The Big Box:

Retail Sprawl in Winnipeg

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Tom Janzen

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With retail sprawl development comes a series of economic and social problems for host communities. Sprawl is often mistaken for economic development, and the people it affects are least likely to understand it.

– Al Norman

Like sumo wrestlers, the competitors in this game must push the limits of their weight category; bigness begets bigness.

– Naomi Klein

The Big Box: Retail Sprawl in Winnipeg

Tom Janzen[1]

Abstract
Pioneered by massive retail chains like Wal-Mart and Home Depot, retail development in North America over the last decade has seen an increasing trend toward suburban "big-box" stores. Like most North American cities and towns, Winnipeg has experienced this trend first hand. Although its proponents often tout this type of development as a source and sign of economic development, a more careful examination of the physical and economic effects of big-box development reveals that it comes at considerable cost; requiring expensive infrastructure, increasing automobile dependency, and decimating local and downtown retail markets. As a result, the big-box trend is being met by an increasing resistance by many local and even national governments worldwide. The purpose of this report is to examine what Winnipeg has done to encourage and/or discourage suburban big-box development, and, drawing on what other communities have done or are doing, propose ways that Winnipeg can limit or at least control big-box development more effectively in the future.

Introduction

The location of retail stores has traditionally centred on the notion of attracting the shopper to the location. However, as Davies suggests, recent trends seem to suggest that an "alternative paradigm" to retail location is developing, based on "…locating the retail outlet where there are people rather than one where a good location is seen as one which is capable of attracting people to it" (Davies 1995: 18-19).

Retailing and the location of new retail developments in North America have undergone significant changes over the last decade, with an increasing trend towards retail and commercial sprawl in the form of "big-box" or "large-format" retailers, effectively bringing stores to the suburbs. This general trend towards "big-box" retail development has been echoed loudly in recent retail developments in Winnipeg. As a result, the downtown – once the city's primary retail area – has been forced to compete with newly developed suburban retail areas where "big-box" discount chains (or "category killers" as they have been labelled by their opposition) like Wal-Mart and Home Depot dominate and the parking is free and abundant. While these new retail developments are boosted as major sources of economic development – Wal-Mart often contends that when a new Wal-Mart is

[1] Tom Janzen is the winner of the Institute of Urban Studies Student Paper Award, 2002.

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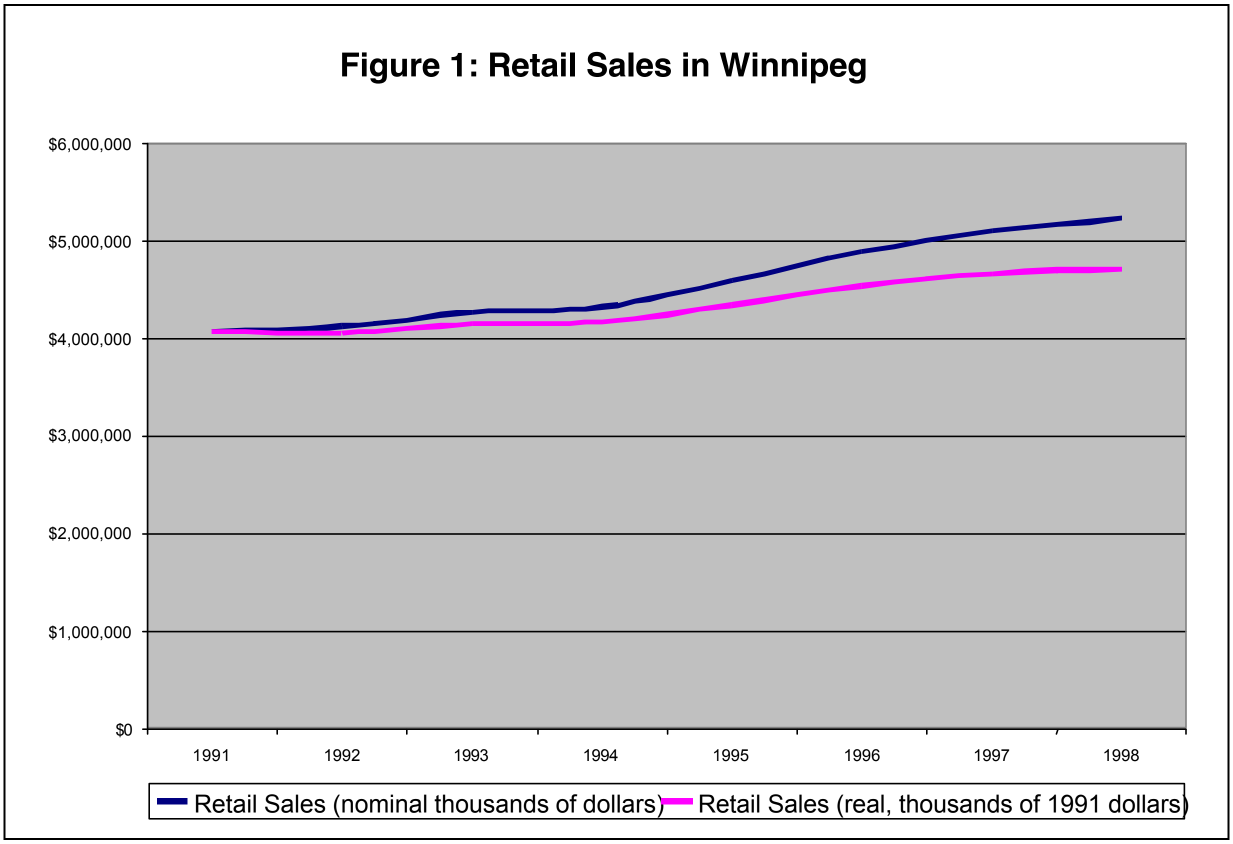
opened, nearby local businesses experience major sales increases – in reality they have contributed significantly to the severe weakening of the downtown retail sector and the decline of the inner city as a whole (Mander and Boston 1996: 338). Furthermore, they require huge amounts of expensive infrastructure development to accommodate the significant increase in automobile traffic that they generate, further diminishing any potential economic gains for the city, which are often used to justify these types of developments.

The purpose of this paper is to examine retail sprawl and "big-box" development in Winnipeg. More specifically, this paper will begin by examining recent retail development trends in Winnipeg and the effects, both physical and economic, of "big-box" developments on the city. This paper will also examine current attempts internationally to curb big-box development and discourage retail sprawl and why this movement is growing. Finally, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions: What is Winnipeg doing to encourage and/or discourage big-box stores and retail sprawl in general? And, from a planning perspective, what should be done to curb the development of big-box stores more effectively in the future?

Sales Trends in Winnipeg

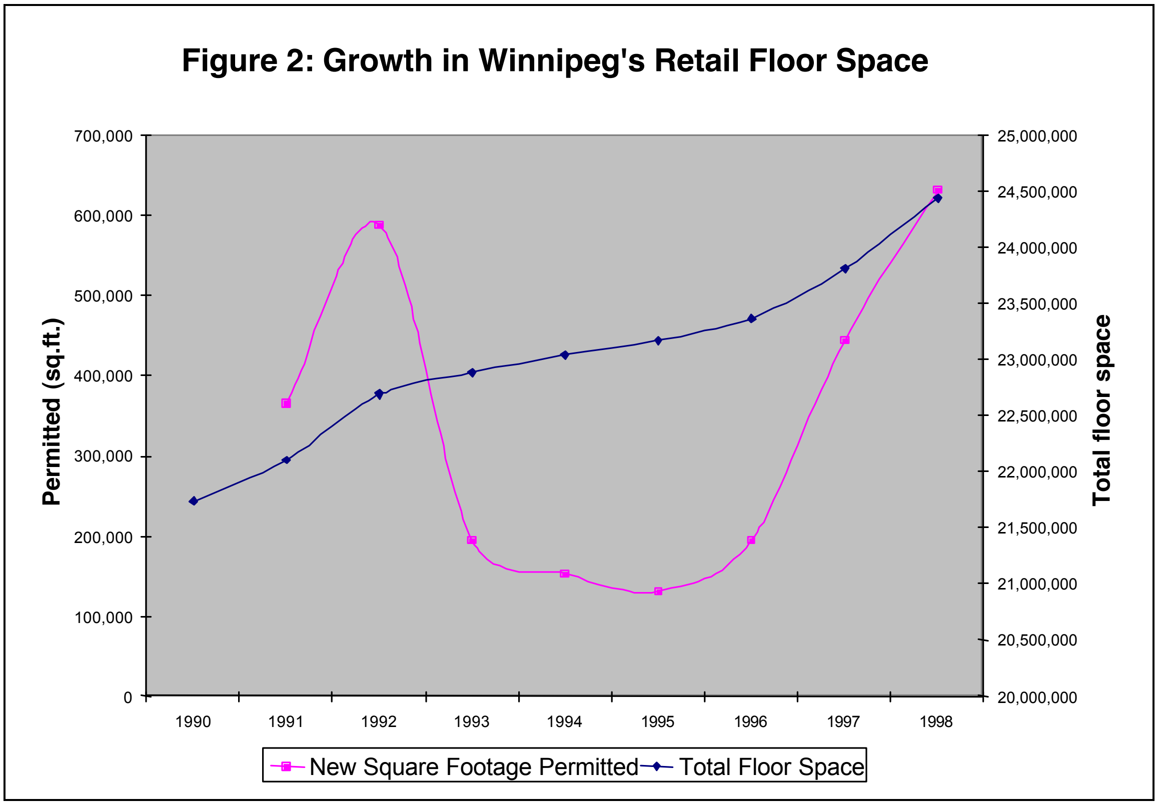
Despite the fact that Winnipeg's population has experienced very little growth and that there has been almost no growth in real income over the past decade, retail sales in Winnipeg have shown some signs of growth. In terms of both real dollars and year-to-year increases, retail sales in Winnipeg have experienced slow but steady growth over the last 10 years (see figure 1). According to a report conducted by the J.C. Williams Group, Winnipeg's retail sales growth "…suggests a declining savings rate and/or an increase in indebtedness… consistent with trends for the country as a whole" (J.C. Williams 2000: 13).

The Winnipeg Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) has also experienced "slow but steady" increases in the total supply of retail floor space over the past decade. Based on the steady growth in Winnipeg's total retail floor supply, and the amount of new floor space permitted annually, it appears that the city gives *carte blanche* to new retail developments in the city (see figure 2).



Source: Adapted from J.C. Williams 2000.

Approximately one-half of all major development projects costing over $1 million in the City have been either the construction of new commercial buildings for large retail chains, or additions, renovations, or reconstruction of existing retail facilities. Of the roughly $71 million spent on major commercial and industrial developments in Winnipeg, about $34 million, or 47%, was spent on the construction of new retail space (Economic Development Winnipeg n.d.: n.pag.). From 1991 to 1998, Winnipeg's retail and service floor space inventory grew from about 22.1 million sq.ft. to 24.4 million sq.ft., at an average rate of about 1.3%, or 290,000 sq.ft., per year. In addition, retail space per capita also increased during the same period from 35.4 sq.ft. in 1991 to 39.1 sq.ft. in 1998 (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 17). Therefore, the question is not whether or not retailing in Winnipeg is growing, but rather where the growth is occurring.



Source: Adapted from J.C. Williams 2000.

Downtown Retailing: Struggling to Stay Afloat

Winnipeg's downtown retail sector has been witness to its own gradual decline over the past few decades. Most recent and most notable was the closing of one of Winnipeg's most important retail landmarks, the Eaton's building on Portage Avenue, now the centre of controversy regarding its future fate. Of all the major commercial projects constructed in Winnipeg over the past five years, none have been built downtown. As of January 2000, approximately 18.2%, or 491,000 sq.ft., of all downtown retail space was vacant. Approximately 70% of those vacancies were located along Portage Avenue, once considered to be the heart and centre of shopping in the city (J.C. Williams 2000: 24).

Studies show that retail vacancy rates in Winnipeg's downtown are higher than in any other area of the city. High vacancy rates have not only become a concern along the main commercial strips (Portage Avenue and Main Street), but also along the secondary streets and in the major downtown shopping malls (particularly City Place, but also in Portage Place). The vacancy rate of major downtown shopping malls, not including the now-vacant Eaton's building, is estimated to be at least 15% (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 22). Downtown Winnipeg has more retail space than any other area of the city, with more than 1.6 million sq.ft. on Portage Avenue alone. However, because the demand for space is so limited, the vacancy rates remain high.

> …mall managers reported that demand for retail space in Downtown is limited for three main reasons: a perceived lack of parking for customers, perceived safety issues, and a limited local residential population. In addition, it was suggested that there is a need for more marketing of Downtown by the major retailers and mall owners. (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 22-23)

Poor demand for downtown retail space is also reflected in lease rates, which are substantially lower than those for comparable suburban retail space. Downtown street front space ranges in price anywhere from about $5 to $10 per sq.ft. However, out of desperation, some owners are willing to rent out space at even lower rates, just covering basic operating expenses. Downtown shopping mall lease rates tend to range from $25 to $35 per sq.ft. (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 22). By comparison, suburban retail lease rates range anywhere from $12 to $18 per sq.ft., and are typically between $25 to $35 per sq.ft. in suburban shopping malls. However, successful shopping malls like St. Vital and Polo Park Shopping Centre in growing retail shopping areas can command base lease rates of as high as $50 per sq.ft. (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 24).

The nature of downtown retailing is also an important consideration when examining trends in retail development. Downtown retailing in Winnipeg has traditionally targeted middle-income customers and continues to do so, offering very little in the way of lower-end discount merchandise. Until recently, downtown retail price-points also included the higher end of the market; however, with the closing of Birks Jewellers and, more recently, the closing of the Holt Renfrew store in 2000, the market range has been considerably narrowed (J.C. Williams 2000: 24).

Downtown Winnipeg continues to accommodate a "substantial amount of regionally oriented retail and service space" and "department-store type merchandise" in locations including The Bay and Portage Place (J.C. Williams 2000: 21). The closure of Eaton's, arguably the most important store in the downtown's regionally oriented retail sector due to its central location, considerable customer draw, sizeable employee base, and large sales volume, represents a major uncertainty for the future of the downtown retail market. Additionally, when compared to the merchandise available in the city's other regional shopping areas, the downtown retail market offers nothing unique to shoppers, with the exception of the Forks and, to a limited extent, the Exchange District. Close to one-third of all retail space in the downtown is dedicated to clothing and apparel sales, with many of the same outlets and product lines available in suburban shopping malls and retail areas (J.C. Williams 2000: 22).

The lack of continuity between downtown shopping locales has also been cited as a key weakness of the downtown retail environment. CentrePlan's division of downtown Winnipeg into six main districts is helpful to illustrate this point:

1. Portage from Balmoral to Main (not including Winnipeg Square)
2. Winnipeg Square at Portage and Main
3. The Exchange District
4. The Forks Market
5. Central Park
6. South of Portage Avenue

All of these districts specialize in different types of retailing and services. However, they lack connectivity to each other and fail to constitute an integrated downtown retail environment. Winnipeg Square has a large number of service and food outlets that cater to the local office tower employees. However, it is very much isolated from the larger downtown context. The Exchange District, although it is gradually coming into its own as a retail area with some of the more "progressive" and unique retail downtown, still does not have a large number of shops. The Forks has been highly successful, with virtually no vacancy and a strong focus on tourism. However, it is arguably the most isolated district downtown, particularly in terms of pedestrian accessibility. Main Street to the south of Portage Avenue has very little retail, and due to the "…high level of traffic and the width of the street, it effectively acts as a barrier to any retail continuity" (J.C. Williams 2000: 27). Central Park, on the other hand, is composed primarily of dispersed strip mall locations, making it highly automobile oriented. At the same time, it has been plagued by high vacancy (J.C. Williams 2000: 27-31).

With this lack of connectivity in mind, pedestrian traffic is also an important consideration in looking at the success of downtown shopping. The dispersion of downtown Winnipeg's retailing as a whole makes pedestrian accessibility to all areas difficult. As Chmielewska (1994: 15) points out, "Winnipeg downtown completely lacks pedestrian perspective…." Chmielewska argues that there are three main design elements that have caused the lack of downtown pedestrian traffic.

> 1. Winnipeg's downtown was not designed with the local climate in mind. The layout of streets and buildings creates wind tunnels, while at the same time there is little in the way of physical protection from the weather (no roofs, awnings, or other physical barriers).
>
> 2. Similarly, the objective of the original street design was to move automobile traffic, not pedestrian traffic. As a result, "…street-level pedestrian interaction with the built environment and with other people…" has effectively been discouraged: "There are no places for people to stop and linger. There is no reason for stopping either."
>
> 3. There is a lack of continuity between the various downtown locales. As Chmielewska suggests, "With a vehicle, one quickly moves from point A to B. Vast distances and ugly stretches in between the sites are quickly passed. The pedestrian is left to struggle through it all, not only covering the distance but also experiencing the blight." (Chmielewska 1994: 15-16)

While the downtown does not provide a particularly favourable environment for pedestrian traffic, most of which has been internalized in the vast skywalk system, the automobile has become the prime mode of transportation for downtown shoppers. However, compared to the highly automobile-oriented infrastructure that serves suburban big-box power centres, the downtown cannot compete with the conveniences of ample amounts of free parking and the newly built, high-speed roadways. Furthermore, for suburban shoppers, shopping at the nearest big-box power centre is, for the most part, a matter of convenience (Davies 1995: 18).

Retail Sprawl in Winnipeg

The suburbanisation of retailing is not a new phenomenon. With a highly dispersed population, and a city council with an inability or lack of political will to control sprawl, there has been an increase in "market opportunities for retailers outside of the downtown" (Lyon and Fenton 1984: 99). In fact, over the years, policies implemented by the municipal government have actually encouraged retail sprawl. As Lyon and Fenton note, "[t]he Unicity council, rather than relegating suburban shopping to fulfilling limited local needs, adopted in 1974 a policy to encourage completion of a system of six regional suburban shopping malls" (Lyon and Fenton 1984: 100). It has been in the vicinity of many of these malls that new big-box developments have been concentrated in retail agglomerations commonly referred to as "power centres."

Between 1954 and 1973, 25 new shopping centres were opened in Winnipeg (including Polo Park in 1959), each with space in excess of 30,000 sq.ft. With the majority of the new shopping centres built between 1961 and 1971, the downtown's share of the CMA's department store-type merchandise sales plummeted from 61.3% to 30.4%. By 1982, it was estimated that the Central Business District's (CBD) share of department store-type merchandise sales had dropped to 17.5% (Lyon and Fenton 1984: 101).

The impact of suburban retail expansion continues to take its toll on downtown retailing establishments. In a 1999 study conducted by the Retail Council of Canada, 36% of all "traditional retailers" across Canada considered large-format suburban stores to be their main competition (Genest-Laplante 2000: 13).

Over the past decade, this new form of retail expansion has become predominant. The "large format," "mega," or "big-box" store as it is best known, has transformed the suburban retailing landscape. Of the $34 million spent on new major retail developments in Winnipeg in 1997, all were built in suburban locales, and nearly all of them were "big-box" stores. Home Depot spent almost $10 million building two new stores; Revy Home and Garden spent about $5.4 million constructing a new store; and Canadian Tire spent $2.4 million on an addition to one of its existing suburban outlets (Economic Development Winnipeg n.d.: n.pag.).

Population and Housing Trends

Demographic trends play a considerable role in determining where retail developments occur. Population decline and growth has been an important factor in the deterioration of retail development in the downtown, and the main reason why suburban retailing is experiencing such a boom. In areas where the population has experienced little or negative growth, retail development has declined. Looking at the population decline in the downtown, it is easy to see why retailing in the downtown has suffered. From 1991 to 1996, the inner city and inner ring populations fell by 3.4% and 3.8% respectively (Statistics Canada). As expected, the new housing market in Winnipeg's inner city also reflects this decline. In 2000, the inner city saw only 19 new housing starts (13 single-family and 6 multiple-family), down by 30% from the pervious year (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2001: 2-3). In addition, housing abandonment has become a significant problem in many of Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods, mirroring the growing retail vacancy rates in the downtown.

In contrast, where population is growing and new housing developments are being planned, retail developments are expanding and big-box stores have already or are planning to locate. Suburban subdivisions in the southwest quadrant of the city have experienced considerable growth over the past 10 to 15 years. For example, from 1991 to 1996, Whyte Ridge recorded a population growth of approximately 58%. Linden Woods, another prominent subdivision in the southwest part of the city, experienced substantial growth, recording an increase of 245% from 1986 to 1991 and a 17% increase from 1991 to 1996 (Statistics Canada). Not surprisingly, the new housing market in the southwest part of the city has been booming in terms of sheer volume with 400 new housing starts in 2000. Although multiple-family starts have been down by about 22% from 1999 to 2000, single-family starts increased by about 11%, 18% in Fort Garry alone (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2001: 2-3).

As a result of a growing population and an active housing market, the southwest quadrant of the city has seen some of the most rapid and extensive retail development in recent years, with much of new big-box development activity occurring in the Kenaston/McGillivray/Bishop Grandin area. First Professional Management has been the main developer in this region with the construction of a new Wal-Mart and a new Safeway at Kenaston and McGillivray (Colliers 2000: n.pag.). The power centre development at Kenaston/McGillivray is expected to see a total of nearly one million sq.ft. of large-format retail floor space, with over 400,000 sq.ft. of new retail space at the northeast corner and another 500,000 sq.ft. at the southeast corner. New retail developments have also been proposed for the Waverly/Bishop Grandin intersection. (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 30-33).

The Axis of Evil: Why Big-Boxes are Bad

As the "retail giants" continue to expand across North America, unapologetically pushing the urban boundaries, the harmful effects of their development have become increasingly apparent and as a result face increasing resistance. Led by large American corporate retailers like Sam Walton's Wal-Mart (the "chief villain"), Home Depot and Price Costco, and followed in Canada by stores like

Canadian Tire and Revy Home and Garden, the destructive impacts of big-box developments take many forms (Ortega 1998: 294).

> The price advantage to the consumer is balanced by the harmful effects on our cities. Although as individuals we may get a wider selection or lower prices on some goods, as a society we may give up a tremendous amount in terms of personal service, social interaction, and all those tangible and not-so-tangible delights that together make city living a pleasure. (Seelig and Seelig 1995: 208)

Turning Downtown into a Ghost Town

As many authors have noted, big-box stores, with their capacity to buy in bulk and pass the savings on to the customer through "rock-bottom" pricing, have the capability to decimate any and all local competition within close proximity (Klein 2000: 139). As Andy Rowell (2000: 26) notes, any suggestion that this sort of development is actually good for local businesses and the health of the city "…flies in the face of the evidence." At the same time, big-box developments purposely avoid existing commercial centres and downtown shopping areas, favouring cheaper greenfield sites at the edges of suburban residential subdivisions (Ortega 1998: 294; Quinn 1998: 10). As Quinn suggests, big-box stores (particularly Wal-Mart) have a development formula that provides "…a neatly packaged and heavily-promoted alternative to downtown" (Quinn 1998: 10). This is fairly evident from the explanation of retail trends in Winnipeg described earlier.

"Lego-nomics": Big-Box Transience

Much like Lego, big-box stores are frequently dismantled and discarded only to be rebuilt at a different location nearby. Teardown, rebuild, and relocate activities have become an increasing trend among big-box retailers who use these tactics to follow the market/customer. This growing trend has seen many large retailers pull out of their position as regional mall anchor stores in order to build new free-standing stores, virtually killing the malls. However, the trend has also seen existing big-box retailers tear down or vacate their existing box and build another one – often indistinguishable from the original, and usually within sight. In many circumstances, the "big box" is intentionally poorly built with this turn-around in mind, and contributes little to the urban environment. As noted by one of the

City of Winnipeg's senior planners, many of the big-box stores are constructed for a maximum 10-year lifespan in order to accommodate this transience.

This trend has been well noted in Winnipeg, particularly among Wal-Mart stores. Wal-Mart vacated its Grant Park Shopping Centre anchor store location only to resurface within 10 kilometres as a free-standing big-box in the new power centre at the McGillivray/Kenaston intersection. Similarly, the Wal-Mart at the Crossroads power centre in Transcona was demolished and rebuilt about 200 metres further back on the same lot in order to increase its size and accommodate the greater parking demands (Colliers 2000: n.pag.). The Canadian Tire on the east side of St. James, part of the Polo Park regional shopping area, also tore down its existing store in order to build a larger store that was set further back on the lot.

Infrastructure and Transportation Considerations

Surrounded by paved acreages to accommodate every customer's vehicle and serviced by large highway-type roads without sidewalks, big-box development was made for the car. It has even been argued that big-boxes may actually increase automobile usage as people from other areas of the city make the trip to cash in on the lower prices (Bressi 1996: para. 27). Recent studies calculated that big-box retail establishments generate four times the volume of traffic generated by office uses, eight times the traffic volume of light industrial uses, and as much as 24 times the volume generated by residential uses, using an equal area of developed land (Cuyahoga County Planning Commission 2000: 7; Government of Ireland 2000: 14). As a result, huge amounts of land and expensive modern infrastructure and roads are needed to supply the mass automobile traffic that the big-boxes and power centres command and create. As Ortega notes:

> The stores might stand alone or be grouped with other category killers in so-called power centers, but, like Wal-Marts, they always were surrounded by acres of parking and were usually plopped down near highways, for easy access by trucks bringing in goods. (Ortega 1998: 294)

As Quinn notes, it is usually the taxpayer who is forced to cover the bulk of expenses incurred by the new infrastructure development – which not only includes roads, but also water, sewage, and hydro – that services these new forms of greenfield retail developments. Not surprisingly, this has become an issue of considerable contention in many cities and one that has recently surfaced in Winnipeg with the release of a report on traffic congestion and infrastructure requirements for the Polo Park regional shopping area and its adjacent big-box developments. The report suggests that $3.3 million is required for immediate road improvements, and that another $10.8 million will be needed to upgrade the roadways to facilitate future growth in the area (Hendry 2002: sec. A:1, A:4). But who should put up the cash: the City or the developers?

The increase in traffic and infrastructure also has obvious environmental impacts. Predictably, the increase in hydro-carbons, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, and carbon dioxide generated by the increase in automobile traffic generated by big-boxes and power centres is considerable. Increases in the amount of storm water associated with excessive parking capacities has also been noted as a major source of pollution. The combination of increase storm water runoff – often as much as 16 times greater on paved surfaces than on undeveloped grassland – and heavy automobile use cause storm water to become heavily polluted with substantial levels of petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants that contaminate the surrounding water table (Cuyahoga County Planning Commission 2000: 19).

A Box Can Only Be a Box: Homogenous Design and the Reduction of Choice

A box can only look so many ways. Not much has been or can be said of the big-box design or appearance; there really is not much to see. Their warehouse-like design is strictly functional, intended to keep costs low and to hold massive product volumes. Big-boxes and superstores are "self-replicating clones" that are blanketing the suburban landscape and, as Klein (2000: 138-140) notes, not only look the same, but are limiting consumer choice in terms of the products and brands that they carry. It represents a very depressing situation when this suburban sameness of sheet-metal and asphalt is considered to be more attractive than the diverse architecture and designs that gives our downtown a sense of place. As Whyte puts it:

> The worst thing about dullification is the way people get used to it. They even get to like it. If there are no longer streets that are attractive to use, they will not use the streets. They will forget there ever were any and say that culturally street life is not

> suited for their city.... Like blue cheese dressing of the salad bars, once you get used to [it], you lose your taste for the real thing. (Whyte 1998: 205)

Resistance Against the Big Box

> In many ways, it was the inhuman scale of the big boxes and their accompanying sprawl – the streets without sidewalks, the shopping centres only accessible by car, the stores the size of small hamlets with all the design flair of toolsheds – that set the stage for the other significant retail trends of the decade. Discount stores were great for saving money but not for much else. And so, as the big boxes expanded into seas of concrete on the edge of town, they generated a renewed hunger for human-scale development.... (Klein 2000: 135)

Small town, USA has been the most progressive in its attempts to limit the destructive nature of big-box development and, in a growing number of circumstances, to restrict big-box development altogether. A number of successful anti-sprawl lobbying groups and local citizen associations, whose principal goals are to halt sprawl and stop big-box development, have also organized. Organizations like Sprawl-Busters, headed up by anti-Wal-Mart guru Al Norman, and the New Rules Project headed by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) are two of the more prominent groups leading the anti-big-box and anti-sprawl movements. New and innovative planning and legislative policies have been advocated by such groups and have been adopted by a growing number of municipalities to successfully limit or stop the big-box invasion and expansion. The following are a few examples of big-box specific legislation currently used by a number of municipalities.

Community and Environmental Impact Statements

Development impact statements are one of the easiest tools with which to control big-box developments. Mandatory community and/or environmental impact statements for all new developments are an easy way to evaluate various proposals and force developers to justify why a certain development project is necessary and why it is in the public's interest. As a result, impact statements keep developers and development in check.

Community impact statements (CISs) must include considerations of the impact of the proposed development on population, traffic and infrastructure. Most importantly, CISs require a detailed analysis of the anticipated costs and benefits of the development project on the surrounding community and on the city as a whole (Fodor 1999: 27-28).

Similarly, environmental impact statements (EISs), like CISs, require an in-depth analysis of the potential impacts of a proposed development, but focus on the potential environmental impacts. Lawrence Township, New Jersey – which also requires CISs – requires EISs on all new developments, requiring developers to complete a comprehensive site analysis (soil, wildlife, vegetation, watershed, etc.), address the potential impact, and propose provisions to reduce the overall environmental impact (Fodor 1999: 29).

Making Developers and Businesses Pay as they Grow

"Full-cost accounting" or "development impact fees" that force developers and businesses to pay for the real costs they have incurred for the city and for the region is one potential way of controlling retail sprawl and big-box development. Such measures effectively reduce the likelihood of tax hikes as a result of escalating infrastructure costs covered by the city in order to facilitate big-box development and sprawl in general (Fodor 1999: 114-116). As was noted earlier, Winnipeg's city council is currently trying to establish how and by whom the $14 million infrastructure upgrades required to service big-box stores in the Polo Park shopping region should be covered (Hendry 2002: sec. A:1, A:4). By implementing legislation forcing developers to cover the actual costs, the City would avoid having to ask these types of questions in the future and avoid getting stuck with the bill.

Moratoriums

The most radical approach adopted by a growing number of towns and cities in the United States has been to ban big-box development altogether through legislated moratoriums. The Town of Easton, Maryland provides one of the most comprehensive examples of a fully operational moratorium on big-box retail development. On August 16, 1999, the town council voted in favour of a temporary moratorium on all big-box retail developments, effectively restricting the town's planning and zoning commission from accepting development and re-zoning applications for big-box projects. The purpose of the moratorium was twofold: First, it was to stop uncontrolled retail expansion that threatened the viability of the town's economy; and second, it was to give the town time to draft and implement new permanent big-box development policies into its comprehensive plan (Town of Easton 1999). The moratorium was lifted in March 2000, with the introduction of a newly legislated physical size cap (New Rules Project 2002).

Similarly, in January 1999, Norway actually introduced a national five-year moratorium on all retail developments larger than 32,300 sq.ft., effectively eliminating any possibility for big-box development to occur.

Physical Size Caps

The most common form of legislated planning control exercised on big-box developments are physical size caps which, simply stated, are size restrictions on all new big-box developments. Physical size caps have been successfully implemented in a growing number of states and municipalities in the United States. In Easton, Maryland, retail stores larger than 65,000 sq.ft. are strictly prohibited under the new physical size cap legislation. In addition, the town's board of zoning appeals has been completely barred from granting zoning variances that would allow larger developments (New Rules Project 2002). However, physical size caps vary considerably been different towns and cities, some limiting retail uses to a maximum area of 10,000 sq.ft. (New Rules Project 2002).

Like Norway's national policies against big-box development, Ireland has also introduced permanent national legislation restricting the physical size of new retail developments. The legislation effectively caps the size of retail developments at 37,000 sq.ft in Dublin and 32,000 sq.ft. in the rest of the country. The policy also limits the allowable size of "retail parks" (or power centres as they are called in North America) to 161,000 sq.ft. (Government of Ireland 2000: 3-9).

Formula Business Restrictions

Formula business restrictions have been adopted by a growing number of cities in order to counter the homogenous nature of retail chains (standardized services, decor, and architectural designs, etc.). Although these types of legislation do not ban chain stores, they do require chains to use designs that are different from those at other existing locations. While they are primarily used against fast-food restaurants, formula business restrictions could be implemented to require design variations for new, large-format retail chain development. This type of legislation "…has proved a significant deterrent to chains, which generally refuse to veer from their standardized, cookie-cutter approach" (New Rules Project 2002).

Second Uses for Old Big-Boxes

The teardown/rebuild and/or vacate trend among large retailers has created a situation of increasing big-box vacancies across the continent. In Winnipeg, the percentage of big-box vacancy increased from 0% in 1999 to roughly 5% in 2000 (Colliers 2000: n.pag.). Consequently, alternative uses need to be found for vacant big-boxes and/or policies to prevent the teardown/rebuild trend need to be implemented.

In a growing number of American states, policies are being implemented that require big-box retailers to rule out the use of existing buildings before constructing new ones (Jossi 1998: para. 8-9). Other municipalities and states are experimenting with policies that require higher design standards than the l0-year half-life of the "standard-issue" big-box (Jossi 1998: para. 8).

An even more radical approach that may prove to be successful in stopping the teardown/rebuild trend would be the requirement of a $5 million demolition or performance bond that would be used to either guarantee "…that a viable establishment will be maintained at this location for a substantial period of time…" or to cover the cost of demolition if the building is vacated after a certain length of time (Peirce 1995: para. 11; Jossi 1998: para. 12). This could be used to deter unnecessary big-box transience and vacancies.

Better Design Requirements for New Big-Box Developments

Fort Collins, Colorado and Birmingham, Michigan have both employed planning legislation that requires certain design standards of all single building retail developments over 25 000 sq.ft. The design standards included maximum facade lengths of 100 ft., the provision for eight-foot-wide sidewalks, display windows, and parking lots that are located behind the store and/or that meet certain landscaping requirements (Jossi 1998: para. 12-17). Like the formula business restriction, better design requirements could act as a useful way to deter new big-box development or at least lead to some improved designs.

Winnipeg's Response to the Big Box

Looking at the development trends in Winnipeg, it seems apparent that big-box development and retail sprawl in general is not regarded or dealt with as a serious issue, despite a downtown retail sector that is obviously struggling. As a result, land use policies used to control big-box development are not clearly defined. On the one hand, existing policies under Plan Winnipeg state that new suburban retail development should be limited to the city's regional shopping areas (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 70). This was also reinforced in an interview with one of the City's planners. On the other hand, the *Retail Development Policy Recommendations for Plan Winnipeg* suggest that big-box "…stand-alone retail businesses that require large surface parking areas should be discouraged from locating in these regional centres as it will limit the ability to create a higher density, urban location over time" (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 77). The recommendations also suggest that the City should limit big-box development to two or three designated areas, rather than allow scattered big-box development throughout Winnipeg as past and current policies have (Coriolis Consulting 2000: 70, 80). It is one thing to make recommendations and another to actively pursue them; judging by recent suburban retail activity in Winnipeg, pursuing these recommendations has not been high on the priority list.

When asked about the highly wasteful teardown/rebuild and relocate activities exercised by many big-box chains, one of the City's senior planners stated: "We're not in the business of regulating the market; we're in the business of controlling land use." This statement effectively sums up the attitude taken by the City on this form of retail development, and explains why a city that is apparently boosting downtown redevelopment is not taking greater steps to deal with some of the reasons why the downtown retail sector has deteriorated in the first place.

However, there are some recent indications that Winnipeg is willing to get tough with big-box developments. In May 2000, the City denied a development proposal for a new free-standing Wal-Mart to locate in an area designated as "rural" on the east side of McPhillips Street between Murray Avenue and McGregor Street. The proposal requested that the "rural" designation be altered to a "neighbourhood" designation to allow the development to move ahead.

A report on the City's decision outlined a number of key reasons as to why the development permit was denied. First, the proposed development was located outside the boundaries of the nearest regional shopping area, which is in opposition to the goal of Plan Winnipeg to limit new retail development in these areas. Furthermore, with Wal-Mart leaving its existing location as the anchor store of Garden City Square, permitting the proposed development would increase the likelihood that other retailers would be attracted to the new site, resulting in increased vacancies and the reduced viability of the Garden City Shopping Area (McPhillips/Leila Corridor). Additionally, if the proposed development had been allowed, it would have meant that most new retail growth in the northwest quadrant of the city would have occurred at or around the new site, limiting the "…opportunities to encourage the intensification or redevelopment of existing retail sites…" (City of Winnipeg 2000: 6-7).

Infrastructure and roads were also considered as one of the main reasons to deny the proposal. The Water and Waste Department noted that it would be highly uneconomical to provide a full regional land drainage system to the site (City of Winnipeg 2000: 5). Similarly, the Public Works Department expressed concerns that the increased traffic generated by the new development would put too much pressure on existing roadways which would require extensive upgrades to facilitate the new store(s) (City of Winnipeg 2000: 7).

After the application was denied, Wal-Mart threatened to move its proposed development beyond City boundaries into Headingly, Manitoba. However, the City called Wal-Mart's bluff, and until recently, Wal-Mart has remained at its existing location. Unfortunately, Wal-Mart has recently obtained approval from the City of Winnipeg to build a new store within the regional shopping area at Court Avenue and McPhillips Street, and will be vacating its current anchor location in Garden City Square. While this may only seem to be a half-victory against Wal-Mart, the process and the outcome provide some useful insights for future big-box development proposals. First, it is an indication that the City has the ability to say "no" to this type of development. Second, although Garden City Square is in trouble as a result of the Wal-Mart's move, the City does not have to spend money on new infrastructure provisions for the new location as it is within the serviced regional shopping area. Third, the City has gained some important insight into the tactics used by Wal-Mart and presumably other big-box chains. In the original proposal, Wal-Mart spokespersons said there was no other suitable location for the new store. Yet after the new development was approved, a Wal-Mart spokesperson admitted that they had not explored alternative sites, essentially admitting their bluff.

If the City knows that they are bluffing, the City may be more willing to challenge big-box retailers in the future.

Conclusion

Although the city's position on big-box stores and power centres is not particularly strong, the decision against the proposed Wal-Mart development in West Kildonan and the reasons for the decision suggest that the City recognizes the destructive impacts that these types of development are having on our retail sector and on our urban landscape. This decision also indicates that the City needs to adopt stronger legislation to limit this type of development. Moreover, Wal-Mart's threats to move outside the city boundary indicate that a regional policy needs to be implemented to restrict the location and relocation of big-boxes. While federal policies to restrict "big-box" and chain store development have been implemented in places like Norway and Ireland, given the nature of the global market economy and the federal government's already limited role in urban policies, this seems highly unlikely to occur in Canada.

However, the growing number of municipalities across North America that are implementing policies to restrict big-box retail developments provide many models for the City of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg region as a whole. Furthermore, as suggested by Centre Venture (2000: 8), "…the Downtown must compete to attract retail and office projects that might have located outside of the Downtown." Not only are more strict planning policies and controls necessary to limit continued suburban retail expansion and big-box developments, but the City needs to be more pro-active in attracting new development downtown.

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