

Residential Infill Strategy: Focus Group Meeting Notes



Date: Wednesday, June 14, 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
- Peanut Park
- Daniel McIntyre Saint Matthews Community Association (DMSMCA)
- Spence Neighbourhood Association
- Corydon Osborne Community Voice
- North End Community Renewal Corporation (NECRC)
- South Osborne Resident's Group (SORG)

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

Overview

The goal of this meeting was to connect with residents and resident associations to pre-consult on 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 who should be consulted, what information should be shared, and how information should be communicated when the infill strategy consultation process begins in the fall of 2017.

- The meeting began with introductions, followed by a 5-10 minute 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.
- Meeting notes include comments from the initial meeting (in black) and feedback from attendees (in blue).

Who Should be Engaged in this Process?

- Start with Resident Associations
- People who have been affected by infill
- People who understand legality of infill

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *There are thousands of residents knowledgeable about zoning, by-laws and even PDAs (as a result of widespread inappropriate developments over the past dozen years). Planning could benefit from this community expertise.*

What information should we be providing?

- Don't make assumptions.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Under What Information Should We be Providing, it says "don't make assumptions." What was really conveyed in its entirety was to not make assumptions about what residents and communities know. The knowledge they have along with the collective understanding of the neighbourhood and its history is far reaching, and needs to be honoured. There is much for you to learn from them, as opposed to focusing on what they need to learn from you. In addition, this point is also extremely important related to what forms of engagement you should be using. Those formats should be those that emphasize the process of the City learning from communities, not vice-versa.*
- When talking with residents about infill we should use examples of developments in the community for reference as a starting point for discussions.
- Will housing data be made available throughout the process?

- Need to understand how current data can inform this project.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Show transparency by not editing public engagement results. Keep an open portal somewhere to show all feedback received as it comes in.*

What formats for engagement should we be using?

- “Kitchen Parties” meaning that Planning will come to where Organizations or Resident Associations meet.
- BBQ's and other community gatherings
- Go to residents in their own community
- Brunch at Sunshine House
- Resident Associations Host the meetings
- Some resident associations have limited capacity for information sharing. What are other ways that information can be shared?
- Strategic events that take place within the community

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Planning should gather info from residents in person first (via kitchen meetings, resident group workshops etc), instead of asking us to fill out workbooks or surveys at open houses.*

Other Points Raised in Meeting

- Changes are needed to the variance and conditional use signs (the yellow signs). Currently they are too legal sounding. Don't provide images of proposed plans, etc.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Ban those yellow re-zoning signs as they are now.*

- There needs to be better connections between developers and residents.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *When Planning asks residents groups to defend themselves, under the guise of "Developers need to hear what you're telling us", you're creating a pressured climate that stresses out residents.*

- Decision making needs to be rooted in evidence.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Developers know they have nothing to lose. They have Planning's support as well as strong regulatory advantages. They haven't needed to deal in community-based evidence that citizen groups offer.*

- Relationships and trust need to be improved between residents, City and developers. Lack of trust regarding money to be made from the proposed development.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *The key issue that came out strongly was the issue of trust between residents, the city and developers. I would recommend you put that at the top in terms like; "Trust between residents, the city and developers is the biggest issue which will affect consultations about infill.*
- *There remains a legacy of unfairness that will likely manifest itself in your July 29th stakeholder event. If you want a productive trustworthy dialogue, you'll have to orchestrate it very carefully.*
- *As residents pointed out to you last week, it is Planning that should advocate on behalf of community needs - in collaboration with residents groups.*
- *Without Planning's support, residents' role has little definition or legitimacy to the profit-minded.*
- *Asking us to debate without the tools we need, such as community needs assessments that are based in local, current and accurate evidence, looks unfair.*
- *We ask Planning to show carefulness and respect for community advocates. That could help create balance and fairness. That may also begin developing a badly-needed climate of trust.*
- *There is zero trust of Planning. It hasn't used facts or local evidence to make decisions. It has appeared deceitful and has supported developers' untruths. It uses projections and conjecture. Honesty was a big topic for everyone.*
- *To build trust, Planning should study community needs and slow down its approval of developers. It should begin collaborative two-way dialogue with residents (instead of "informing" or "sharing").*
- *To build trust, Planning could show everyone it is working to enshrine resident groups' role within its decision-making structure, like other cities do.*
- *"Relationships and trust need to be improved between residents, City and developers." This does not go hardly far enough in capturing what was said, which is that without some serious relationship building between the City and its communities, this initiative, along with any others related to the development approval process, will be of absolutely no value. Nothing is more important at*

this point. Every action that is taken by the City should have, in the background, an intent to make a positive contribution to relationship building.

- *The culture within Planning has to change. It has to slow down land development approvals to accommodate community needs.*
- A steering committee of stakeholders that includes resident groups should be established, that may also include professional architects, planners, developers, etc.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *“A steering committee of stakeholders...should be established.” More fully, this steering committee should oversee this entire process, so that it is truly community led. At present, it is an old-style, technocrat driven process. As part of this is the next point, which was that the first undertaking of this steering committee would be to confirm the terms of reference for this project.*
- *Establish a stakeholder steering committee for Planning to serve. PPD: “Infill Guidelines won’t really address greenspace...”*
- *Currently there is no meaningful role legislated for resident groups.*
- The project needs to confirm a terms of reference
- Terms need to be defined
- The term “stakeholder” needs to be defined.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Page 2, point 8, I had noted; “Only residents are stakeholders, developers are vendors and beneficiaries of decisions.”*
- *Your notes say that the term “stakeholder” needs to be defined. My sense was that there was much input given by all in attendance as to how to define stakeholders.*
- *The only stakeholder should be residents. Don’t ask residents to fight developers without having Planning’s support (eg. community needs assessments).*
- *Residents must be the first and last decision-makers about projects in their communities.*
- The term “liveability” needs to be defined.
- Need to question and understand who is benefiting from the proposed development. Is the community benefiting? Is it the developer that is benefiting?

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Condo projects are not about increasing housing or taxes. They are about profiteering: developers sell chunks to large realtors who sell to medium realtors who sell to smaller realtors. Condos keep turning over, esp near trains.*
- Need to bridge neighbourhood vision with decision making

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Page 2, point 11, rather than “Need to bridge the neighbourhood vision with decision making” I had noted; “Have to understand the residents’ vision for their neighbourhood v. the City’s vision for that neighbourhood.”*
- *Each community has different needs and its context must define its projects.*
- Consider how resident associations can be included in the regulatory decision making process.
- Be honest about how proposals will impact residents and list common criticisms.
- Infill guidelines cannot be discretionary – they should apply consistently to all infill.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Finally, my last comment would be that one of many issues to be discussed during this initiative is the process through which infill guidelines will be assessed and applied. I would say that, to date, the design approval process under our neighbourhood plan has been extremely disappointing, after many promises were made about it.*
- *Infill guidelines should apply everywhere (Planning has some dungeons & dragons rules about exceptions, even though it is all infill). PPD: “We’re excluding BRT corridors because they’re not really residential areas” (I pointed out Lord Roberts is one, and is being wrecked by BRT infill. PPD: “Lord Roberts is a Major Transformation Area...” (I said “That taxonomy just makes residents crazy because we had no role in it and we’re in shock”)*
- There is a fiction that the Bus Rapid Transit in Winnipeg is Transit Oriented Development, when it is developer oriented development.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Page 2, point 15; rather than “developer oriented development”, I had noted “developer oriented transit”*
- *Stop the Developer-oriented Transit projects.*
- Population projections need to be based in fact.
- We should be comparing population growth with development growth (e.g. single family housing starts and multi-family housing starts).

- Targets should be established for the percentage of resident stakeholders consulted.
- There needs to be discussion about heritage designation and infill development.
- Contentious development plans should be put on hold until infill strategy is complete.
- When considering infill development there should be an understanding of what neighbourhood amenities exist (e.g. parks)
- An implementation plan should be incorporated into the infill strategy.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Page 3, addition to point 1; I had noted; "How much population increase can the existing infrastructure (including sewage) handle?"*
- City decision makers and Planning should be using this project as an opportunity to build trust with residents.

Feedback and additional notes provided in response to circulated meeting notes:

- *Page 3, addition to point 2; I had noted; "Residents disappointed design execution of projects did not suit neighbourhood as promised."*
- Open houses should be banned.