

Chapter Three

A snapshot of the Manitoba Capital Region

The Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) is not a commission of inquiry. Its role is to build on the base provided by previous studies, to stimulate discussion, and provide advice on regional planning in Manitoba's Capital Region. A variety of government reports and consultations have highlighted concerns over issues such as:

- growth patterns
- water supply, quality and use
- climate change
- flood protection
- efficient use of infrastructure
- the need for a regional perspective on planning
- agricultural land, livestock operations and soil protection
- decline of the central part of Winnipeg

These are all real and important issues and are addressed in the body of this report.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with both a brief snapshot of the

characteristics of the Region, a number of key issues, and a summary of the attitudes of municipal politicians and members of the public on these issues.

GEOGRAPHY

The Capital Region straddles parts of two natural regions of Manitoba: Tall Grass Prairie west of the Red River, and Aspen/Oak Parklands to the east and north, a transitional zone between the former and the Manitoba Lowlands. Over the major portion of the Region, the limestone bedrock has been thickly plastered and levelled by clay deposited in the former Lake Agassiz, while to the east of the Red River, sand, clay, gravel, and till were deposited as glaciers retreated, forming the basis for a wide variety of soil types. Natural drainage is poor. The productivity of prime soils from the bottom clays, for example, is made possible only by an intricate web of constructed drains. Excess water is removed from both within and outside the Region to Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba by the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. The valleys of these slow, turgid rivers and the vegetation

that borders their channels, provide some gentle variety to the landscape.

SIZE

The Capital Region covers 7,532 square kilometres or 1.2 per cent of Manitoba's land base. Geographically, the two largest municipalities are Rockwood (1,154 square kilometres) and Macdonald (1,106 square kilometres). The two smallest are Stonewall (6 square kilometres) and Selkirk (25 square kilometres).

In terms of geographic space, the City of Winnipeg is the eighth largest municipality in the Region, covering 464 square kilometres.

GROWTH IN POPULATION

Rates of growth and patterns of population growth are two of the most pressing issues facing the Manitoba Capital Region. It is useful to establish a number of important facts at the outset.

- Manitoba's population is growing at a very slow rate. From 1996 to 2001, Manitoba's total population grew by 5,685 people. This was a 0.5 per cent increase or a 0.1 per cent annual growth rate.
- Most of Manitoba's growth took place within the Capital Region. From 1996 to 2001 the population of the Capital Region increased by 5,450 people. This was an increase of 0.8 per cent or an annual growth rate of 0.16 per cent. Outside of the Capital Region, population increased by only 235 people. This means that during this five-year period 96 per cent of Manitoba's total population growth occurred in the Capital Region.
- Compared with other Canadian urban centres Winnipeg is growing at a slow rate. Of the 17 largest metropolitan regions in

Canada, Winnipeg has had the slowest growth over the last five years.

- Over the period 1991 to 2001, Winnipeg experienced a decline in its rate of growth. From 1991 to 1996, the Winnipeg grew at a rate of 0.53 per cent. From 1996 to 2001, the rate was 0.17 per cent.
- The rate of population growth in the Capital Region municipalities outside of Winnipeg has also declined, falling from 10.4 per cent in 1991 to 5 per cent in 2001.
- Most of the population growth in the Capital Region is taking place outside of Winnipeg. For the 1996 to 2001 period, 80 per cent of Capital Region growth took place outside of Winnipeg. During this period, Winnipeg's per centage of the total population of the Capital Region declined by about 0.6 per cent to about 87.1 per cent.
- From 1996 to 2001, 60 per cent of Capital Region population growth was concentrated in five rural municipalities: East St. Paul, (+1240), St. Clements (+600), St. Andrews (+550), Springfield (+440), and Macdonald (+420)
- 42 per cent of Capital Region population growth from 1996 to 2001 was concentrated in one rural municipality, East St. Paul (+1,240), and one city, Winnipeg (+1,065).
- From 1996-2001 six municipalities either lost population or experienced minimal growth: Ritchot (-405), Selkirk (-130), St. François Xavier (30), Rosser (65), Cartier (110), and Rockwood (150).
- Despite its slow growth rate and high growth rates in some other municipalities, Winnipeg remains by far the most populous municipality in the Region, with 619,544 people (87 per cent of the Capital Region population) in 2001.

- There is significant variance in the population of the other Capital Region municipalities. The three largest are Springfield (12,600), St. Andrews (10,700), and Selkirk (9,750). The two municipalities with the lowest populations are Rosser (1,410) and St. François Xavier (1,025).

From 1991-2001 Capital Region municipalities outside of Winnipeg grew by 10,560 (approximately at a rate of 1.3 per cent a year.) Over the same period of time the City of Winnipeg grew by 4,330 (approximately a rate of .07 per cent a year) (Census Canada, 2001 Census).

These facts do not speak for themselves. They say different things to different people, and raise a number of important questions that will be addressed in this report:

- What are the appropriate long-term development strategies for a region that is experiencing slow growth?
- What are the similarities and differences in the growth patterns of Capital Region municipalities?
- Is Capital Region growth outside the City of Winnipeg taking place at the expense of the City of Winnipeg?
- Does overall public policy create subsidies that encourage undesirable development patterns?

A national comparison

According to the 2001 census, 51 per cent of Canadians lived in four regions (commonly known as the Big Four): the Golden Horseshoe around Toronto, Montreal and its regional communities, Vancouver and BC's Lower Mainland, and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. Since the 1996 census, these four regions

grew faster than the country as a whole, with a jump in population of 7.6 per cent, compared to only 0.5 per cent for the rest of the country. As magnets for people, investment, jobs and services, the big four are becoming the dominant centers of economic, technological, cultural and political power in Canada. For the 1996-2001 period Manitoba's Capital Region grew by only 0.6 per cent.

AGRICULTURE

Settled communities were established in the Red River Valley because of the high quality of its agricultural land. Today, commercial crops are raised on about 1.18 million acres (476,865 hectares) in the Capital Region. The 3,000 farms within the Capital Region operate on about 10 per cent of the total farmland in Manitoba. The following facts underscore the importance of this economic sector for the Region and the province:

- A significant portion of Manitoba's agricultural output comes from the Capital Region. About \$300 million, or 15 per cent of provincial agricultural production takes place in the Capital Region.
- About \$87.4 million in livestock was produced in the Capital Region in 2001, about 7.6 per cent of the Manitoba total.
- Capital Region farms are, on average, smaller than farms in other Manitoba regions. The average farm size in the Capital Region is about 520 acres (210 hectares) compared to an average farm size of 785 acres (317 hectares) for all of Manitoba.
- The average land value of farmland in the Capital Region is about \$916 per acre (\$2263 per hectare) compared to a provincial average of \$444 per acre (\$1097 per hectare)

- The Rural Municipality of Springfield has the most farms in the Region, with 500, while the Rural Municipality of East St. Paul has the fewest with 30 farms.
- There are 110 active farms in the city of Winnipeg, more than each of East St. Paul, West St. Paul, St. François Xavier, and Headingley.
- About 65 per cent of the Capital Region is considered Prime Agricultural land (Canada Land Inventory Class 2 and 3) (Manitoba Agriculture and Food)

These facts serve as a reminder that in any debate on where further residential growth should take place, it is necessary to take into consideration not only concerns over local autonomy, freedom of choice, urban sprawl and efficient use of infrastructure. Consideration must also be given to the implications of removing agricultural land from that use, the impact that residential development can have on rural drainage systems, and the potential conflicts that can arise between agricultural operations and residential communities.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

There are important examples of regional cooperation at work in the Manitoba Capital Region. The Capital Region Committee brings the governmental leaders of the Capital Region municipalities together with provincial cabinet ministers on a regular basis. Beyond this, there are a number of examples of institutional cooperation and service sharing, such as:

- An agreement between the Macdonald and Winnipeg to allow Macdonald access to the Brady Landfill.
- There are three Planning Districts that involve ten of the Region's sixteen municipalities.

- Rockwood, Rosser, Teulon and Stonewall share a regional library.
- Stonewall and Rockwood have a fire service agreement and an agreement for their sewage lagoon.

Shared services involve some form of cost sharing, including, potentially, tax sharing. While there are intermunicipal tax sharing arrangements in other parts of the province, currently there are no such arrangements in the Capital Region.

Other Canadian regions, such as Edmonton and Calgary, are ahead of Manitoba's Capital Region in developing regional partnerships comprised of governments and other sectors of society designed to enable their regions to be more competitive in the new global economy.

FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Generalizations about financial circumstances are risky because the sixteen Capital Region governments differ significantly in terms of their fiscal capacity (ability to raise revenues), their expenditure obligations, and their current financial condition. However, it can be said that:

- All municipalities faced budgetary challenges during the 1990s because of difficult economic conditions, the limits of main revenue source (property taxes), restraints in financial transfers from the provincial and federal governments and pressures for continued or new service provision.
- Capital expenditures for new infrastructure projects and the maintenance of the existing infrastructure were difficult to finance, especially as resistance to higher taxation of all kinds grew.
- There were significant limits to the potential financial capability of the provincial

government since Manitoba is a relatively small, less affluent province compared to some other provinces. However, the Government of Manitoba introduced new programs in the 1990s such as lotteries (VLTs), Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), the Urban Development Initiative (UDI), Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure programs, Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing (PMTS) increases, Winnipeg Development Agreement, two Core Area Initiatives, Neighbourhoods Alive!, expanded Water Services Board programs, and an expansion of the Conservation Districts program.

WATER ISSUES

The Capital Region centres on the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. It extends north to the shorelines of the south basin of Lake Winnipeg including the area around Grand Beach. The Region also includes parts of the Seine, La Salle, Brokenhead, Morris, Rat and Marsh rivers and the Sturgeon, Cooks, Netley, Wavey, Omand's, Devil's and Joubert Creeks. In addition, there are number of wetlands, the most prominent being Oak Hammock and Netley marshes. All these systems drain into Lake Winnipeg and there have been recurring concerns about the quality and safety of lake water.

Drinking water

Capital Region municipalities draw their drinking water from a variety of sources. The City of Winnipeg brings water from Shoal Lake in eastern Manitoba and northwestern Ontario through an aqueduct system. Other communities draw groundwater from aquifers, while many rural residents take their water from private wells. The issue of drinking water quality is linked to sewage treatment and potential sources of water contamination.

Because the clay soils of the Red River Valley are not well suited for traditional septic fields, there have been a number of cases of well contamination and septic field failure. In recent years, boil water orders placed have been placed on a number of municipalities.

Much of the aquifer west of the Red River and south of the Assiniboine River contains saline water. Due to the depletion of aquifers, the boundary between the salt and freshwater has been moving east, rendering the water from an increasing number of wells undrinkable.

REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The two major forums for Capital Region cooperation are the Capital Region Committee and the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region. In addition, the Association of Rural Municipalities (Winnipeg Region) is comprised of those municipalities that border on the City of Winnipeg. These organizations and their roles are discussed in Chapter Six.

CONCLUSION

Manitoba's Capital Region faces a number of serious social, economic, and environmental challenges, but it is not a region in crisis or even approaching a crisis. The talents and abilities exist to meet these challenges and to seize the opportunities of the future. From the tenor of the RPAC meetings and discussions there seems to be a consensus that the Region must cope with both slow growth and the environmental and economic consequences of the sorts of growth-related decisions that have been made in the past. The Region must attract more investment and immigration, while stewarding its resources and infrastructure. None of this is impos-

sible—much is already being done to meet these challenges.

However, there is a need for a coordinated cooperative region-wide approach to these issues. This will require a regional vision, one that can only emerge as the sixteen Capital Region municipalities undertake a series of common projects. At the same time there needs to be a coherent provincial planning policy that applies to the entire Capital Region that can provide a clear framework within which the region can continue to develop. The next chapter outlines the RPAC's overall proposals for the next steps in the development of the Manitoba Capital Region.