

Chapter Four

Region building

The Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) is calling on the Government of Manitoba and the leaders of the sixteen Capital Region municipalities to engage in a conscious exercise in region building. It is proposing initiatives that strengthen regional ties and create a clear, comprehensive, and consistent land-use policy for the region.

A number of the presentations to the RPAC raised the concern that regional planning and the adoption of integrated approaches to service delivery would undermine local democracy and municipal autonomy. Fears were expressed about the creation of another tier of government, a special purpose authority or provincial takeover of some traditional municipal responsibilities. Others spoke of the need for unity and coherence to ensure that development is efficient and resources are protected. These concerns are not unique to Manitoba; they are part and parcel of the international debate over the nature of regionalism. One suspects that these tensions are not likely to be eliminated in the short-run. The solution is to find a consensus on a balance, which may change over time.

In its efforts to find that balance the RPAC has been guided by two important principles.

1) Municipalities must retain primary responsibility for development planning at the local level.

This principle recognizes the important role of municipalities working together on a voluntary, consensual and gradual basis to engage in collaborative, regional activities. It respects the tradition of local democracy and local planning, and recognizes the diversity among the sixteen communities in terms of their current conditions and future aspirations.

Recent experience suggests that municipalities are capable of joint action in the best interest of their communities when sufficient mutual understanding, trust, and commitment exist. Joint undertakings are more effective and enduring when they are entered into willingly by participants as opposed to being imposed from above.

2) The provincial government should set forth a regional policy plan and periodic policy statements that create the context for the planning activities of municipalities.

This principle recognizes the provincial government’s policy leadership, direction setting, and control responsibilities. Elected by all Manitobans and possessing legal authority over municipalities, the Government of Manitoba has both a right and a duty to ensure regional progress. Given the central importance of the Capital Region in terms of population, economic activity, social and cultural life, and environmental concerns, no provincial government, regardless of the political party in office, can be indifferent to the issues facing the Region, both now and in the future.

Exclusive reliance upon a spontaneous, voluntary, consensus-based, and gradual approach to regional decision-making would not be sufficiently timely, bold, comprehensive, coherent, and far-sighted to meet the challenges the Capital Region faces. Given their different sizes, economic strengths, financial capacities, and organizational capabilities, the sixteen municipalities are not equal in their ability to promote and protect their individual interests. Also, at times, conflict between two or more municipalities can become an obstacle to regional progress. For all these reasons, the Government of Manitoba must demonstrate sustained interest, involvement, and commitment to the progress of the Region.

Despite its undoubted legal right to do so, the provincial government should not dictate detailed terms and conditions of development

to municipalities. Instead, the government should issue a regional policy plan, periodic policy statements, and more detailed Provincial Land Use Policies. In the past, provincial governments have been unclear in their policy intentions and inconsistent in the enforcement of policy statements. A sound provincial policy approach should be principled, anticipatory, timely, open, consultative, consistent, committed, and accountable. In the RPAC’s view, the Government of Manitoba should exercise its prerogatives on the basis of advance consultation with the affected municipalities and within the Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments that is being proposed in Chapter Six.

WHY ENGAGE IN REGION BUILDING?

There are at least four important reasons for the Government of Manitoba and the sixteen Capital Region municipalities to make a conscious effort to create a strong and coherent Capital Region.

1) Issues cross regional boundaries

Whether it is land-use planning, environmental protection, economic development, or transportation, many of the issues faced by governments spill over existing jurisdictional boundaries. This argument has been well developed in a variety of studies of the Manitoba Capital Region and is covered in Chapter Seven of this report.

2) The changing economy

New telecommunications and information processing technologies have contributed to the emergence of a global economy. Governments have reinforced the process of globalization through the adoption of liberalized trade policies and new international rules of

economic life. National governments no longer exercise the same degree of control within their own borders over the main levers of economic and political life as they did in the past. Financing, investment, trade, employment, and corporate decision-making have become more international in scope. In Canada's case, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has increased integration with the economy of the United States and placed legal and political limits on the actions of governments. Dealing with the impacts of globalization and free trade has fallen increasingly on provincial and municipalities. As national borders and national governments become relatively less powerful, regional locations become the focal point for a "new economy" that is knowledge- and information-based, technology intensive, and globally oriented.

These developments have led to the emergence of a school of thought known as the New Regionalism. New Regionalists argue that city regions, metropolitan regions, region states, or city states have become the fundamental building blocks of the new economy. City regions are portrayed as gateways linking local economies to the national and international economic processes. Successful regions are comprised of intricate and dynamic networks of linked and complementary industries and other institutions. When deciding to locate or to expand a facility, businesses are said to examine a region's assets—its infrastructure and transportation, its workforce, its educational and cultural institutions, its environment, its recreational opportunities, its industry networks, and its social health and cohesion. In response, governments at all levels, must think and act regionally. Within the limits to government action, localities

within regions must work together and with their communities to improve their economic prospects, while retaining accessible and responsive municipalities. (See Chapter Seven for a fuller discussion of these approaches to regionalism.)

3) The financial circumstance of governments within Manitoba's Capital Region.

To make the most efficient and effective use of scarce tax dollars, Capital Region governments must look for projects involving functional consolidation and collaboration that will enable them to provide better services at lower cost. This is particularly important with respect to capital investments in sewer, water, solid waste management, recreation, and transportation, where financial help from the provincial and sometimes the federal government is involved. Manitobans cannot afford the luxury of duplication or under utilization in these high-cost services. These circumstances also place service sharing and tax sharing high on the regional agenda for active and serious consideration.

4) Environmental sustainability.

In recent decades, it has become increasingly recognized that squandering our natural resources and damaging the environment is neither sound economics nor good business. Resource and environmental concerns cut across municipal boundaries, across the jurisdictions of the different orders of government, and across departments and agencies within particular governments. Like most provincial governments, the Government of Manitoba has developed programs and regulations on environmental protection and sustainable development. It passed *The Sustainable Development*

Act, created a Round Table on Sustainable Development, and in June 1999 the Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation Core Group issued its report. Finally, the preamble to the Provincial Land Use Policies sets forth principles of sustainable development which are meant, along with other considerations, to guide municipalities in the preparation of their development plans.

In recent years terms such as “sustainable cities” and “healthy cities” have emerged in debates over regional planning. These terms reflect the view that the appropriate focus for environmental planning, strategies and standards should be the entire, interdependent regional complex rather than the individual units therein. There is a need for distinctive policies that are attuned to the varying conditions and the environmental potential of different parts of city regions. These policies should also be complementary and mutually reinforcing, which means that a balance between local and regional decision-making must be found.

In summary, the nature of public policy problems, the need to promote an economically competitive region, the requirement to stretch limited tax dollars and the concern about damage to the environment, are all powerful reasons why the important actors within the Manitoba Capital Region should strive to create a more dynamic and creative regional partnership. There are existing activities, discussed elsewhere in this report, where valuable steps towards positive regional approaches have been taken. However, all governments must be more imaginative and energetic in pursuing a regional agenda.

BUILDING TRUST

Many groups and individuals who spoke to the RPAC expressed their concerns that a new level of government was being proposed for the Capital Region or that existing municipalities would be merged against their will. The RPAC is not recommending such measures. Given the rich tradition of local government and the strong identification of people with their local communities, attempting to force consolidations would provoke deep conflicts and would not necessarily promote long-term solutions to the new challenges faced by all governments.

CONCLUSION

There will be resistance to regional thinking and regional approaches. The present levels of regional consciousness and mutual trust are not what they should be. An effective region requires that all the governments have a shared understanding and commitment to a vision and a set of principles that will guide their behavior in interacting with one another and with non-governmental organizations. Based upon a general sense of direction and a shared commitment, governments can work together to address issues through specific, practical projects of collaboration on a regional basis. Of course, there will be conflicts and disagreements but as much as possible these should be channeled in a positive direction. The Region needs to move forward modestly, seeking “win-win” results in which all the governments and their communities experience a net gain from the benefits created at the regional level. Funding regional initiatives must be the responsibility of all governments on a basis that recognizes the differences in their financial capacity. In

particular, we believe that the provincial government must provide financial support to encourage regional initiatives because, without some incentives, regional actions are not likely to spring forth as quickly or widely as is necessary.

Creative leadership will be required for regional success. Not all such leadership can and should come from governments. There are advantages for governments and their communities in pursuing a regional partnership approach, which involves a number of sectors within the economy and society. An open, consultative, responsive, and accountable process of region building will identify opportunities, encourage cooperation, promote fairness and build trust and confidence.

While there will be short-term benefits from the investment of ideas, time, money, and political goodwill in stronger regional efforts, the greatest payoffs will be over the long term. Commitment, patience, and perseverance must be the hallmarks of the regional effort being called for in this report. Elected leaders, administrative officials and the various stakeholders throughout the Capital Region must be prepared to explain the long-term benefits of regionalism and to remain committed to a mutually agreed upon game plan for the Region's future. All citizens of Manitoba will benefit if this is the case.

