

Proceedings of the Urban Limit Line Workshop

1990

The Institute of Urban Studies





THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

FOR INFORMATION:

The Institute of Urban Studies

The University of Winnipeg
599 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg
phone: 204.982.1140
fax: 204.943.4695
general email: ius@uwinnipeg.ca

Mailing Address:

The Institute of Urban Studies

The University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

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Prepared by:

The Institute of Urban Studies
The University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 2E9

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1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROCEEDINGS

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROCEEDINGS

On April 18, 1990, a one-day Workshop was organized by the Institute of Urban Studies to discuss issues and matters related to Plan Winnipeg's Urban Limit Line . The Workshop was sponsored by the Manitoba Department of Urban Affairs and the Manitoba Home Builders Association.

The Institute of Urban Studies considered the Workshop to be timely for two reasons:

- (i) ever since the institution of the Urban Limit Line, it has been a contentious issue among the various actors involved (City Officials, the Government of Manitoba, surrounding rural municipalities, and the housing and urban development industry);
- (ii) the City of Winnipeg has initiated a review of Plan Winnipeg. Since the Urban Limit Line is considered to be an important part of Plan Winnipeg, it would be useful to assess the issues identified so that those involved in drawing up a new Plan Winnipeg can use the insights from the Workshop in formulating the new Plan.

In order to stimulate discussion at the Workshop, the Institute prepared and circulated a Discussion Paper (Appendix A), prior to the Workshop. Although the discussion paper provided some basic information related to the Urban Limit Line, including a sample of the often divergent opinion on the Urban Limit Line, it was not the intent of the Institute to provide a comprehensive compilation of opinion, nor was it the intent of the Institute to provide an in-depth analysis of the many issues related to the Line.

The discussion paper did provide background information on the Urban Limit Line including a description of the Line, its intended purpose, and the considerations in its delineation and institution. In addition, the discussion paper presented many issues associated with the Urban Limit Line such as:

1. Issues of values;
 - a) should Plan Winnipeg restrict the choice of residential location?
 - b) should Plan Winnipeg deny the desired lifestyle associated with suburban living?
2. Costs and benefits of suburban development;
3. Effects of the Urban Limit Line on land supply and housing;
4. Issues of enforcement and administration;
 - a) growth outside city limits,
 - b) dispute about soundness of fiscal analysis,
 - c) service capacity as determinant of approval,
5. The usefulness of the Urban Limit Line.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

The intent of the Workshop was to provide a forum for concerned groups and individuals to discuss various perspectives and issues related to the Urban Limit Line. Approximately 65 invited participants attended the Workshop, including representatives from the Province of Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg, the Winnipeg Real Estate Board, the Manitoba Association of Home Builders, surrounding municipalities, and Resident Advisory Groups.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

The Workshop was structured to include both plenary presentations and smaller group discussions. A copy of the agenda for the Workshop is appended in Appendix B. The Workshop began with a brief presentation of the Discussion Paper followed by a panel response to the paper. Respondents to the paper included representatives from the Manitoba Home Builders Association, the Department of Environmental Planning (City of Winnipeg), and the Manitoba Department of Urban Affairs. The respondent from the Manitoba Home Builders Association offered information pertaining to the benefits of suburban growth to the City of Winnipeg. The Chief Planner from the Department of Environmental Planning reminded the audience that Plan Winnipeg and the issues that it must address are much larger and more complex than a line on a map indicating the limits of urban services in Winnipeg. The Senior Planner from the Manitoba Department of Urban Affairs addressed the importance of the Urban Limit Line in getting the public to understand the objectives of Plan Winnipeg as well as the need to look at Plan Winnipeg from a regional perspective.

The Discussion Paper generated a number of questions. In turn, these questions were used to focus discussion at the Workshop sessions. To address these questions, the Workshop was structured into two working sessions:

SESSION NO. 1: ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF THE URBAN LIMIT LINE

1. Is the Urban Limit Line an effective tool for:
 - a) directing growth to least cost areas? If not, why not?
 - b) directing new housing to established neighbourhoods? if not, why not?
2. Is it realistic to provide opportunities for suburban development in each community, or is it enough to provide opportunity in each quadrant of the City?
3. What proportion of new housing should be built on the periphery?

SESSION NO. 2: WORKING TOWARD SOLUTIONS

1. Is inner city revitalization possible without limiting suburban growth? If so, how?
2. Is it possible to limit suburban growth without pushing development outside city limits? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. What are the alternatives to an Urban Limit Line for:
 - a) directing growth to least cost areas?
 - b) directing new housing to established neighbourhoods?
4. What considerations should be taken into account in approving new suburban development?

Workshop participants were arbitrarily divided into four working groups, each with a facilitator and a recorder. All groups received an identical set of questions to discuss and reported the results of group discussions to the Workshop as a whole.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE PROCEEDINGS

This document is a synthesis of plenary session discussions and reports from working group sessions. Following the Introduction, Section Two presents a summary of the discussions pertaining to the effectiveness of the Urban Limit Line. Section Three identifies emerging trends and their implications for Plan Winnipeg. Section Four provides a synthesis of the discussion in Workshop Session 2 (alternatives to the Urban Limit Line), and suggestions for a new Plan Winnipeg. A postscript, Section Five, provides a reflection of the context of the Urban Limit Line and its relationship to Plan Winnipeg.

2.0 SESSION I: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE URBAN LIMIT LINE

The Discussion Paper examined several of the issues related to the Urban Limit Line. Session 1 of the Workshop examined issues related to the effectiveness of the Urban Limit Line. Workshop participants were asked to address these issues through the discussion of the questions raised by the paper (and set out in section 1.3). Workshop participants were asked to assess the extent to which the Urban Limit Line has served the purpose of: directing new growth to least cost areas on the suburban periphery; directing new housing to older, established neighbourhoods; deflecting growth outside City limits; providing a choice of location for those seeking to build and purchase new homes. Moreover, they were asked if, in their view, the Urban Limit Line has driven development to locations outside City limits.

2.1 DIRECTING GROWTH TO LEAST COST AREAS

One of the premises of Plan Winnipeg is that, since many people prefer to own a new home in a new residential neighbourhood, new residential development in suburban areas should continue to be an option in Winnipeg. However, it was recognized in the Plan that such development should present the least possible cost to the City. One of the objectives of Plan Winnipeg therefore was to direct new suburban development into the areas determined by the Department of Environmental Planning to be least-cost areas for the City of Winnipeg to provide municipal services.

The Discussion Paper raised the question as to whether the Urban Limit Line has helped to serve the purpose of directing new growth to least cost areas on the suburban periphery. Although the general consensus from Workshop participants was that to an extent, yes, it has helped, many however, questioned whether such development has occurred simply because of the Urban Limit Line, or whether other mechanisms inherent in Plan Winnipeg, such as the policies that govern the location of new suburban development, may play a more important role.

Some participants maintained that market forces are the best determinant of cost-effective development. They suggest that developers, responding to market forces, automatically seek to develop in least-cost areas. Some participants, however, questioned by whose definition (developers, the City, or the Province) has this "least cost" development occurred. Others felt that market forces are simply not enough to ensure the least-cost, orderly and efficient growth of the City.

Although a wide range of opinions were suggested as to the effectiveness of the Urban Limit Line in ensuring cost-effective development, the overall consensus was that orderly cost-effective development is essential for Winnipeg, however, the Urban Limit Line may not necessarily be the proper tool.

2.2 DIRECTING GROWTH TO ESTABLISHED NEIGHBOURHOODS

One of the fundamental objectives of Plan Winnipeg is the maintenance and revitalization of older established neighbourhoods. To the general public, the Urban Limit Line has come to symbolize this objective of revitalizing older, established neighbourhoods while preventing uneconomical development on the periphery. Almost a decade has passed since the Limit Line was first introduced and still the goals of revitalization have not been achieved. Within this context, Workshop participants were asked to address; to what extent, if any, has the Urban Limit Line been an effective tool for directing new housing to established neighbourhoods?

The overall consensus was that the Urban Limit Line has not been an effective tool for directing new growth to established neighbourhoods. Many felt that the Urban Limit Line itself was not intended as a tool to direct new growth into established areas, and therefore should not be evaluated within this context. Moreover, some added, that due to the attraction and perceived benefits of living in a new residential community, any attempt to restrict an individuals' freedom of choice is destined to fail.

Several participants believed that the Line itself has not restricted suburban development and therefore any measure of revitalization that has taken place cannot be attributed to the restriction of suburban development. Moreover, the view was expressed that curtailing suburban growth, will not in itself, ensure the revitalization of older neighbourhoods. Some responded that the benefit of the Line, in this regard, may have been that it did allow for cost effective development to occur, thereby saving money to assist the funding of revitalization efforts.

Thus, it appears that the majority of the Workshop participants believe that the Urban Limit Line, by itself, plays little role in either the directing growth towards existing neighbourhoods or in directing new growth into the most cost effective areas of the suburban periphery.

2.3 BASIS FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT

It has been suggested that the Urban Limit Line has denied options for outward growth of certain communities, and by doing so, it has restricted the freedom of choice for those who want to live in a new home in a particular community. The discussion paper indicated that one of the principal considerations taken into account by the planners in the delineation of the Urban Limit Line was to provide a choice of location for those seeking to build and purchase new homes in each quadrant of the City. To address this concern, Workshop participants were asked if it was realistic to provide opportunities for suburban development in each community, or is it simply enough to allocate this opportunity in each of the four quadrants of the City.

Several participants suggested that each community has its own needs. Moreover, due to Winnipeg's strong community loyalties, there is little residential movement between different communities. If a community needs more living space, or even a certain mix of housing types, the Urban Limit Line, as defined through the allocation of land by quadrants, was felt to be too restrictive. In addition, some participants suggested that by attempting to provide choice of residential location on the basis of an equitable distribution among all four quadrants of the City, the supply and demand for residential land within each individual quadrant is not adequately reflected. It was felt by most participants that quadrants, as defined by the City, are too large in area to adequately reflect market demands for choice of residential location.

Almost all Workshop participants agreed that the use of quadrants as principal units for the allocation of land, is not only artificial and arbitrary, but socially irrelevant, and therefore, by nature unjust. Consequently, most participants indicated that within the limits of economic and geographic feasibility, development should be focused on the needs of a community rather than simply on the basis of quadrants. There is an obvious need to ameliorate the least-cost areas, as defined by Plan Winnipeg with a greater sensitivity for a community's desire for growth.

2.4 DRIVING GROWTH OUTSIDE CITY LIMITS

The discussion paper indicated that some believe that by restricting development within the City's limits, the Urban Limit Line is serving to drive new growth into the surrounding rural municipalities. Moreover, they suggest that Winnipeg can no longer afford to lose taxpayers to the surrounding municipalities. They maintain that the restriction of growth within City limits, already experiencing an overburdened tax base, will serve only to further intensify the strain upon the City's limited financial resources.

When asked if it was possible to limit suburban growth without pushing development outside City limits, most participants felt that a direct relationship between these two choices did not necessarily exist. In most instances, Workshop participants did believe the choice of living outside of the city limits was more a matter of lifestyle. Stating that rural residential living reflects a different lifestyle, and therefore a different market demand than suburban residential living, they conclude Winnipeg and the surrounding rural municipalities are not necessarily competing for the same market.

Some participants felt that since such a generous amount of land is designated for suburban residential purposes within the Urban Limit Line, suburban growth is really not being constrained by the Line. Nevertheless, it was felt that if suburban residential development was to become severely curtailed, new residential development would eventually leapfrog the line to areas outside of the City limits. Consequently, it was believed by some, that if an adequate supply of land for suburban residential

purposes was not maintained within Winnipeg, the Urban Limit Line would have the potential of undermining the growth management policies of Plan Winnipeg.

3.0 EMERGING TRENDS AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR PLAN WINNIPEG

Plan Winnipeg must provide a statement of Council's strategic choices for the future development of Winnipeg. Although the Urban Limit Line was the subject of the Workshop, it is not the real issue. The fundamental issue at hand is whether council is prepared and committed to keeping Plan Winnipeg effective as a guide to address the issues and concerns that will shape Winnipeg's future. Many Workshop participants emphasized the need for Plan Winnipeg to broaden its' scope to address emerging social issues as well as the relationship between Winnipeg and its' surrounding Rural Municipalities.

3.1 SOCIAL CONCERNS

An aging population, smaller families, the costs and delivery of services, a shrinking economy, issues of ethnicity and poverty, a declining demand for suburban development, as well as a growing concern for the sustainability of both our built and natural environments, will all have a dramatic effect upon the quality of life in Winnipeg. While most participants expressed the opinion that a new Plan Winnipeg should address these fundamental social issues, few suggested an approach that would lead to the successful resolution of these issues. It appears that an overall vision of a desired city and its quality of life is missing. Perhaps the forecasts that determined population trends and threshold capacities of infrastructure for the extant Plan Winnipeg should be broadened in scope to include the social data necessary to produce an effective social agenda. In view of the expected further decline in the demand for suburban residential activity in Winnipeg, the Urban Limit Line and the larger question of suburban growth management may now warrant less attention in our planning process.

3.2 THE REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

A majority of Workshop participants expressed the concern that it is important, at this point in time, to view Plan Winnipeg within the context of an urban systems perspective. The inter-relationship between Winnipeg and its surrounding municipalities is increasingly being recognized. Many of the issues that planners must address are of an inter-jurisdictional nature and therefore have regional implications.

Current planning for the Winnipeg region is divided in both a jurisdictional and a legislative sense. Under the City of Winnipeg Act, the City of Winnipeg is responsible for the City itself, plus the shrinking Additional Zone which now encompasses only portions of three Rural Municipalities. Outside this area, and under the Provincial Land Use Policies, planning is carried out either by individual municipalities or loose collection of municipalities incorporated into Planning Districts. The City of Winnipeg Act, covering the City of Winnipeg and the Additional Zone, is administered by the Manitoba Department of Urban Affairs, while the Provincial Land Use Policies covering all other jurisdictions in the Winnipeg commutershed are administered on the behalf of the Province by the Department of Rural Development.

There is no formal regional framework or mechanism in place to deal with inter-jurisdictional issues that have regional implications.

As outlined in the Discussion Paper, several participants maintained that development policies operating outside Winnipeg's boundaries should be consistent with those operating within the City's boundaries. Participants expressed the need for cohesive, coordinated, and comprehensive planning within a regional framework. A mechanism with a well-defined mandate, proper funding and expertise, a role that is more than simply advisory, and the legislative strength to overcome parochial interests is needed to ensure an effective regional planning framework. The recently initiated Winnipeg Region Committee could serve as a useful forum to develop such a mechanism.

4.0 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PLAN WINNIPEG

After an examination of the issues related to the Urban Limit Line in Session 1, a consensus emerged that the issues of urban development addressed by Plan Winnipeg are complex and that the Urban Limit Line is only one small measure among others to address these issues. As such, it has a limited scope and function.

The majority of the participants were of the opinion that the Urban Limit Line is not the sole tool contained within Plan Winnipeg to address the revitalization of the inner city and to manage suburban growth. Some were concerned that further debate on the Limit Line would deflect the focus away from the real issues that a new Plan Winnipeg must be called upon to address. If the Urban Limit Line is not necessarily the proper tool to address those issues, what are the real issues and how can they be best addressed? This was the subject matter for Session 2 of the Urban Limit Line Workshop. The discussion revolved around two main themes, each of which is discussed below.

4.1 DIRECTING NEW SUBURBAN GROWTH TO LEAST COST AREAS

As previously mentioned, a majority of the Workshop participants questioned whether the Urban Limit Line has served any useful purpose in directing new suburban development to least-cost areas. Most agreed with the view that such development may be influenced not so much by the Urban Limit Line itself, but rather by the policies contained within Plan Winnipeg with respect to new suburban development. Several participants were of the opinion that new suburban development is, and has been for several years, directed into least-cost areas as defined by Plan Winnipeg. Some did suggest that developers do respond to market forces and automatically seek to develop in least-cost areas, while others maintained that market forces are simply not enough to ensure the least-cost, orderly and efficient growth of our City from a servicing perspective.

The consensus that emerged from Session 2 of the Workshop was; that in terms of directing new suburban growth to least-cost areas, the Urban Limit Line was an unnecessary oversimplification of the development approval process. The opinion was expressed that if Plan Winnipeg is amended to delete references to the Urban Limit Line, as far as the location and timing of development is concerned, not much would change. Suburban growth would still be regulated by the Plan Winnipeg's policies regarding Suburban Residential Neighbourhoods. Some concern was expressed that the Urban Limit may in fact be deflecting attention away from the criteria specified in Plan Winnipeg for the approval of Suburban Residential Neighbourhoods. Decisions regarding new suburban development should consider the question of whether a parcel of land should be serviced, and not whether the land falls on one side or

the other of the Limit Line.

4.2 MAINTENANCE AND REVITALIZATION OF OLDER, ESTABLISHED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Early in the Workshop, several participants viewed the objective of Plan Winnipeg to revitalize older, established neighbourhoods as being restricted to the inner city. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, the majority of participants viewed revitalization as not just an inner-city, core area problem, but rather as a problem of declining neighbourhoods wherever they are to be found.

A majority of Workshop participants expressed the belief that curtailing suburban growth, will not in itself, ensure the revitalization of the older neighbourhoods. Moreover, when the "carrot and stick" approach to neighbourhood revitalization was discussed, some participants suggested that the Urban Limit Line is not an effective "stick". They believe that there must be "carrots" to attract people into the established neighbourhoods. These participants suggested that it is not necessarily what you do in on the periphery, but rather it is what is to be done in the older neighbourhoods that is important to the success of revitalization.

As suggested by the discussion paper, many believed that a concerted strategy is needed to stabilize the existing neighbourhoods of the City. Opinions were expressed that housing may follow economic growth, and without the economic growth needed to sustain additional households, new housing would be futile. In addition, the point was made that perhaps we should be preserving the older, existing neighbourhoods rather than directing new growth to these residential areas.

Several participants were of the opinion that increased immigration and economic growth are the key ingredients for inner city revitalization in Winnipeg. The creation of more workplaces and incentives for businesses and government facilities to operate in the inner-city was also emphasized. Several participants also suggested the need for the two levels of government in Winnipeg to develop a framework for a working partnership to address issues of neighbourhood revitalization. Several participants agreed with the view expressed in the Discussion Paper, that neighbourhood based planning is central to the revitalization of the older, established neighbourhoods. Some participants felt that a more effective way to address the notion of revitalization was to view planning in terms of the quality of life within a neighbourhood. Consequently, several participants emphasized the need to prepare and adopt community and action area plans to give strength and consistency to decisions regarding the future of Winnipeg's neighbourhoods.

5.0 POSTSCRIPT

The stated objective of the extant Plan Winnipeg is to direct planning activities away from the accommodation of additional suburban growth and towards the maintenance and revitalization of the older, established neighbourhoods. Suburban growth management, therefore has been assigned secondary priority over the life of the Plan. Emerging trends and concerns, particularly the expected further decline in the demand for suburban residential activity in Winnipeg, warrant a rethinking of Plan Winnipeg within the context of a new series of priorities. The time has come to examine the issues and priorities of the master plan guiding the decision making process that will determine Winnipeg's future. As a policy document, Plan Winnipeg is only as good as the commitment to it, and how it is administered and enforced. Neither the Plan itself, nor the Urban Limit Line, replaces good decision making. To be an effective guide for decision making, Plan Winnipeg must be capable of fine tuning, and adjusted on the basis of the changing priorities of the City. In most instances, it appears that the Urban Limit Line has not served the useful purpose of effectively guiding the decision making process.

From a planning perspective, if the Urban Limit Line were to disappear, other mechanisms within Plan Winnipeg would come into effect. Several participants of the Workshop were of the opinion that the Urban Limit Line has however played an important and instrumental role in getting the public to understand the objectives of Plan Winnipeg. In retrospect, the Urban Limit Line may have served better as a media tool than as a planning tool.

The Urban Limit Line has a symbolic function. Simply describing the Urban Limit Line as the edge of Suburban Residential Neighbourhood Areas would never have captured the same degree of public attention and imagination. While some people may prefer to view it as an over-simplification, others view the line as a necessary simplification. The Urban Limit Line has allowed people from different ideological perspectives to approach issues of development and to define the edges of the argument.

The intent of the Workshop was to provide an open forum for concerned groups and individuals to discuss various perspectives, and issues related to the Urban Limit Line. Although many of the participants approached the issues from different perspectives, in general all participants attempted to resolve the same basic issues. The often divergent opinions did serve to enrich the discussions and enlighten our understanding of the issues related to Plan Winnipeg's Urban Limit Line.