

AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF PLANNING IN THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

Compiled in the
Survey, Town Planning and Property Department
of the
City of Winnipeg

An early plan of the settlement on the Red River as it was in 1816 indicates only three roads or cart trails in use, later named - Main Street, Notre Dame Avenue and Portage Avenue. These roads, together with the two rivers, were the governing factors which later determined, to a great extent, the street plan and the development of the City.

One of the earliest subdivision plan was of the Hudson's Bay Reserve. When the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869 transferred all its interests in the Hudson Basin to the Dominion Government for the sum of 300,000 Pounds, the Company retained 1/20 of the total area of land, in addition to certain reserves or tracts of land upon which were situated the various Forts and Trading Posts.

The Fort Garry Reserve situated on the North side of the Assiniboine River at its junction with the Red River consisted of 500 acres and was shown as River Lot 1 on the Dominion Government Survey of the Parish of St. John. The Hudson's Bay "Reserve" situated in the heart of the City of Winnipeg developed into the most valuable commercial, business and apartment block property in the City of Winnipeg.

The first plan of subdivision was made in 1872 before the incorporation of the City of Winnipeg which took place in 1873. This first plan was approved by Donald A. Smith (later Lord Strathcona) as Chief Commissioner of the Hudson's Bay Company. The majority of lots were 50 feet by 120 feet, lanes 20 feet wide and streets 66 feet wide, excepting Main and Broadway which were each 132 feet wide. The average block was 500 feet by 260 feet.

A second plan was made by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1879 showing the same arrangement of land as that in the first plan with the exception that Portage Avenue was extended diagonally across the subdivision 132 feet in width to connect with Main Street.

A third and final plan was made in 1881 completing the entire subdivision by including the grounds formerly occupied by Fort Garry which had been demolished with the exception of the North Gate.

The boundary of the Hudson's Bay Company "Reserve" on the North was Notre Dame Avenue and on the West Colony Creek. Settlers North and West of the "Reserve" built their homes along the river banks for the sake of the many conveniences which the rivers afforded. The long narrow settlement lots, and which were later subdivided into building lots by the owners, were usually provided with one straight street down the centre of the simple width of one chain (66 feet) with cross streets at intervals varying according to the generosity of the subdivider. Unfortunately, owing to lack of control, these cross streets, in many cases, did not connect with each other with the result that some expense was involved in later years in extending and straightening such cross thoroughfares.

The City had been incorporated in the fall of 1873 with 1,869 inhabitants. A tremendous increase of population began with the arrival of the Railway, and in the fall of 1881, an extraordinary real estate boom raged. The settlers' river lots were being bought up and subdivided into 25 foot lots and re-sold at tremendous profit. With the steady increase of population, estimated at 16,694 by 1884, and its trade and commerce pressing in upon the settlement, new sites for homes were explored and acres of land subdivided.

On authorization of City Council, the first Map of the City was compiled by G. McPhillips, D.L.S. and C.E., and completed in 1876. It can readily be seen from looking at the old maps that the City has benefited in the development of its street plan, thanks largely to the foresight of the early settlers and developers of the district. However, control of subdivisions and proper street connections were required to safeguard the City's future development.

In 1878, the Survey Department was established under J. W. Harris, D.L.S. and C.E., and it became a requirement of land owners and developers to submit plans of subdivisions, street openings and extensions, with the Survey Department for approval before registration. In 1891, the first Special Survey of a portion of the City was completed and in the next succeeding years, the balance of the City was covered by the Special Survey. In the same year, 1891, City Council passed a By-law changing street names to a numbering system with Notre Dame Avenue being called Central Avenue. Thus McDermot Avenue became 1st Street North, Bannatyne Avenue became 2nd Street North, etc., and in like manner, the Avenues south of Notre Dame Avenue were numbered. Commencing west of Main Street, the Streets were called 1st Street North, 1st Street South, etc., with Notre Dame Avenue being the boundary. This system was found undesirable and in 1893, the streets of the City reverted to a "name" system which has continued to this day.

FIRST WINNIPEG CITY PLANNING COMMISSION (1911-1913)

The need for City Planning in general was very early recognized by the Winnipeg authorities. In 1911, the City secured a Charter amendment authorizing the appointment of a Commission to consider and report upon a City Planning Scheme,

the distribution of population, and other problems relating to City organization and government and to provide for defraying the cost thereof.

By-law 6825 was passed June 5, 1911 appointing a Commission to be called "The City Planning Commission", to consider and report to Council from time to time upon a City Planning Scheme for the City of Winnipeg. This Commission was composed of the Mayor (William Sanford Evans), six other members of City Council, the Provincial Municipal Commissioner, and ten citizens representing the following organizations: Parks Board, Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Company, Provincial Board of Health, University of Manitoba, Industrial Bureau, Board of Trade, Trades and Labor Council, Winnipeg Real Estate Exchange, Builders Association and Architects Association.

The Commission gave consideration to housing standards, traffic and transport facilities; architectural design of buildings and bridges, parks, playgrounds, schools, river frontage and dockage, and a physical plan. A Master Plan of the Greater Winnipeg area was prepared for the Commission by Professor Arthur Alexander Stoughton, Architect and Town Planner, University of Manitoba, who acted as the Commission's Professional Advisor.

Professor Stoughton considered the best form of Town Planning Commission should be composed of technical men, professional town planners, engineers, surveyors, and laymen who had studied the subject with, of course, representation from City Council.

This Commission, therefore, and subsequent Commissions, had access to expert advice through all executive officials of the City such as the City Solicitor, City Engineer, Assessment Commissioner, Medical Health Officer, and the City Surveyor who

acted as Secretary-Engineer since 1928 and was Secretary of earlier Commissions. Professor Stoughton donated valuable services as Professional Advisor to this and subsequent Commissions, and on rare occasions, outside advice was obtained for specific purposes.

By 1913, the population had increased to 184,730 resulting in a tremendous industry of house building. The boom-day 25 foot lots were crowded with frame or brick veneer detached houses and a lesser number of terraces, where in many cases the eaves touched or overlapped.

The City Planning Commission drew the attention of Council to the lack of adequate supervision of building operations and to the very narrow home sites in use. As a result of the Commission's report, the Building By-law was revised, a larger staff of Building Inspectors engaged and regulations imposed providing for a minimum width of 33 feet for building lots in new subdivisions.

As an immediate result of the efforts of the Commission, several street improvements were made such as a series of parallel East and West streets in the Western part of the City, namely: Sargent, Ellice, St. Matthews and Wellington Avenues; and a series of parallel streets in the North part of the City, namely: Salter, Powers, Andrews, McGregor, McKenzie and Arlington Streets.

Other improvements considered by the Commission were:

Broadway-Portage Connection

River Park Driveway from Elm Park Bridge through the Municipal Hospital property to Brandon Avenue (now developed as Churchill Drive and Park).

Sharpe or Grande Boulevard - This proposed Boulevard (now Inkster Boulevard) commenced at Main Street near the North City Limit and it was proposed to extend it Westwards to connect with the Dominion Government Road Allowance known as Kitchener Avenue and following that Avenue to the N.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 23-11-2E thence Southerly past Brookside Cemetery and through Deer Lodge Subdivision to Portage Avenue. However, since the bulk of this proposed boulevard lay outside the city limits with the lots being privately owned, this boulevard was never completed.

New Maryland Bridge over Assiniboine River.

Proposed Arlington Street Bridge across Assiniboine River to complete a natural trans-City thoroughfare on Harrow and Arlington Streets. This was further considered by the Town Planning Commission in 1932 which reported that this was the most logical area for the next bridge over the Assiniboine River to be constructed West of Maryland Bridge.

Suggestions of this Commission, and which were considered by a subsequent Commission, included a Cross-Town Highway by way of Colony, Balmoral and Isabel Streets; Rorie Street-Disraeli extension from Portage Avenue to Kelvin Street. The latter route was superseded by the Disraeli Bridge and Freeway. This Commission was superseded by the Greater Winnipeg Plan Commission.

THE GREATER WINNIPEG PLAN COMMISSION (1914-1920)

City Council, in 1914, appointed a Greater Winnipeg Plan Commission to prepare a comprehensive City Plan and to take up the matter of Municipal Planning; the work to be done in the office and under the supervision of the City Surveyor. This Commission comprised Mayor T. R. Deacon; the City Surveyor, J. W. Harris, D.L.S. and C.E.; together with four private citizens, namely J. D. Atcheson (a prominent Winnipeg Architect and who was appointed permanent Chairman by the Commission), C. D. Shepard, William Pearson and Professor E. Brydone-Jack.

Mr. R. H. Avent, Manitoba Land Surveyor, who entered the City service in 1907 was appointed Secretary of the Commission and continued in this capacity after his appointment as City Surveyor upon Mr. Harris' retirement in 1916.

The Commission proceeded with the preparations of various studies all through the period of the war. The very valuable work which it produced was only accomplished through the zeal of its members and in particular, the untiring devotion of its Professional Advisor, Professor Stoughton, who gave his service not only in advising the manner in which plans should be carried out but in actually preparing many plans without any remuneration whatever.

Two of the Schemes considered by the Commission were:-

- (a) A suggested terminal for the "Jefferson Highway" - an existing road which extends from New Orleans, on the Gulf of Mexico, to Winnipeg: The Mayor of New Orleans visited Winnipeg in 1917 and the Mayor of Winnipeg returned the visit. In both cases, the trip was made by auto over the Highway a distance of over 2000 miles and return. Plans were prepared for extending Pembina Highway across Gladstone School site with the complete scheme requiring removal of Gladstone School. The partial scheme as proceeded with widened Osborne and Corydon and rounded the corner at their intersection.
- (b) A Trans-City Highway, paralleling Main Street and now known as the Mall and Cross-Town Highway including the approach to the Parliament Buildings: At that time, the principal traffic arteries were Main Street and Portage Avenue. There was a population of over 70,000 living North of the C.P.R. Main Line and the bulk of the

(b) Cont'd.

traffic between this section and the balance of the City passed along Main Street and through a 100 foot subway crossing the C.P.R., there being no other adequate crossing facilities over the C.P.R. Yards.

Plans of other improvement schemes prepared by the Commission were:-

Proposed extension of Osborne Street through the Municipality of St. Vital, and Osborne - Edinburgh connection with Bridge over Red River.

St. Matthews Avenue extension to Portage Avenue.

Salter Street to Scotia Street connection.

Scotia Street extension along the Red River to St. Andrews Locks.

Complete plans of architectural design of bridges at Salter Street, Main Street and Arlington Street crossing the C.P.R. Yards.

Park Boulevard scheme encircling the City at an average radial distance of four miles including in its course Kildonan Park, Kitchener Park, Tuxedo Park, and suggested additional parks at the junction of McPhillips Street and the North City Limit, at the junction of Sharpe Boulevard and Saskatchewan Avenue, on Waverley Street south of Wilkes Avenue and at two other focal points in Transcona. One of the most important suggested parks was that comprising both banks of the Seine River for a length of about four miles.

Very few of these plans proposed by the Commission were actually implemented. No further meetings were held after the fall of 1920.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TOWN PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD (1928-1944)

For a few years after 1920, interest in Town Planning lay dormant. There was in force a comprehensive building By-law providing for many of the features of a zoning scheme such as use restrictions, fire zone limits, building restrictions, construction requirements, etc. Over 200 By-laws had been passed by the City fixing building alignments and establishing residential restrictions in certain areas. Studies were made by the Health Department with regard to housing conditions, and the City Surveyor prepared plans showing existing land restrictions.

In 1927, interest in Town Planning was revived through the efforts of the Board of Trade, the Winnipeg Real Estate Exchange, and other citizens, and on January 13, 1928, a Committee of Council was appointed, composed of six Aldermen with the Mayor (ex-officio) and the City Surveyor as Secretary-Engineer to be known as the Special Committee on Town Planning and Zoning Board. This Committee acted as two separate bodies with identical personnel.

The Committee on Town Planning reported to Council on all questions of Town Planning including new zoning. The Zoning Board acted purely as a court of appeal in the matter of variations of Zoning restrictions.

This Special Committee proceeded immediately with the study of zoning requirements and prepared a Zoning By-law which was passed by Council on January 7, 1929 as No. 13060.

No regular appropriations were provided for the Committee excepting administration costs which were included in the Survey Department's estimates. From the year the Committee was appointed the City passed through a long siege of extreme financial depression. Large quantities of lands had reverted to the City for non-payment of taxes and it was not until the advent of the second Great War that municipal finances began to improve.

Owing to the financial stringency, the Committee did not prepare an over-all plan or report but did prepare and report on immediate and future street improvements such as widenings, extensions and alignments.

The City Surveyor had charge, under the Property Committee, of the sale of Tax Properties and was alert to see that none were disposed of which might be used to better the City Plan. A large number of parcels were set aside as future parks and playgrounds and other parcels were earmarked for school sites, City yards, housing schemes, industrial sites and water works extension.

Special attention was given to the implementation of the plan outlined by the former Commissions for the extension of Wellington Crescent to connect with Assiniboine Drive, thereby forming the City's first river drive, which extends from the heart of the City to its largest park (Assiniboine) a distance of approximately four miles.

The Town Planning Committee studied the feasibility of widening Osborne Street between the Assiniboine River and the Red River to provide for the eventual widening of this Street from 66 feet to 80 feet. Due to the high cost of acquiring property at that time, building alignments were fixed on Osborne Street in anticipation of the eventual widening to 80 feet. An alignment was fixed on each side of Corydon Avenue between Lilac and Cambridge Streets looking to the widening of this street from 66 feet to 80 feet. An alignment of seven feet on each side of Stafford Street between Academy Road and Hector Avenue was fixed with the same objective - the eventual widening of this street to 80 feet.

Plans were prepared to determine the feasibility and to provide details of construction of a river drive along the North bank of the Assiniboine River from Osborne Bridge to Cornish Avenue.

Great care was taken by the Special Committee on Town Planning not to involve the City in any schemes whose costs would be an extravagance by existing financial conditions, but rather in making provision for the savings of costs of future street widening requirements by the fixing of alignments.

The Town Planning Committee in 1930 considered the unsatisfactory arrangement of streets in the Elmwood District and which became part of the City in 1906. Considerable improvements in street connections, straightenings, widenings, etc. were made in the next succeeding years and several proposed plans were prepared for the orderly subdivisions of undeveloped lands under the East Elmwood re-planning scheme. The re-development of this area was curtailed between 1934 and 1948 because of considerable property reverting to the City through Tax Sale. However, in 1948, the development in this area was resumed with the subdivision of the City's large land holdings into residential home sites with school and park facilities and improved roadways.

Other improvements considered by the Committee were:-

A Sherbrook Street Viaduct.

A report submitted by a private citizen suggesting pedestrian subways and safety zones crossing Portage, Main and Broadway as a means of relieving parking problems and providing traffic control and pedestrian safety.

An extension of Wolseley Avenue - Raglan Road to Tylehurst; also proposed extension of Priscilla, Westminster, Lizzie, Ellice and Cross-Town Highway.

The extension of Ellice Avenue to provide a direct road to Stevenson's Flying Field.

A proposed Government Airport adjoining Fort Osborne Barracks in Tuxedo and River Heights, and also a site on McPhillips Street.

A Municipal Housing Scheme for low income class of citizens.

The matter of slum clearance.

A building alignment on the West side of Isabel from Notre Dame to Elgin Avenues fixing an alignment to provide for the future widening of Isabel to 80 feet.

Rorie Street extension as suggested by the previous Plan Commissions was re-studied.

The removal of the C.N.R. Line between Portage and Wilkes Avenues and its traffic being re-routed over the C.P.R. and Midland Rail lines.

A great deal of the time of this Committee, however, was consumed in dealing with appeals from zoning and building restrictions in its capacity as Zoning Board.

Various By-laws had been passed regulating the control and uses of land in the various parts of the City. The Zoning Committee commenced preparation of an over-all Zoning By-law which was not to apply to any specific area in the City but rather to the City as a whole. This By-law was not proceeded with and it was not until 1950 that the City had such a comprehensive Zoning By-law.

In May of 1944, the Town Planning Committee was dissolved, but the same personnel continued as a Zoning Board of appeal, and a new Town Planning Commission was appointed under By-law No. 15689.

THE WINNIPEG TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION (1944-1960)

The Winnipeg Town Planning Commission was appointed by City Council by By-law No. 15689 passed May 8, 1944 and was composed of the Mayor of the City, one Alderman from each of the three wards and seven members other than members of Council.

This By-law was amended by By-law 17233 passed March 15, 1954 which provided the following:

- (a) Non-members of Council increased from 7 to 9.
- (b) Non-members of Council to include the City Engineer and City Surveyor each of whom had the authority to appoint a senior member of his staff to act as his substitute.
- (c) Section 5 appointing City Surveyor as Secretary-Engineer repealed.
- (d) "Commission" to appoint its own Secretary.

THE METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

About the same time, the Provincial Government set up the Metropolitan Planning Committee composed of members of Council from Winnipeg and eleven adjacent Municipalities which would contribute pro rata according to population.

The Metropolitan Planning Committee and the Winnipeg Town Planning Commission saw the need for cooperation to prepare a Metropolitan Plan for Greater Winnipeg. A Joint Executive Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Professor W. J. Waines, Economic Advisor to the Provincial Government; together with Mr. R. Pearson, Deputy Provincial Treasurer, to consider a Master Plan for Greater Winnipeg and to be prepared jointly by the Winnipeg Town Planning Commission and the Metropolitan Planning Committee. This Master Plan was completed in 1948 as a guide to future development.

The Joint Executive Committee also considered creating a Metropolitan Planning Commission to be composed of representatives of the member municipalities. The Winnipeg City Council, on March 21, 1949, approved of the creating of a Metropolitan Planning Commission and the Provincial Legislature on April 22, 1949 assented to "The Metropolitan Planning Act" establishing "The Metropolitan Planning Commission" (1949-1960)

The members of the Commission were composed of:

- (a) Four appointed by the Council of the City of Winnipeg.
- (b) Two appointed by the Council of the City of St. Boniface.
- (c) Two appointed by the Council of the City of St. James.
- (d) Two appointed by St. Vital.
- (e) One appointed by the Council of each of the other Municipalities which were members.
- (f) Non-voting members invited by the Metropolitan Planning Commission representing various utilities.

Effective December 31, 1960, the Metropolitan Planning Commission ceased to exist and its functions were transferred to The Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg.

The following are some of the major schemes planned by the City of Winnipeg, most of which have been implemented since 1944:-

Removal of C.N.R. Harte Subdivision tracks between Pembina Highway and Borebank Street.

Taylor and Grant Avenues widening and extension, Pembina Highway to Edgeland Boulevard.

Corydon Avenue widening and extension, Thurso Street to Edgeland Boulevard.

Mathers and Fleet Avenues - diversions and extensions.

Midtown Bridge and Thoroughfares - Donald Street
to Corydon Avenue.

Disraeli Bridge and Thoroughfare.

Empress Street overpass at Portage Avenue and connect-
ing Streets.

Pacific Avenue and Weston Street extensions.

Watt Street extension.

Kenaston Boulevard extension.

Inkster Industrial Park Development.

Other major projects considered or reconsidered but
which have not as yet been implemented include:-

Proposed removal of the C.P.R. Beach Line track
North of Selkirk Avenue between Arlington and
McPhillips Streets.

Proposed subway or overpass crossing the C.N.R. Main
Line at Waverley Street. (The Pembina Highway and
Osborne Street Subways were completed some years ago.)

Wilkes Avenue extension - Waverley Street to Pembina
Highway.

Sherbrook-Maryland connection.

Extension of Wellington Avenue - Sherbrook to Balmoral.

Extension Broadway to Portage Avenue.
