

Chapter Six

A Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments

Regional co-operation is a crucial requirement for the future of the sixteen municipal governments that comprise Manitoba's Capital Region. Presently, the Manitoba Capital Region is a product of informal political and administrative processes. It needs to be given greater importance and visibility by gaining more of a statutory and institutional basis for its operations. For this reason, the RPAC is recommending that the Government of Manitoba, after consulting with the Capital Region municipalities, pass legislation establishing a Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments.

To maintain efficient and effective services and to respond to the important changes taking place in the more complicated, dynamic, interdependent, and uncertain world beyond their individual borders, municipalities must not only address their own needs, they must look to their neighbours and to other levels of government. Important policy issues spill over municipal boundaries and require a more integrated regional response. Furthermore, the three levels of government no longer, if they ever did, operate in isolation.

As a group, the sixteen municipalities of the Capital Region have their most frequent and most important interactions with the Government of Manitoba. The provincial government draws the boundaries of the Capital Region and designates its membership. The provincial legislature passes the main statutes (such as *The Municipal Act*, *The Planning Act*, and *The City of Winnipeg Charter*) that delegate authority to municipalities. Municipalities also depend greatly on financial transfers from the Province. Much of what happens in the world of the Capital Region involves interlocking activities of the sixteen municipalities and the Government of Manitoba.

The Region is also affected, although to a much lesser extent, by the statutory, policy, regulatory, financial, and administrative actions of the Government of Canada. In short, the Region exists in a complex web of relationships among issues, governments, and other actors.

Although little noticed by its residents, the Capital Region already operates reasonably well. Other chapters of this report provide examples of successful inter-governmental

collaboration. Rural municipalities in the Region regularly settle cross-border problems amicably and expeditiously. The provincial government regularly consults its municipal partners on issues such as planning law amendments, and even the operation of the RPAC process. The City of Winnipeg and the provincial government not only negotiated the *City of Winnipeg Charter (2003)*, they have planned a further set of discussions to identify more autonomous models of urban government. The Province and the municipalities have participated in a succession of infrastructure programs that have been cost-shared with the Government of Canada. Over several decades, tri-partite agreements involving the City of Winnipeg, the Government of Manitoba, and the Government of Canada have involved the expenditure of hundreds of millions of capital and operating dollars to revitalize Winnipeg, with a priority being placed on the core of downtown. In summary, cooperation among governments is necessary in the interconnected regional context and there are many positive examples of collaboration.

The extent and pace of the development of successful regionalism needs to increase. The proposed Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments would provide the needed institutional basis for regional development.

WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP?

From the outset the RPAC wishes to be clear that it is not recommending another level of government. Instead, the Committee is proposing to recognize in law, and through the establishment of a new organizational forum, a region of sixteen municipalities that are joined geographically, economically,

ecologically, and socially in a region that is vitally important to the future of the province. To promote this important region and to ensure collaboration among the members, the RPAC is proposing the establishment of a new organization for information sharing, research, and consensus-building.

The proposed Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments (PMCRG) will be an intergovernmental forum to promote regional thinking and collaboration among governments in the Region. The Partnership will not pass and implement laws nor will it take authority away from municipalities. Agreements reached within the Partnership will be based on consensus and, with the exception of setting the budget of the Partnership itself, such decisions will not be binding on the member governments.

With only an executive director and one other professional employee, the Partnership will not require a large administrative apparatus. Its budget will be based on contributions from the Government of Manitoba and the sixteen regional municipalities. This is not a radical change because the municipalities already contribute financially to the costs of the association called the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region. To provide a legal basis for the expenditure of public funds and to enhance the visibility of this important new regional forum, it should be brought into existence through the passage of a provincial statute. In short, the Partnership is a new institution designed to foster positive regionalism. In no way can it be described as another level of government, as another bureaucracy, or as a special purpose authority with formal decision-making powers. It is all about communication and addressing matters of mutual concern.

Writing in 1999, the Capital Region Review Panel observed “there has not been an effective structure to address regional issues by municipal governments within the Region.” (Capital Regional Review Panel, *Final Report*, 1999, p. 74) The panel went on to recommend that the provincial government pass a Regional Associations Act, which would provide a statutory framework to enable all Manitoba municipalities, including those within the Capital Region, to form regional associations. The proposed act was described as providing “a wide range of authority that is not intended for immediate adoption but is available, if, as and when the member governments voluntarily agree that their regional association should have that authority.” (Capital Regional Review Panel, *Final Report*, 1999, p. 74) The Review Panel observed that regional associations elsewhere evolved gradually from forums originally intended for the exchange of information to become collaborative enterprises to market regions, promote shared services, resolve disputes, and deal with other levels of government. The RPAC believes that the province must play a leadership role in bringing a regional association into existence.

The sixteen Capital Region municipalities need a regional forum to share information, to discuss issues of mutual concern, to develop ideas for regional action, to conduct research and analysis, and to agree upon common approaches to shared problems. Because of the importance of the Capital Region to the entire province and because provincial policy, regulatory, financial, and administrative actions can greatly affect the Region, the Government of Manitoba needs to participate directly in any new regional forum that is created.

A knowledgeable observer of the Manitoba Capital Region might ask why another body is

being proposed. The forum that the RPAC is proposing is different from existing associations and committees because it will exist in law. Its primary purpose will be to create mutual understanding and cooperation among the governments of the Capital Region.

First, let us consider what exists. There is an organization that represents all Manitoba municipalities, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM). The AMM was created by legislation in January 1999, merging the Union of Manitoba Municipalities (UMM) and the Manitoba Association of Urban Municipalities (MAUM). Based in Portage la Prairie, the AMM executive and the full-time professional staff of the AMM lobby on issues that affect Manitoba municipalities. The AMM also operates a trading company, the Municipalities Trading Company of Manitoba Ltd. (MTCML), and provides many member services, including municipal insurance, special events throughout the year, a quarterly magazine, a bi-weekly news bulletin, a web site, and general information and support. The AMM would continue to exist following the formation of the PMCRG.

There are already several organizations operating at the regional level. The Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region, incorporated in 1998, provides representatives of the sixteen municipalities an opportunity to share ideas, identify issues, and develop positions that it can then raise with the provincial government. The purpose of the organization can be described as educational, information sharing, and advocacy directed towards the provincial government. The organization levies fees on its members and employs a consultant on a part-time basis. Quite appropriately, the provincial government does not participate directly with this group, although

there are frequent contacts with the provincial Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Following the establishment of a Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments, the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region might still have a role to play in developing strategy and tactics to influence the provincial government.

The Association of Rural Municipalities (Winnipeg Region) (ARM) consists of all the municipalities that border on the City of Winnipeg. At one time these municipalities were subject to planning controls by the City of Winnipeg within a territory called the Additional Zone. While the Additional Zone was abolished in 1991, the municipalities continue to meet regularly.

The Capital Region Committee (CRC), established by the Government of Manitoba, is comprised of the Capital Region mayors and reeves and is co-chaired by the Ministers of Intergovernmental Affairs and Conservation. It provides an opportunity for the sixteen Capital Region municipalities to have advance input into the agenda and to influence provincial thinking. Historically the agenda of the CRC meetings, which are chaired by the Province and held four times a year, have been set by the Province with the opportunity for municipalities to add agenda items. While of undoubted value as an opportunity for formal and informal communication, these meetings do not provide sufficient scope for substantive work on issues of mutual concern. The proposed Partnership of Manitoba Capital Regional Governments will be a more fully institutionalized and permanent forum for inter-governmental deliberations. The proposed Partnership of Manitoba Capital Regional Municipalities would, in effect, replace the current Capital Regional Committee.

THE ALBERTA EXPERIENCE

The Partnership that the RPAC is recommending, resembles, in part, the Alberta Capital Region Alliance. A corporation created under the *Alberta Companies Act*, the Alliance is comprised of 22 municipalities representing over one-million people in the greater Edmonton area. With a mission to “define, discuss and explore solutions to regional issues,” it is involved with:

- sharing information and networking
- acting as an advocate for the Region
- providing research on regional issues
- providing a forum for stakeholders on regional issues
- facilitating and supporting implementation of regional initiatives
- supporting partners’ success
- partnering with the Province to advance regional initiatives

According to its vision statement: “The Alberta Capital Region Alliance is a strong, prosperous community of communities fostering our uniqueness and promoting the Alberta Capital Region provincially, nationally, and internationally.” (Alberta Capital Region website)

The Government of Alberta originally made membership in the Alliance mandatory, but it is now voluntary. The Alliance General Assembly consists of all the elected councillors from each of the 22 Alliance municipalities. In addition, each municipality has a representative on the Alliance Board of Directors. A committee of Chief Administrative Officers (CAO) from the municipalities has three representatives on the Board. Most decision-

making is done on a consensus basis, with votes being held only on such matters as the articles of association, the business plan, the budget, and the allocation of funds for regional projects. Voting is on the basis of one vote per municipality regardless of the population size of the municipality. There is an elected Chair and Vice Chair of the Board. Unlike what is being proposed by the RPAC for Manitoba, the Alberta Alliance has no representation from the Alberta Government.

The Management Committee consists of the Chair of the Board, Chair and Vice Chair of the CAO's group, and two other representatives of the General Assembly. An Executive Director and a small secretariat conduct the actual day-to-day operations of the Alliance. The annual operating budget is approximately \$250,000 with additional funds provided by the provincial government to support regional studies and projects. The Alliance Board approves a multi-year business plan (including budgetary allocations). The 2003-05 business plan identified priority actions (in some detail) in five areas: transportation, economic development, municipal service delivery, leadership development, and external relations. It has taken many years for the Alliance to arrive at its present state of organizational development and maturity. From a distance at least, the Alliance appears to offer the member municipalities, the region, and the entire province some important advantages and benefits.

A MANITOBA CAPITAL REGION PARTNERSHIP

The Edmonton regional model is a good starting point for thinking about the organization and functions of the proposed Partnership of Manitoba Capital Regional Govern-

ments. First, as in the Alberta example, there is merit in establishing the Manitoba Capital Region on a more formal basis by passing a law to bring the partnership into existence. There are a number of reasons for doing so, including the fact that the RPAC is proposing that the Province and the sixteen municipalities all contribute funds towards the operation of the Partnership. There needs to be a legal basis for using tax dollars for this purpose. The legislation authorizing the creation of the Partnership should be general in nature leaving many of the operational features to be negotiated among the Partnership governments.

Membership in the Partnership should be mandatory and include all sixteen Capital Region municipalities and the Government of Manitoba. Other municipalities might apply to join or be included automatically should the provincial government change the boundaries of the Capital Region.

Compared with the City of Edmonton, the City of Winnipeg represents a much higher percentage of the regional population. Although most Partnership decisions will be made on a consensus basis, the RPAC is recommending that the City of Winnipeg should appoint two members to the Partnership. The remaining fifteen municipalities should each appoint one Partnership member, normally the mayor or the reeve. The Government of Manitoba should be represented by two provincial cabinet ministers (most likely the Ministers of Intergovernmental Affairs and Conservation). This formula would create a Partnership of nineteen members. The Partnership would elect from its membership a chair and a vice-chair for agreed upon terms. The Partnership should meet at least four times a year. It could appoint committees and task forces as

required, and these smaller groups could become the real working units of the Partnership.

To provide direction and to oversee the ongoing work of the Partnership, the RPAC proposes an executive committee comprised of the Chair and the Vice-Chair, two representatives from the City of Winnipeg and two provincial ministers. In the event that a City of Winnipeg representative was elected Chair or Vice-Chair, another representative from one of the adjacent municipalities would be elected to the executive committee. The executive committee would work with a Partnership executive director to develop workplans, set budgets, nominate committees and commission studies. All these actions would require approval of the full membership of the Partnership.

The Partnership should adopt mission and values statements to guide its activities. Its value statement should include a commitment to such core values as:

- strong municipalities
- regional commitment, promotion, and progress
- healthy people, healthy ecosystems, and healthy economy
- creative leadership and teamwork
- efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery
- public involvement, awareness, and accountability

Adoption of a vision and values statement would symbolize commitment to the future of the Region and would provide unity of purpose and motivation for the practical activities to be undertaken by the Partnership.

The practical activities of the Partnership are likely to be very similar to the Alberta regional body:

- to promote strong municipal governments with creative leadership
- to create a forum to discuss common municipal issues
- to conduct research on regional issues
- to foster public awareness of regional issues
- to identify and undertake regional initiatives and projects
- to retain local jurisdiction while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of municipal and regional service delivery
- to strengthen contacts with other levels of governments and to advocate on behalf of the Region
- to partner with other governments, business, and other segments of society to market the Region in a coordinated manner

A list of immediate projects that the proposed Partnership should undertake include the staging of a summit on sustainable economic and social opportunities for the Region, the development of a computer-based Geographic Information System for the Region, and the conduct of a study of intermunicipal tax sharing.

The RPAC is recommending a Partnership that will operate on a consensus basis and will not take votes that are legally binding on its members. The exception to this rule would be the requirement for binding votes on the Partnership's budget and setting the annual fees for the member governments.

The RPAC is recommending that membership in the Partnership be mandatory. If individual governments could opt out of the

Partnership or refuse to pay their fees, the Partnership's operations could be seriously impaired and/or the opted-out municipalities could obtain the benefits of regional actions without having to invest time and money. The RPAC is confident that over time, the Partnership will generate greater mutual understanding and trust among its members, and municipalities will see the value of the institution and their annual contributions.

The RPAC has the following thoughts to offer regarding the financing of the Partnership. First, the Government of Manitoba should financially support the Partnership on an ongoing basis. The justification for this is that the Capital Region represents such a large part of the provincial population and economy. Also, it would be helpful to the provincial government to have a strong regional organization to provide ideas and to engage in a constructive dialogue over future regional directions. With its larger population and tax base, the City of Winnipeg should contribute more to the finances of the Partnership than the other municipalities. Accordingly, the RPAC is proposing for discussion among the governments involved, the following annual financial formula:

Government of Manitoba	\$250,000
City of Winnipeg	\$50,000
<u>Other Municipalities</u>	<u>\$50,000</u>
TOTAL	\$350,000

The contribution from the individual municipalities outside of Winnipeg could be based on a per capita formula. The RPAC estimates that the total budget of \$350,000 represents close to the minimum amount needed to sustain a viable organization. The basic elements covered by the Partnership

budget would be the salaries of an executive director, at least one other professional staff, an administrative support person, rental of office space and equipment, communications, and meeting costs. For additional projects and events, the Partnership would have to obtain outside funding.

To function well, it is important that the councils of the member municipalities be kept informed about activities and projects taking place on the regional level. The regional Partnership should publish a regular newsletter and circulate it to all municipal officials. A report from their regional representative, who would normally be the mayor or the reeve, ought to be a standing item on the agendas of individual municipal council. The Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments should make public an annual report on its activities, including audited financial statements. At least once a year, perhaps in conjunction with the release of the annual report, the Partnership should convene a general meeting of all the elected representatives from the sixteen councils. This occasion might be a daylong event involving leadership development opportunities such as reports from task forces and guest speakers. It is very important for effective two-way communication to exist between the municipalities and the regional Partnership if there is to be maximum understanding and support for regional efforts of various kinds.

As noted earlier, with the creation of the Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments, the current Capital Region Committee could be dissolved. The future of the other current regional organizations, the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region and the Association of Rural Municipalities, ought to

be determined by the membership of those organizations.

The proposed Partnership must be about more than municipalities and the provincial government learning to better work together. There must be a strong external focus to its efforts involving advocacy with the federal government and promotion of the Region. It would also entail significant involvement in events such as the Manitoba Capital Region Summit recommended in the next chapter of this report.

While recognizing that the proposed Partnership must ultimately be designed by the participating municipalities, The RPAC believes there is a persuasive case for the creation of such a Partnership. A Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments could be a crucial catalyst in building the positive regionalism that is at the centre of all of our recommendations.

The RPAC recommends that:

- 6.1 Following consultation with the current Manitoba Capital Region governments, the Government of Manitoba adopt legislation creating a Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments with representation from all Manitoba Capital Region governments, including the Government of Manitoba. The Partnership should be tasked with improving regional cooperation on planning issues. The City of Winnipeg and the Government of Manitoba should each have two representatives on the Partnership, all other Manitoba Capital Region governments should have one representative. The two Government of Manitoba representatives should be members of the provincial cabinet. There should be a six-member executive

drawn from the Partnership that has a maximum of two representatives each from the City of Winnipeg and the Government of Manitoba.