to explain to a Ward Councillor who was deliberating over a plan approval what a cantilever is. Some developers feel that Councillors get personal in the process.
- Need guidelines for form/ character.
- Length of process:
  - Permits are a huge hold up and a huge source of frustration. Builders, developers have to spend a lot of time chasing down members of the public service.
  - Accounts of processes taking 18 months to achieve permits (one case 3 years). In neighbouring planning districts permits have been issued in as little as 2 days.
  - Small builders don't have the time/capacity to keep chasing down the public service for answers. And, if you are not your own advocate then things will just sit.

- It would at least be good to know up front how long the process will take and what the key decision points are.
- There needs to be a clear timeline to communicate to the applicant what the deficiencies are with their proposal, or what information is missing so they can address this. This is what other cities/ municipalities do.
- Length of process adds cost to projects. Ties up capital. Developer has to pay property taxes and interest while things sit in limbo.
- Consistency, predictability will save developers time, effort and will reduce risk.
- Some developers have noted increased competition in the infill market from large developers and think this might have to do with the growth fees. I.e. these developers may be shifting to infill where the fees don't currently apply.
- Growth fees expected to apply to Mature Communities in 2019. This is a problem.
- The goal should be that we are trying to increase the amount of infill development. Need tools for HOW. Fast track approval process, stream line. Langford BC cited as a good example. They created design guidelines, set parameters and then opened up lands for intensification. Therefore, proposed development can be tailored to the rules, which are clear and transparent.
- With regards to a strategy, we need to find common ground, mutual interests.
- Development approval process:
  - Shouldn't need to go to a public hearing if a development meets policies. Regulations should address this.
  - Should bring back a Planning Commission where the experts are making the decisions.