

Chapter Fifteen

Looking forward

This report calls upon governments in Manitoba's Capital Region, in collaboration with one another and in partnership with other organizations and individuals, to develop new and practical approaches towards a positive regionalism for the 21st century. There have been encouraging new developments within the Region, but the pace and the extent of regional activity needs to increase in order to promote economic opportunity, improve the quality of life, and to protect the environment for future generations.

Positive regionalism involves collaborative actions of regional benefit that cannot be taken as efficiently or effectively by the sixteen municipalities acting alone. But positive regionalism is about more than governments working together better. It must also involve the identification of opportunities and creative problem solving by all segments of the regional community. An open, consultative, responsive, and accountable process of region building will identify new ideas, promote greater understanding of contending interests and values, encourage cooperation, and build trust and confidence.

Regional planning is about choices and the accommodation of differences; how the process is conducted is as important as the plan itself.

The RPAC began its work in September 2001. The past two years have involved numerous public and private meetings, as well as many working sessions of the Committee as it drafted its Discussion Paper, Interim Report, and now this Final Report. For all members of the Committee, the process has been highly educational. We have come to know and understand the Region much better than when we first embarked on this journey of discovery. Hundreds of people have helped us to achieve this greater understanding of both the distinctive features, great strengths, and future opportunities of the Region. We wish again to acknowledge and sincerely thank all those organizations and individuals who shared their experience and ideas with us. You have enriched our understanding of the issues. Even when your opinions did not provide the basis for direct discussion or did not lead to a recommendation in this Report, they were important to helping us to under-

stand the regional context in more concrete, less abstract terms.

Committees appointed by governments to study so-called “problems” almost, by definition, have to spend more time discussing the complications and constraints than celebrating the accomplishments. The RPAC has tried to present a balanced picture of the past, present, and future of the Region. We regret that limitations of space and the endurance of our potential readers did not allow us to tell more success stories. There are many such stories that could be told. There is great strength, ingenuity, capability, and commitment within and among the sixteen governments that comprise the Capital Region. There are many features of the local planning systems that are not broken and therefore do not need to be fixed. What is needed to respond to changing circumstances are refinements and modernizations of the existing land-use planning system, not a complete overhaul of that system.

The RPAC was impressed with the dedication and commitment of the women and men who serve in elected office throughout the entire Capital Region. The occupation of elected politician is not viewed in as favourable public light as it once was. This is unfortunate because the municipal leaders we met clearly put the needs and interests of their citizens at the centre of everything they do. Their jobs are difficult and demanding. They recognize the need to accommodate different perspectives. To a much greater extent than is popularly assumed, they also recognize the interdependence among the communities that comprise the Region. They accept that the success of one municipality does not necessarily prevent other municipalities from realizing their aspirations. Unfortunately, it is the

perceived and real conflicts between and among communities that generate attention and public misunderstanding. Beyond a certain point, attempts to analyze who benefits and who pays for various types of regional developments and related government spending comes to a dead end. A “balance sheet” of “winners” and “losers” is not the way we need to think about the Region. Given past developments and anticipated trends, politicians and the communities they represent will be required even more to think and to act within a framework of positive regionalism.

The RPAC’s task, based upon consultations, was to provide advice and recommendations to the Government of Manitoba and its regional partners on future directions for Manitoba’s Capital Region. It was not the Committee’s job to resolve current issues within and among governments. However, the RPAC had to be aware of how past developments and current controversies set the context for future developments.

Most change involves keeping at least one foot in the past, while taking small steps into the future, parts of which are inherently unknowable. The RPAC has sought to identify a future destination and to provide a general road map on how to get there, but the detailed itinerary must appropriately be left in the hands of the elected provincial and municipal representatives. So, in a way, this report is the beginning of the journey, not the end. The RPAC believes that the real work begins as it submits its report. We have crafted a map towards regionalism with a purpose, based upon strength and commitment by both municipal and provincial governments, and with the involvement of all parts of the regional communities. Now the Committee encourages governments and

others to debate, adopt, and energetically pursue our recommendations.

Those recommendations are meant to be based on common sense and practical solutions. We examined approaches to growth management and land-use planning used in other jurisdictions but always came back to the question of the relevance of those approaches to the distinctive context of the Manitoba Capital Region. We have sought to present the pros and cons on various proposals so that, regardless of the fate in terms of adoption of our specific recommendations, there will be some lasting educational value in the analysis itself. We resisted being swept along by buzzwords and the hype surrounding so-called new approaches. We recognized the need for credibility and feasibility in our recommendations. Even if an approach used elsewhere is deemed to represent “best practice,” this does not mean that it would fit with the Manitoba situation, that it would be affordable, or that it would be politically feasible.

At our hearings we were told that past advisory committees and governments have too often over-promised and under-delivered. Realistic expectations of the benefits of reform need to be set to avoid deepening public disillusionment with the efforts of governments. There are limits to what governments, whether acting alone or in partnership with other sectors of society, can do to improve dramatically in the short term, the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their communities. There are much larger forces at work beyond the boundaries of the province that will greatly shape the future of the Manitoba Capital Region. On its own, better regional planning will not generate higher levels of economic prosperity and

social progress. Other jurisdictions are ahead of Manitoba in terms of developing and implementing strategies to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of their city regions to the knowledge-based industries and workforces of the future. With so many jurisdictions pursuing the same basic approaches, the advantages to a particular city region are to a great extent offset.

Recognizing these realities does not mean lapsing into pessimism and a “do-nothing” approach. Accepting the importance of economic regions and the potential detrimental effects of divided jurisdictions is the first step. Mobilizing support and commitment for regional goals is the second step. Working out the details of partnership arrangements and action plans is the third step. The fourth step is to ensure implementation and to sustain commitment.

The RPAC recognizes that this report comes at the end of a long lineup of previous reports dealing with various aspects of the Manitoba Capital Region— *The Winnipeg TransPlan 2010 Report* (1998), *The Capital Region Review Panel Final Report* (1999), *The Drinking Water Advisory Committee Report* (2000), *The Sustainable Livestock Development in Manitoba Report* (2000), the *Manitoba and Climate Change Report* (2001), and *The Consultation on Sustainable Development Initiative* (2001)—to name but a few. These reports constitute a legacy of analysis and recommendations for potential future use by governments. However, during our hearings we encountered a certain amount of fatigue and frustration with so many rounds of consultations and too little change to the dynamics and outcomes in different areas of public policy within the Capital Region. To respond

to this sort of cynicism and to encourage a process of debate we make one final recommendation. Within two years of the release of this report, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Manitoba and in consultation with the Capital Region municipalities, should prepare a status report on the actions taken to that point to implement the recommendations presented in this document. Acceptance of this recommendation will be a positive sign of the provincial government's commitment and willingness to be accountable, for the development of an ongoing agenda of positive regionalism for the 21st century.

The RPAC recommends that:

- 15.1 Within two years of the release of this report, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Manitoba and in consultation with the Manitoba Capital Region municipalities, should prepare a status report on the actions taken to that point to implement the recommendations presented in this document.