

Chapter Thirteen

Sustainability and protection of the land and the water base

The previous chapter examined changing patterns in the built environment in Manitoba's Capital Region and the sorts of policies required to ensure that growth be guided in ways that make the best use of existing investments and not undermine core areas of currently settled communities. As that chapter made clear, geographic influences on the location and patterns of settlement along the rivers near the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers have lost their force. Land-use and development since the coming of motor vehicles, though adjusted to old urban patterns, have felt few constraints other than those applied by corporate preferences, the decisions of Capital Region municipalities, and the location choices of individuals and families as to where they will live and work. We live in a region now defined by human desires and human behavior, such as the pull of Winnipeg as a centre of employment and services, a preference for country living, and a tolerance of daily travel in comfortable cars using inexpensive fuel. With exception of the threat of flood, we are only lightly controlled by natural phenomena. Yet

we live in a sensitive environmental setting that can be easily modified and easily compromised by human decisions.

The subject of this chapter is the tremendous impact that the growth and expansion of human habitation and industry can have on the natural environment. Throughout this report the RPAC has argued that the Region's social and economic future depends on the development of a regional consciousness and region-wide planning. It has argued that the creation of a Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments and the expansion of regional cooperation through tax and service sharing can play an important role in fostering such regional consciousness. This chapter makes a similar argument about the need for a regional approach to thinking about the environment. The chapter starts with a discussion of two resource sectors on which public debate and discussion is well developed—the future of regional farmland and protection for the Region's water resources—and concludes with a discussion of the need to develop a sustainable development plan for the Capital Region. A number of recommendations for

changes in land-use policy flow from this chapter—they are contained in the following chapter, which outlines the RPAC’s recommendations for strengthening Manitoba’s land-use and planning policies.

THE PRESERVATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE

Three thousand Capital Region farms operate on 1.18 million acres (476,865 hectares) or about 10 per cent of the total farmland in Manitoba. The quality of the farmland in the Capital Region is very good. Eighty per cent of the land in the Capital Region is Canada Lands Inventory Class 1, 2 or 3 for agricultural capability.

There is a growing concern that too much of this land is being withdrawn from production. At the RPAC meetings and hearings many presenters expressed concern for the preservation of agricultural land in the Capital Region. Development pressures and a changing agricultural sector have led to high numbers of subdivision applications, and ensuing land-use conflicts across Manitoba. The pressures to subdivide and convert land to non-agricultural uses are strongest in the Capital Region. From 1981 to 2000, 15,399.36 acres of agricultural land were converted to residential land. It has led to the creation of 2,899 rural residential lots (9.912 acres) and 591 farm residential lots (5.486 acres) (Information provided by Manitoba Agriculture and Food). Though the conversion of agricultural land to residential land through subdivision may not appear rapid or unmanageable, it must be remembered that the benefits of good husbandry, such as raising crops for food, extend indefinitely into the future, while any development that replaces the soil resource has a finite life.

Special protective care should be accorded to lands that are suitable for irrigation and agricultural use. Therefore development on agricultural land should proceed with caution.

It should also be noted that policies intended to direct urban growth in an efficient manner can come into conflict with policies intended to protect high-quality agricultural land. For example, a policy that seeks to ensure that growth is contiguous to existing built-over areas can direct development onto high-quality farmland.

There are numerous reasons for protecting agricultural land:

- There exists a world-wide need for agricultural production, creating a moral as well as an economic imperative to protect a finite resource.
- Localized sustainable models of production and consumption depend on local food production capability.
- The possibility that new technologies may make it possible to bring more land in the Capital Region into production.
- Lands in agricultural production contribute substantial environmental benefits to both urban and rural residents.

How we might protect agricultural land?

The most effective protection for agricultural land would be for farming to be a more profitable activity. Improving farm profitability raises policy issues that go beyond the scope of this Commission, but the point must be recognized. The variety of federal and provincial agricultural support programs represent an important policy tool for preserving Manitoba’s agricultural sector. There is

also an important role for the careful preparation, diligent review, and meticulous application of development plan policies and zoning by-laws. The Provincial Land Use Policies (PLUPs) anchor the preservation and protection of agricultural land upon the need to maintain an available base for present and future food production and agricultural diversification. The following chapter contains recommendations for the strengthening PLUPs and their ability to protect agricultural land. The issue of portioning the property tax assessment lands may also create an incentive to take land out of agricultural production.

Development pressures indicate that there may be a need to employ additional measures. To this end, it is worthwhile to briefly review the approach that is taken to protecting agricultural land in British Columbia and parts of the United States.

In British Columbia, a Land Reserve Commission (LRC) has a mandate to protect that province's agricultural base. The LRC regulates land use in the 4.7-million hectare Agricultural Land Reserve and works with various communities of interest to accommodate and support working farms and working forests on Reserve lands. The Commission provides advice on land use planning to local communities, adjudicates applications for the use of land in the Agricultural Land Reserve, and encourages farming to provide a basis for a sustainable economy and a secure source of food. It has broad powers to ensure that local plans do not conflict with *The Agricultural Land Reserve Act* and can investigate, hold hearings, levy fines, and seek court orders to ensure compliance with its orders.

In the United States, the 2002 *Farm Security and Rural Investment Act* earmarks \$1 billion for farmland protection. Much of this

fund goes to the purchase of conservation easements to compensate property owners in exchange for commitments to keep land in farming. Usually, the cash return to the farmer is the difference between the potential development value and the land's worth in agriculture. The legislation builds upon a long history of protection, frequently helped by federal funds that match state and county incentives. This is an approach that may have relevance for Manitoba.

One point that was emphasized at the RPAC's public hearings is that it is not helpful to talk in general terms about diminished agricultural activity in the Manitoba Capital Region. Instead it is necessary to take account of the differing patterns in each municipality. The development pressures on farmland are mainly felt in such municipalities as Springfield, while others such as Cartier and Macdonald are likely to remain rural in nature for the foreseeable future. Finally, there are other municipalities, such as East St. Paul, that can hardly be termed "rural" in character. Therefore an across the board approach to protecting farmland may not be appropriate.

Manitoba policy options

In the long run, one of the most effective ways of preserving farmland in the Capital Region may be through incentives to ease economic pressure on farmers. Development rights could be established as a property interest to be bought and sold. There is already a Manitoba precedent in *The Conservation Agreements Act*. Under the *Act* farmers can enter into agreements with a non-profit organization to accept some restrictions on land use—a common one would be an agreement not to drain a parcel of land. In exchange for this agreement, which is meant to

preserve wetlands and protect the environment, farmers generally receive some form of tax benefit.

In Manitoba, legislation provides classifications for various types of properties. When properties are farmed on a commercial basis and where market values of land exceed a productivity level of value, the property owner may apply for what is known as a Farm Use designation. This allows taxes to be levied on a property at less than current market rate. If the use of this property changes, the owner is then liable for repayment of tax savings for each year for which the taxes were levied or for the five years immediately preceding the year in which the change of use took place; whichever is the lesser period. *The Conservation Agreements Act* could be amended to include farmers who agree to give up their property development rights.

Rules can also be put in place to ensure that the subdivision of land is carried out in way that limits the loss of agricultural land. Regulations regarding the placement of permanent features (for example, buildings on cement foundations) can ensure that the major portion of a parcel of land can be used for intensive farming if the situation requires. It should not be forgotten that most of the world's population subsists on very small land holdings.

THE WATER BASE

Provincial water management planning focuses on watersheds, basins, and aquifers, few of which are contained wholly within the Capital Region's boundaries. As a major water user, the Region requires policies that are consistent with the strategies applied in a much wider area—at its most extensive, the Nelson River Basin. It is also true that the

needs of the Capital Region are part of wider provincial water planning and management.

Considerable attention has been applied recently to water management by the province. This has been accelerated by recent trends and events such as the deterioration of the water quality in Lake Winnipeg, the implications of climate change, boil water orders, and the water-related public health crises in Walkerton and North Battleford. The April 2003 discussion paper *Building a sustainable future: water—a proposed strategic plan for Manitoba* is a useful survey of the issues, referring to previous studies and consultations, describing current activity, and outlining what must be done to maintain a sustainable, high-quality water supply throughout Manitoba.

Groundwater

Drinking-water quality issues affect many communities and individual residences in Manitoba. There are several areas in Manitoba's Capital Region which are, or have recently been, on boil water orders, which means their untreated drinking water has deteriorated to the point of posing a health risk.

The recent report of Manitoba's Drinking Water Advisory Committee stated that maintaining water quality should be a principal consideration in any discussions of land-use planning. There are also concerns about the continued reliance on and the proliferation of private wells and septic fields in the Region.

The provincial government has recently announced a series of measures to further protect water supplies and Lake Winnipeg, such as the establishment of a Stewardship Board and new regulations to help maintain forests and vegetation along the Red and Assiniboine rivers. The Stewardship Board will help Manito-

bans identify further actions necessary to reduce nitrogen and phosphorous to pre-1970 levels in the lake by 13 per cent or more. Also proposed is a program to expand soil testing to ensure appropriate fertilizer application in both rural and urban settings. In April 2003 the government strengthened the sewage and septic field regulation that sets standards for the design and placement of such systems.

The cumulative impact of many small developments (one and two lot subdivisions for example) can have even greater impact on ground water than a single large development. The Province and the municipal governments are not doing an adequate job of monitoring the cumulative effects of numerous small developments on water supply and quality and on the environment generally. One clear necessity would be to better map, coordinate, and share information between and among departments and municipalities on well and septic field locations and sizes. This is a further argument for the Geographic Information System outlined in the previous chapter. The provincial government must enhance its system of measuring the cumulative impact of small developments.

The southwestern portion of the Capital Region—roughly the area south of the Assiniboine River and west of the Red River—has low quality (saline) groundwater. There has been evidence to suggest that this saline line has been moving east over the last number of years. The RPAC encourages the provincial government to take appropriate measures to ensure that the fresh/salt groundwater boundary remains relatively stable.

Septic fields are perhaps the most commonly used form of private sewage disposal in rural areas of the Capital Region. They were initially designed and intended for low-water

residential consumption, in areas of low-residential concentration, and on very large lots or acreages, particularly farms. In the Capital Region today there are thousands of homes using individual septic fields, in areas of relatively high density, many on small lots, some as small as a third of an acre. Homeowner water consumption rates often far exceed use the limits that the fields were designed to accommodate. When this overuse is combined with the heavy clay soils in much of the Capital Region, the result is septic field failures. Cases have been reported of raw sewage in people's yards and flowing in ditches.

At the RPAC's public hearings municipal officials and the public stated that Manitoba's private sewage disposal regulations were out-of-date and inadequate. The RPAC was also told that there is a poor system of private well inspection or monitoring. While the RPAC applauds the government's April 2003 amendment of the sewage and septic field regulation, there is a need for further amendment. In particular, the regulations should include provisions for mandatory testing and maintenance of septic and sewage systems. There is also a need for an effective enforcement plan.

Surface Drainage and Waterways

In older parts of Selkirk and Winnipeg storm runoff and sewage water are often combined in the same sewer system during periods of high volume runoff. After major storms this can result in raw sewage flowing into the Red River rather than being directed to the sewage treatment plant. While both cities are replacing these systems, the replacement programs should be accelerated, perhaps with the assistance of senior levels of government.

Land and resource uses that draw from surface waterways should not overtax those

resources. A fundamental principle for water management should be that natural in-stream flows of surface waterways should always be maintained at a minimum natural level in order to preserve ecosystems. The RPAC encourages the Government of Manitoba to ensure that adequate mitigation measures be applied when there is risk of surface water pollution from land and resource use.

Overland flooding occurs in some areas of the Capital Region, usually after a major storm, in wet periods, or from spring snow melt. In rural areas, many of the drainage systems were designed to assist agriculture and were not intended to protect large lot rural residential properties from flooding. Since people living in these residential enclaves often ask for better drainage than farmers require, there has been pressure put on governments to rectify drainage problems in built-up residential areas. The RPAC encourages the Government of Manitoba to ensure that drainage improvements are undertaken in way that does not unnecessarily increase downstream flooding and respects natural flora and fauna and useful biological processes.

Marshes and wetlands can store surface water for possible later use, recharge groundwater aquifers, cleanse water by reducing sediments, absorbing nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorous) pesticides, coliforms and other pathogens, providing habitat for wildlife and aquatic species, and reducing flooding and erosion. The practice of using existing wetlands and creating new marshes and natural low areas for assisting in drainage should be encouraged where appropriate.

The RPAC heard from a number of municipalities and the public about the poor condition of provincial drains and the time it takes

to obtain a license to work on local drains. This is a serious concern. The RPAC also acknowledges that the Province has marginally increased spending on drainage in the last three years but the problem still remains.

The RPAC encourages the provincial government to continue to increase resources to assist in rectifying the problems of maintaining provincial drains and processing applications for drainage work from agencies and individuals.

Conservation districts offer another way of addressing drainage issues. However, there are only three Conservation Districts in the Capital Region—the Cooks Creek Conservation District, the LaSalle-Redboine Conservation District, and the Seine-Rat Conservation District. The RPAC encourages municipalities in the Capital Region to consider establishing additional Conservation Districts or joining existing ones to assist with water and resource management issues. The proposed study on service sharing should include an investigation of the expansion of conservation districts.

Shorelands

Vegetation zones along waterways and wetlands, referred to as riparian buffers, protect shorelands against erosion, reduce turbidity, enhance the diversity of native biota, and reduce flooding. However, there are a number of instances where development in the Capital Region has occurred too close to the banks of rivers and creek, contributing to riverbank erosion and instability. In some cases, mitigative measures, which are very expensive, can be undertaken to enhance the natural stability and appearance of the bank area.

Public access to the shorelands of major water bodies should be maintained and enhanced where the terrain permits. Originally, the flat landscape of the prairie was broken only by the vegetation corridors following its waterways, which provided natural green corridors for wildlife. The re-establishment of these corridors through a linked system of parks, green spaces, scenic drives, and pathways along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and other waterways would enhance wildlife, and provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. This could increase related business and employment opportunities and provide additional flood and erosion protection. Such a development would serve as an enhancement of the existing Red River Greenway Partnership Initiative. (This initiative is intended to result in a long-term tourism development strategy for the Red River Corridor.)

The Government of Manitoba, the Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments, and other interested agencies should examine the feasibility of developing a linked system of parks, corridors, and green spaces along the waterways of the Capital Region. Organizations dedicated to the clean-up and rehabilitation of urban streambeds should be recognized and helped in their efforts.

From a direct water quality perspective, provincial programs, such as "Covering New Ground," which assists livestock producers with the development of off-stream watering and the repair of specific riparian areas on farms, should be examined for the effectiveness of their incentives in the Capital Region.

FLOODING

Flooding is a common and naturally occurring phenomenon in a large part of the Capital Region. The Red River Valley was once a large array of marshes, sloughs and shallow waterways. Settlers and governments drained the land to improve its productivity for crops. But a number of significant floods over the years, the most recent in 1997, are reminders that this is a major flood plain. All three levels of government have spent enormous amounts of time, money and resources on flood protection measures and flood compensation over the years.

Regional land-use policies adopted by the provincial government should address flood protection through appropriate development restrictions and enforcement in order to minimize human safety risks and property damage.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The preparation of a Capital Region sustainable development plan can unite the Region's governments and residents, assisting in the development of a sense of regional cooperation and understanding. Such a plan is, however a significant undertaking with important implications, the most important of which may be successful region building as envisaged in Chapter Four and an effective Partnership on the lines described in Chapter Six.

The 1987 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development first introduced the concept of sustainable development to popular debate. Sustainable development became defined as development that meets the needs of the present without com-

promising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Since 1998 Manitoba has had *The Sustainable Development Act* that is based on the following principles:

- Integration of Environmental and Economic Decisions
- Stewardship
- Shared responsibility and understanding
- Prevention
- Conservation and Enhancement
- Rehabilitation and Reclamation
- Global Responsibility

Issues of sustainability have also been central to a number of other important reviews and initiatives in Manitoba. Two of the most relevant of these to the Capital Region are the 1996 Manitoba Capital Region Strategy and the 1999 Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation (COSDI) report. The Capital Region Strategy provides a foundation for implementing sustainable development in the Region. The COSDI report gives guidance on the steps that need to be taken in creating a sustainable development plan and the steps required to ensure that the impacts of new developments are adequately assessed from a perspective of sustainability.

Background

Numerous arguments have been advanced for developing a sustainable development strategy for the Capital Region. These range from growing concerns about the international environment to the possibility that there are economic benefits to be reaped by those regions that can most quickly adapt and develop a more environmentally friendly

development policy. There are, for example, cost savings to be generated in the development of strategies that use less heat and conserve more water. Building code changes that recognize these benefits can save consumers money immediately and reduce the needs for long-term investment in additional water and energy distribution systems.

A variety of jurisdictions around the world have implemented sustainable development guidelines, such as sustainable zoning and green building guidelines, that provide these communities with a competitive advantage. One of Manitoba's strengths is the province's supply of clean water and renewable energy. Sustainable development approaches can allow Manitobans to both preserve and benefit from these natural advantages now and in the future.

There is a vast literature on sustainable development—its meaning and its translation into the practicalities of providing a reasonable existence for people in ways that are brought and remain within the capability of the world's resources to supply their needs.

Our Common Future, the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987 (otherwise known as the Brundtland Commission Report), sharply increased public awareness of humankind's penchant for utilizing the world's renewable resources at a pace beyond their ability to recover. Recent projections of the drawdown in oil reserves illustrate that the pool of non-renewable resources is also rapidly diminishing. Conservation, recycling, re-use and technical developments are important remedies. Alarmed by burgeoning population, diminishing bio-diversity, reduced agricultural lands, disappearing forests, and declining air and water purity, pessimists believe we may have substituted hope for substance, thereby

failing to ensure the future for our children. In conservation, there are massive “corrections” to be undertaken—as, for example, in improving water quality throughout Manitoba. In all these fields upon which human health and well-being depend, it is asserted that research is not proceeding in proportion to need. Under heavy pressure for job creation, growth, and competitive edge, governments blow hot and cold about sustainability, seeming to find it difficult to generate support for a precautionary approach to proposals about which the preservation of the environment and consequences to health are uncertain.

The RPAC takes a more hopeful view of what might happen in Manitoba and the Capital Region, if only because notions of sustainability are becoming an increasingly important part of public thinking. They have been included in some of the policies and rules that govern Manitobans’ behaviour towards the environment and those sectors of the economy that the government chooses to influence. Throughout the late 1980s, during which conservation strategies were being proposed by several provinces, and in the next decade, Manitoba was spurred by national concerns and international concerns. The Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers (the predecessor of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment and chaired at the time by Manitoba’s Minister of Environment) and its task force (see the National Task Force on Environment and Economy Report 1987) made 40 recommendations that encouraged industry and governments to develop and implement policies and actions aimed at integrating environmental and economic considerations into decision making. The Task Force also called for the creation of provincial round tables to help

guide Canada’s transition to sustainability. Canada created the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE), which remains very active in 2003. Manitoba created the Manitoba Round Table on the Environment and Economy (MRTEE). The Government of Manitoba issued its Sustainable Development Strategy after four years work by MRTEE (see *Sustainable Development Strategy for Manitoba*). Consultation during the report’s preparation was deep, as was the involvement of the public in the compilation of component strategies that complemented the overall provincial strategy. One such component was the Capital Region Strategy.

The Capital Region Strategy

The 1996 Manitoba Capital Region Strategy Report, *Partners for the Future*, which was prepared under the supervision of MRTEE and endorsed by the Capital Region Committee and the Government of Manitoba, identified the following goals and priority areas.

Seven goals:

- **To modify planning and management** mechanisms to ensure resources are developed and used in an environmentally sound and economically sustainable manner.
- **To protect natural habitats** and landscapes in the Capital Region, and protect critical natural resources.
- **To promote sustainable development** and diversification of the Capital Region.
- **To ensure the policies** for the Capital Region, Rural and Northern Manitoba are mutually supportive and result in improved and balanced provincial development so all Manitoba benefits.

- **To promote diverse programs** and initiatives that protect and improve the infrastructure of both the natural and built environment of the Capital Region.
- **To promote measures** to achieve the full human potential of the diverse population of the Capital Region in a sustainable manner.
- **To ensure the integration** of sustainable development principles and guidelines in local and provincial decision-making. *(Applying Manitoba's Capital Region Policies, p. 7)*

Ten policy areas of priority:

- 1. Working Partnerships and Regional Citizenship:** Partnerships will be used to improve governance, the environment, economy, and well-being of citizens. People will have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions affecting them. A sense of regional identity and pride will be developed.
- 2. Quality Environment/Sustainable Resources:** The Region's environment and resources will be managed in order to enhance the economy and ensure the well-being of people.
- 3. Directed Growth:** Growth will be directed to land able to sustain it. The costs of the growth will be fully paid for by the beneficiaries of the growth.
- 4. Sound Physical Infrastructure:** Infrastructure will be environmentally sound and will support regional and local sustainable economic development.
- 5. Profitable Niche:** The economic strengths of the province and Region will be marshalled and developed in order to provide long-term socio-economic security for people.

- 6. Capable, Flexible and Motivated Workforce:** Youth and workers will be prepared for employment and business opportunities that are available now and in the future, and encouraged to strive for excellence.
- 7. Knowledge and Technology:** Knowledge will be acquired, information disseminated, and technology advanced in support of provincial, regional, and municipal sustainable economic development and environmental management.
- 8. Fiscal Soundness:** A fiscal environment conducive to attracting sustainable economic development and enhancing the quality of life will be provided.
- 9. Social Equity:** People will have equal access to opportunities to participate in the community and work force. Self-reliance, increased independence and respect for others shall be fostered.
- 10. Quality of Life:** The quality of life in the Capital Region will be maintained and enhanced. *(Applying Manitoba's Capital Region Policies, p. 8)*

The objectives, policies and actions listed in the Capital Region Strategy are sound. It is best used as a reference document, a check on the process of implementation of sustainable development policies.

There are three reasons why the RPAC is optimistic about the feasibility of a sustainable development plan for the Capital Region. First, many of its residents contributed to the work of the Round Table. The Partnership and the Province can, once again, draw on this experience. Residents know the Region's resources, its environmental problems, and how people and institutions interact in this part of Manitoba. Secondly, all the component strategies have some bearing on planning in

the Capital Region. Thirdly, the Capital Region Strategy is a very direct guide to the debate on which policies can benefit the Region's future.

The Capital Region Strategy is formatted on objectives, policies, and necessary actions in "policy areas." The policy areas—Partnerships, Settlement, Economy, Environment and Resources, and Human Resources—overlap with discussion in earlier reports on the Region, with Provincial Land Use Policies, and with the chapters of this report. Because it indicates "how to" and identifies the institutions and agencies that should implement the various policies, it provides a valuable checklist for plan preparation. The *Strategy* should be updated, reviewed, and used.

A quote from Paul Selman captures the value of partnership, co-operation, and mutual support that the RPAC believes to be essential:

...sustainable development strategies are as much a journey as a specific destination and, in their implementation, process may be as important as product. (Selman, p. 289)

The Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation (COSDI)

The 1999 report on the Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation was the result of a provincially initiated multi-stakeholder consultation "to consider and make recommendations to government on how Manitoba can best implement Sustainable Development Principles and Guidelines into decision-making, including environmental management, licensing, land use planning and regulatory processes." (Consultation on Sus-

tainable Development Implementation, p. 5) Among the key COSDI recommendations were proposals to:

- Develop, adopt and implement province-wide sustainable development policies.
- Review the existing Sustainable Development Strategies to ensure they provide an integrated, comprehensive, understandable and current framework for implementing sustainable development.
- Require integrated sustainable development planning on a large area basis, such as watersheds.
- Implement the policies of large area plans, for those parts of Manitoba organized into municipalities, through mandatory development, provincial and public review and provincial approval of municipal or district sustainable development plans and their amendments.
- Allocate resources subject to the large area sustainable development plans, and/or through the effects assessment and review of significant resource allocations and developments — following the principle that good work which is up to date need not be done again.
- Require all municipalities to review and adopt development plans that reflect the components of sustainable development, and provide support to municipalities to implement such development plans.
- Include in the concept of effects assessment all sustainability factors such as environmental, economic, social, cultural and human health effects.
- Include a component in the effects assessment process that will examine the extent of planning and pre-licensing activities. Where planning and pre-licensing activities

clearly fulfill the effects assessment process and information requirements, there will be opportunity to credit those activities towards the assessment process. (Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation, p. 7)

The report advanced two major propositions. First, as outlined above, Manitoba requires integrated, sustainable development planning on a large area basis—COSDI specifically mentioned the Capital Region as one possible large area. The second proposition was that Manitoba should broaden the concept of project assessment from environmental impact assessment, as set out in *The Environment Act*, to effects assessment. Effects assessment includes the assessment and reviewed of all of the sustainability factors of a development. An effects assessment would include the assessment and review of a combination of any the following elements:

- a. purpose of the project;
- b. description of the project;
- c. assessment methodology and results of public consultation;
- d. an analysis of the alternatives to the project and alternative means for the project, in each case including the “do nothing” alternative;
- e. need (examined in connection to alternatives);
- f. description of the existing environment and potential zones of impact;
- g. description of the environmental effects;
- h. description of the social effects, including human health, cultural and heritage values;
- i. description of the economic effects;

- j. description of the mitigation measures;
- k. description of cumulative and interdependent effects;
- l. residual effects and their significance;
- m. follow-up plans;
- n. decommissioning; and
- o. project sustainability [note: a) analysis of the balance between the environmental/ecological, social, economic, cultural and human health benefits and impacts of the project, b) the indicators and methodology for performing such an analysis will need to be developed over time. (Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation, p. 25)

There is much in the COSDI report that is relevant to the way in which Manitoba strengthens the Capital Region. The recommendations on integrated large area planning and on effects assessment are central to any sustainable development strategy. There is already one large area planning exercise, as defined by the COSDI principles, underway in Manitoba, namely the East Side Plan, encompassing the geographic area east of Lake Winnipeg. The Government of Manitoba has also begun a revision of *The Environment Act*.

The COSDI proposals for effects assessment are a step beyond existing *Environment Act* requirements. The COSDI Core Group, which put the report together following consultation with a 60-member Advisory Committee, wanted a means to improve project specific decision-making. They sought improvements that coordinated input from all parties with an interest or stake in a project, and which covered a fuller range of potential environmental, economic, social, cultural, and human health inputs. This is not to say that *The*

Environment Act has served Manitoba poorly. Indeed, analysis of proposals and conditions of licenses often deal with more than the potential consequences to the physical environment. However, principles and guidelines of sustainable development, with their broad perspective, have entered the legal language (*The Sustainable Development Act*). COSDI tried to list what should be examined—i.e., what the proponent should present in an assessment document, what government should look for, and how the public should be engaged in discussing a proposal. The goal was to ensure that the license would be comprehensive and the proponent would address issues of sustainability. The process should reveal gaps and adjustments necessary to support the project over the long-term, or perhaps, to demonstrate potential unsustainability in concept, design, or operation.

This discussion is ongoing. As noted, *The Environment Act* is being reviewed. From the RPAC's perspective, assessment should begin at once of all new, specific major developments in the Capital Region. The thought is that each exercise will stimulate consideration of the "fit" of the project into the land-use plans in the Region and into the way its systems can accommodate or prove alien to the new development. Because effects assessment can be a tool for looking across internal boundaries—municipal, district, physiographic, etc.—it points the way to co-operation and aids the shaping of the sustainable development plan.

In summary

The RPAC recommends that the Government of Manitoba prepare a provincial policy statement dealing with sustainable development in the Capital Region. Such a statement

should be based upon the COSDI approach and would become a frame of reference for the work of district planning boards, municipalities, and conservation districts, while helping to ensure that provincial strategies, such as those applicable to soil and water, take the particular needs of the Region into account.

The RPAC sees an effective Partnership of Manitoba Capital Region Governments as being crucial for the effective development and implementation of such a statement. For this reason, time must be allowed for the Partnership to develop working relationships, experience, knowledge, and data. The creation of a sustainable development plan for the Capital Region should come at the initiative of the Partnership.

There is no reason to delay the use of effects assessment on all new, specific major developments in the Capital Region. Eventually, all new developments will be considered for licensing only if they are consistent with the sustainable development plan.

Much water has passed under the bridge since ideas on sustainable development were first expressed in the province. Time and resources were committed to developing strategies for many resource management sectors under provincial governance. The time is ripe for the Government of Manitoba to provide a coherent update on their status. The RPAC recommends that the Government of Manitoba should publish a status report on the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the Consultation on Sustainable Development Implementation, describing how the principles in this document have been integrated into policy, regulations, and financial and administrative decision-making.

