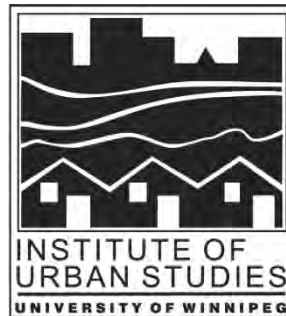
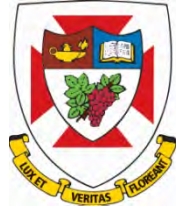


Community Involvement in Infill Housing

ca. 1973

The Institute of Urban Studies





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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN INFILL HOUSING

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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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A. Initial Development

Some concern has been expressed as to the degree of community involvement in the Mark VIII Experimental Infill Housing Project. The following is a description of the various means used to determine the need for infill housing, its conception and design, and initial community reaction.

I. An initial survey of the community residents undertaken in the winter of 1969, identified housing as a predominant and overriding concern. Repeatedly people voiced their desire for decent housing, suitable to their incomes, preferably for ownership. Also expressed at the same time, was a fear of traditional urban renewal clearance schemes which would not only uproot them from the community of which they had become a part, but which would also destroy the character and individuality of that community. This suggested the need for new housing that could be inserted into the area without major dislocation.

II. Time has not lessened the impact of these expressed needs. In work with the People's Committee for a Better Neighbourhood Incorporated, the Self-Help Housing Group, and the People's Rehabilitation and Repair Company, all community groups based in Urban Renewal Area II, the understanding of housing requirements by Institute staff was enhanced. An Institute Architect, Eric Barker, who worked in the area developed different design solutions to these problems and discussed them with a variety of community

people. Thus, there was a continuing process of community consultation.¹

More specific work began with the Self-Help Housing Group, a group of residents in Urban Renewal Area II who have low incomes, and who wish to own a home. In the summer of 1971, the group approached the Institute of Urban Studies for assistance. In a series of meetings with the group adding up to over 100 hours of consulting the concept of infill housing was discussed, examined, and more fully developed. In the following months, the Self-Help Group, agreed to work with the Winnipeg House Builders and the Institute in implementing an infill housing program on a trial basis.² Thus, the notion of infill housing derived from extensive work within the community and in company with community residents. At the same time councillors on the Environment Committee were given a view of the proposed units and the Resident Advisory Group in Centennial Community Committee was informed of the project.

III. As part of the experiment, it was decided that a continuing assessment would be made of community reactions. These were to be conducted in four stages 1) initial assessment of interest in immediate community at time of posting of zoning variation, 2) a wider survey at the beginning of construction, 3) ongoing surveys and observation during construction, 4) and major investigation of reaction upon completion. This design was drawn up for the purpose of assessing community interest and reaction, not to undertake any extensive community education. To do so would have affected the reliability of views that were solicited.

1. Eric Barker, "The In-fill Housing Experiment in The Citizen and Neighbourhood Renewal", (ed.) L. Axworthy - a publication of the Institute of Urban Studies, 1972.

2. ibid.

The first survey was undertaken in May, 1972, when the properties on Elgin, William, and Alexander were posted for a zoning variation. Residents surrounding the William Avenue property were asked if they were aware of the zoning notice being posted, and if they were interested or concerned in the proposed development. Their views on the general development or redevelopment of the area were also elicited. In cases where interest was voiced, the proposed infill housing was explained. Only one resident had read the notice and she didn't understand it. Most were not aware of the proposed change, and were not interested. The several who were interested thought the new buildings would improve the neighbourhood. At no time was opposition to the idea encountered.

At the same time that the property at 861 William was being considered for a zoning variation, a similar process was taking place for the lot at 743 Elgin. In this case, interest in and concern about the proposed structures was encountered. Residents were referred to the public notice of the zoning meeting and several did appear to voice objections. This eventually led to a public meeting announced by a circular distributed in the neighbourhood by Institute staff. Information about the project was made available and residents expressed their view. Subsequently, the House Builders withdrew their application since it was not their desire to disrupt the neighbourhood in face of clearly expressed opposition.

A similar process would have followed in the case of William Avenue had any interest been indicated. Despite the notice posted on that property there was no representation by residents at the zoning meeting. It should be pointed out that these surveys represent an exceptional effort to determine interest in neighbourhood change. The normal procedure is no advertising at all beyond what is required by law. In fact one could conclude that these efforts go beyond efforts normally taken by city govern-

ment itself in deciding important developments that affect the community. It should also be noted that it was in response to opposition encountered by a second survey conducted after construction began that the House Builders, on their own initiative, suspended work on the site. Since that time, the Institute has been involved in attempting to reach a compromise acceptable to all parties and has in company with the Winnipeg House Builders taken the matter to the local resident advisory group.

In September, a more extensive survey was conducted in the neighbourhood of the Alexander and William site to obtain reactions to and explain the building activity of the House Builders at that site. On the Alexander site a total of 20 residents surrounding the site were interviewed. Only one resident was opposed - mainly for speculative reasons. His opinion was that the entire area should be bulldozed, and complete blocks of new housing built. One resident felt the units would not sell, but was not opposed. Eleven residents felt that the new building activity in the area was needed. The remainder had not noticed the activity, were not interested, or would not express an opinion on the matter. These results confirmed the initial assessment made when the project was first being conceived, that this form of incremental in-fill housing development is acceptable to most residents in the area.

IV. Despite the reaction presently being generated by the residents in the area surrounding 861 William, which is interestingly in direct contradiction to their earlier stand, the Institute feels that the building of infill housing in Urban Renewal Area II is justified on the basis of the value of the concept, previous positive support received from area residents, and because it fulfills the expressed need of providing home-ownership for low-income families without destroying the structure and character of the

neighbourhood. Often the reaction encountered represents a resistance to any change, and the only way this will be known is to continue to monitor user and neighbourhood reactions to new structures after they are completed.

This observation is borne out through interviews and discussions held with community groups and residents on the William site who have opposed the project. At the core of their objections is a fear of something new, of a building that doesn't fit what their perception of a house is or should be. Comments for example that the units don't face on the street, don't have front yards are indicative of this kind of perceptual reaction to something that is new, or different.

At the same time, it is also possible that the fears by some residents about too high a density might also be true. But, the point of the experiment is to find out. No one can suppose what the efficacy or acceptability of the units are until they are built.

At that time extensive study of both occupants and adjacent residents is planned. Such studies will then reveal to what degree the completed units serve the intended purpose and provide an alternative solution to the low cost housing problem.