Neighbourhood Design Options Study

City of Saskatoon
Community Services Department
City Planning Branch
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Abstract

'Smart Growth' is a term recently coined in the United States to describe a significant trend underway now to improve the way American's build cities. There is a growing concern across North America about the state of our urban areas. The effects of poor urban planning, over many decades, is now being felt in many major U.S. cities which are facing major funding shortfalls, and criticism over unsustainable development practices.

In general, the United States has not practiced smart growth, and generally has not practiced effective urban planning. According to noted architect Andres Duany, the U.S. culture places a higher value on individual liberties, while Canada has placed priority on balancing individual freedoms with community values and the common good. As a result, most Canadian cities have placed a higher priority on sustainable and effective urban planning practices and done a better job of adopting and enforcing, what are known today as 'smart growth' principles. Saskatoon, in particular, stands out as a very well planned city with a compact and contiguous design, thanks in large part to a comprehensive Development Plan adopted in 1966. Residents, developers, community and government leaders can take pride in the fact that Saskatoon has a solid development strategy.

However, things can always be improved, and Saskatoon faces challenges to introduce more options for accommodating all forms of sustainable development, as a matter of practice, not as a matter of variance, discretion, or appeal.

The Neighbourhood Design Efficiency study (Project 1850) began in the summer of 1998, and was intended to identify ways to provide "alternatives to the standard, low-density suburban neighbourhood", including how to "provide a range of choices in new neighbourhood design options". A number of research initiatives were undertaken, culminating in the Neighbourhood Design Options Study (attached), which is the result of research, consultation and consideration of issues that affect the way neighbourhoods are designed, and how they operate over the long term.

The Design Options Study was undertaken with consideration of the growing concern in many cities in North America over increasing costs and the perceived fiscal, social and economic unsustainability of conventional development. This concern has led to looking for new ways to plan for growth to achieve defined goals and objectives. Saskatoon has, through diligent planning, avoided much of the worst aspects of sprawl-type development - but could face similar challenges in the future.

*The concept of "smart growth" is evolving as a key strategy to manage development and growth. Based on a vision of "what kind of city we want," **smart growth is a tool to assist in the decision making process**, particularly in terms of allocating public services and resources, and to monitor how well we are doing in terms of the outcomes of development. The "smart growth" movement originated in the United States in response to many instances of excessive sprawl usually associated with large metropolitan regions. As*

such, it shouldn't be assumed that Saskatoon has the same development policies and standards, or lack thereof, which could lead to the same results as observed in the U.S..

The Plan Saskatoon process and the resulting Development Plan and Zoning Bylaw established a solid smart growth vision for the shape of the future city and its neighbourhoods, but there may be gaps between that vision and current development practices that need to be addressed. Defining specific and measurable objectives for development and monitoring development outcomes is essential to achieving the desired goals. The Neighbourhood Design Options Study puts forward suggested recommendations towards new mechanisms for managing growth, and identifies new tools to help ensure that Saskatoon continues to build towards a high quality of life at minimal cost to present and future generations.

Executive Summary

There is a sense that the way North Americans have built cities might have worked in the post-war "baby-boom" years, but that it may no longer be able to sustain or support the continued development of low-density, segregated-use neighbourhoods that are fundamentally dependent on the automobile, relatively cheap gas, and a belief in an endless capacity of the environment to absorb the effects of human activity on the land. Some of the problems that have been linked to this "sprawl" style of development are: the gradual abandonment of older neighbourhoods; escalating infrastructure costs; physical sprawl; pollution; social and economic isolation; crime; lack of affordable housing and the seemingly endless demands of vehicular traffic.

While Saskatoon has, in large part due to adhering to some key principles of city planning, avoided the worst excesses of sprawl-style development, there are still some issues that need to be addressed. In particular, via the Plan Saskatoon process in 1998, the community identified the following factors for consideration:

- An aging population, smaller households and fewer families with children mean less need for one-unit dwellings and more need for other forms of housing.
- Neighbourhoods based primarily on low-density one-unit dwellings are not sustainable throughout their life cycle, and are less able to meet the needs of a diverse City.
- The increasing need for fiscal responsibility brings into question the sustainability of building and maintaining low-density urban infrastructure.
- There is a need to build residential communities that are less dependent on the car and more supportive of alternative means of transportation.
- Fewer new home purchasers are in need of elementary school services, bringing into question the need for schools in all neighbourhoods.
- The need to promote a compact and efficient city form that consumes less land and natural resources to accommodate urban growth.

This report summarizes the on-going work to address these issues; identifies the key areas of concern and brings forward possible strategies and options for the development of Saskatoon's neighbourhoods. The guiding principle for this report is that which was developed in the Plan Saskatoon process:

> *"…a fiscally, socially and environmentally sustainable community by: i) ensuring the efficient use of land and civic infrastructure; ii) maintaining a rational and effective system to manage urban growth; and iii) providing an appropriate distribution of important community facilities and services throughout the City."*

The report does not prescribe solutions, but points to specific areas where further policy or program development would have a positive impact on how we build our communities, now and for the future. The goal is to provide more choices for residents as to how and where they live and work, and to do so with minimal cost to both present and future generations. This report is about adding development options and tools, not about taking away current standards.

Some of the issues addressed include:

- Increased housing choice
- Dealing with higher densities
- Housing affordability
- Street layout and design, rear lanes
- Open space and park role and design
- Neighbourhood commercial uses
- The role of schools
- Balancing new growth with existing
- Urban forestry
- Stormwater management
- Traffic calming
- Sidewalks
- Transit
- Zoning for mixed uses

A number of key questions arise as we explore how to make the shift towards more sustainable practices. Is the market ready for change? Can the City affect other aspects of the development system to enable change? Where is the line between creating opportunities and social engineering? Can we just change regulations, or do we need to change how we work?

Comment has been made that the current policies and regulations in Saskatoon do not prohibit better design or more sustainable practices. While this appears to be true, it does not address why many development practices are not living up to the potential for improved outcomes.

One of the primary rationales for continuing with conventional development practices is that the low-density, segregated uses it generates are what consumers want. However, evidence suggests that the market has not always provided sufficient choice to potential residents. The market is often responding to other, unseen forces such as constraints within the financing system, which promotes adherence to convention, and tends to be less supportive of the complexities of mixed use and often higher density development. This is in spite of experience elsewhere which shows that consumers not only embrace developments based on more sustainable practices, they are prepared to pay a premium for them. Other evidence shows that the net cost of providing and maintaining neighbourhoods built to alternative standards is significantly lower, and thus more fiscally sustainable.

Regardless of market preferences, the fact is that the essential supports on which the conventional market has been built can no longer be counted on. These supports range from the public provision of schools in all neighbourhoods, to the continual increase in the capacity of the road system to handle the new traffic. How we build for the future demands new tools and new systems, and research into what makes a neighbourhood healthy for the long term – sustainable – points to the need to re-examine some of the methods we currently use.

It is particularly important to look beyond mere physical form – what the neighbourhood looks like – and to consider the whole of the development system. There is growing interest in the concept of "**Smart Growth**", which is a mechanism to ensure that planning and development decisions are made in the context of the social, physical and economic health of the region as a whole, rather than simply growth for growth's sake. It is a concept increasingly being used to guide planning and development decisions towards achieving identified goals and objectives – the vision of what kind of city we want.

Smart growth demands the crafting of such a vision, and codifies the goals of that vision in realistic and measurable objectives that are used to guide development decisions. Saskatoon has a good foundation to work from in this regard with the Plan Saskatoon process and the resulting Development Plan, and we continue to refine this vision via processes like the Local Area Plans underway in the core neighbourhoods. However, some elements of current practice may not fully enable achievement of that vision, primarily because they tend to be single issue focused and thus disconnected from other factors, processes and decisions. Part of the difficulty is that the outcomes of development are not often monitored, which tends to promote a focus on short-term results rather than long term sustainability.

The aim of this study is to identify ways to reduce the gap between vision and practice, and a series of recommendations are presented towards that goal, including:

1. That the City develop and adopt a "smart growth" definition in the Development Plan and other key policies that regulate the shape of the city.

2. That priorities and goals for development be identified in terms of measurable outcomes and applied via a rated assessment matrix to assist with development decisions and allocation of public resources, to provide:

    - Better balance between the development practices in new neighbourhoods and those in existing older neighbourhoods;
    - Increased and better integrated mixing of land uses and building forms;
    - The provision of a greater range of housing choices throughout a neighbourhood;
    - Design that encourages alternative transportation, including transit and improved "walkability";
    - Focusing neighbourhoods around a "village center";
    - Promoting greater interconnectivity within and between neighbourhoods and precincts;
    - Improved adaptability of uses over time to meet changing needs without the need to engage in a rezoning process.

3. That regulatory instruments be revised to focus on performance and outcomes of development rather than prescriptive controls.

Rather than limiting our options, these recommendations should allow greater adaptability and choice in our neighbourhoods, in keeping with an overall vision of the neighbourhood itself.

The most important response seems to be that the overall objectives of development need to be better defined, so that the performance of development can be assessed in whole, rather than allowing one isolated factor to become the primary driver of neighbourhood design.

It is important to add that while focused on new neighbourhoods, these approaches apply equally to existing neighbourhoods, and in fact it is essential that any smart growth strategy clearly address how older parts of the city are dealt with.

Plan Saskatoon and the Development Plan have set the direction in terms of the goals and objectives the community is asking for. The need now is to make sure that the tools we use to implement these goals are appropriate for the task. The most overlooked but perhaps most important tool is to establish measurable goals for development in terms of sustainability, and then to monitor how well we are doing to achieve those goals.

In the end, building neighbourhoods must be done in the context of the health and well-being of the community as a whole, and must address long-term considerations of fiscal, social and environmental sustainability. We cannot afford not to plan and build for the future, but we need to find ways to do it that make sense for the present.

Introduction

♦ Why look at new designs for new neighbourhoods?

Saskatoon continues to grow, both in physical size and in population. Since 1986, Saskatoon has been the 8th fastest growing city in Canada (Canada West Foundation, 2001). Relative to other Canadian cities, Saskatoon is a "compact, well-planned city" that has benefited from visionary Future Growth models in the past, and which are "directly responsible for the high level of quality of life Saskatonians enjoy". (City of Saskatoon Future Growth Study, 1999). The current Future Growth Study sets the general direction for how the City will grow to a population of 400,000 over the next 25 years. It is however the set of regulatory, technical and planning tools that will physically shape what that City looks like and how it functions.

The City's primary regulatory tool is the Development Plan 1998 (Bylaw 7799), which is intended to provide a framework for building:

> *"…a fiscally, socially and environmentally sustainable community by: i) ensuring the efficient use of land and civic infrastructure; ii) maintaining a rational and effective system to manage urban growth; and iii) providing an appropriate distribution of important community facilities and services throughout the City."*

The Development Plan sets policy for corporate programs, and, empowered under the authority of the Provincial Planning and Development Act 1983, guides Council "in making development decisions", by " identifying "factors relevant to the use and development of land", and identifying "critical problems and opportunities concerning the...social, environmental and economic effects of ...development" (P&D Act Section 51). This includes managing land use, utilities, conservation, municipal facilities, housing, the development of new communities, "the renewal, rehabilitation and improvement of neighbourhoods" and the "co-ordination of municipal programs..." (P&D Act Section 55).

City programs are enabled as a result of Development Plan policies. For example, the City's Development Plan mandates the location and characteristics of parks, recreation facilities, heritage, community infrastructure and amenities, and housing. Programs provided via these facilities fall under the jurisdiction of City Council and its decisions on what services and programs to provide.

The current Development Plan evolved from significant consultation with the public via the "Plan Saskatoon" process to determine what kind of city today's citizens are striving for. The majority of citizens are satisfied with the general layout of the city, and believe that Saskatoon's growth has been adequately managed over the last 20 years. However, concerns about the future were expressed, focused on a number of key issues:

- The sustainability of development and growth;
- The development of both new and existing neighbourhoods;
- Traffic issues and alternative modes of transportation; and
- Social development issues. (City of Saskatoon 1996)

Urban growth competing with rural land uses, New Jersey (Aitken and MacLean, 2001)

These comments echo a general concern across North America about the state of our urban areas. There is a growing sense that the way we are building our cities might have worked in the early post-war years, but that we can no longer sustain or support the continued development of low-density, segregated-use neighbourhoods. The North American neighbourhood is fundamentally dependent on the automobile, cheap gas, and based on a belief in an endless capacity of the environment to absorb the residues of human activity. Some of the problems that have been linked to this "sprawl" style of development are the general abandonment of older neighbourhoods and the central core, "escalating infrastructure costs, physical sprawl, pollution, social isolation, crime, lack of affordable housing and the seemingly endless demands of vehicular traffic" (Munro and Roseanu, 1995).

Current development practices are increasingly seen as being fiscally, environmentally and socially unsustainable, prompting a search for better ways of doing things. As the City of Calgary reported in 1995:

> *"unless ways are found of significantly reducing the costs of development, … the increasing share of revenues that have to be spent on building and maintaining infrastructure to support growth may well become a serious financial burden for us and for future generations. Further, if we fail to respond adequately to social needs and put off dealing with environmental issues, we should expect many of the social and environmental health problems that larger cities now contend with. Then the quality of life that (we) enjoy and value so much will be threatened". (City of Calgary, 1995)*

While Saskatoon has, in general, escaped the worst excesses of sprawl-style development, there are still some issues that need to be addressed. In particular, the Plan Saskatoon process identified the following factors for consideration:

- An aging population, smaller households and fewer families with children mean less need for one unit dwellings and more need for other forms of housing.

- Neighbourhoods based primarily on low density one unit dwellings are not sustainable through their population life cycle, and are less able to meet the needs of a diverse City population.

- The increasing need for fiscal responsibility brings into question the sustainability of building and maintaining low-density urban infrastructure.

- There is a need to build residential communities that are less dependent on the car and more supportive of alternative means of transportation.

- Fewer new home purchasers are in need of elementary school services, bringing into question the need for schools in all neighbourhoods.

- The need to promote a compact and efficient city form that consumes less land and natural resources to accommodate urban growth.

This list of concerns reflects the sense that the way we develop our communities is not keeping pace with the shifts in the demographic and social structures of our society. The impact of these and other trends, such as the on-going increase in urbanization evident throughout Saskatchewan and across Canada are showing up on our streets:

- Saskatoon's neighbourhoods are now competing with outlying towns such as Martensville and Warman, in part because the increasing costs of providing land and services is beginning to affect the kind of development opportunities that exist within the city;

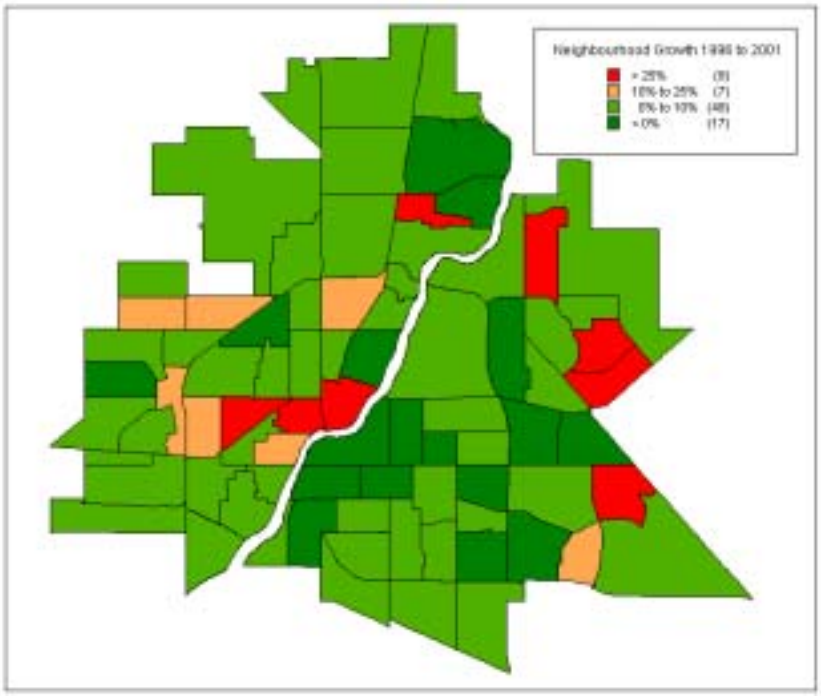
- Roads and river crossings are getting more and more congested, with growing demands for new infrastructure, while older infrastructure often remains unimproved;

- Some older neighbourhoods continue to see population growth with little or no addition to or improvement in services, infrastructure or even housing stock;

- There is a lack of affordable housing in some neighbourhoods, which is showing up as an increase in the concentration of poverty and economic segregation;

- Some neighbourhoods provide little or no commercial activity, while others absorb all of these needs for a wide area;

- Neighbourhoods themselves are getting bigger in population, and to some extent more self-contained, and thus are confronted with addressing a much different set of resident needs than older, typically more integrated neighbourhoods.



Many older neighbourhoods are growing in population at rates similar to new neighbourhoods, but without new development.

Across North America, a number of new ideas have been introduced that try to address these kinds of concerns, from reverting to the pre-war development patterns like those of Nutana and Riversdale, to moving towards entirely new ways of building, using ecologically friendly technologies and methods, including reducing the role of the car.

The United States, in particular, has been active in searching for and implementing new ways of planning and building communities, in part because of the more severe deterioration of their cities in the 1970's and 1980's. Ideas like "New Urbanism" and "Neo-Traditionalism" focus on the visual design of neighbourhoods, and tend to promote grid-streets and houses with front porches close to the street. "Smart Growth" looks at mechanisms to ensure that planning decisions are made in the context of the health of the region as a whole, rather than simply growth for growth's sake.

Rather than proposing a single model for future development, this report focuses on specific elements of neighbourhood planning, starting with an overview of the overall impact of conventional development practices, and moving to specific factors such as increased density, increasing housing choice, and the provision of parks and open space. Increased environmental, social and fiscal sustainability is a theme that runs throughout the report. Other issues considered include the role of the market; consumer preference and choice; the impact financing has on urban form; and the impact of the scale of development and its outcomes. The goal is to provide a more holistic understanding of how these factors relate to each other, and how they relate to the Saskatoon context, in order to facilitate a "made in Saskatoon" solution.

Willowgrove and Hampton Village

Two new neighbourhood developments – Willowgrove and Hampton Village – are currently in the early development stages, and are demonstrating more sustainable practices, in part due to changing market demands. These neighbourhoods are introducing a more fine-grained mix of housing types, more integrated parks and open spaces along with more natural handling of stormwater run-off. Willowgrove also introduces a Community Center concept to address the need for a school, as well as "Village Centre" that brings together the more dense housing forms to support and be supported by access to local amenities including retail and small office uses, centered on a Village Square that provides a sense of place to this new community. These plans represent a significant change in the way we understand our neighbourhoods and what outcomes we expect from development.

In all of these discussions, much emphasis is placed on the built form, for the simple reason that the form of the neighbourhood and its buildings affects its function – how people use and live in the neighbourhood.

Plan Saskatoon and the Development Plan have set the direction in terms of the goals and objectives the community is asking for. The need now is to make sure that the tools we use to implement these goals are appropriate for the task.

Smart Growth

♦ What is Smart Growth?

"Smart growth" is a concept that continues to evolve in North America in response to concerns over the fiscal, social and environmental sustainability of conventional development practices. Smart growth recognizes connections between development and quality of life, and addresses the underlying systemic factors that influence where, how and why development occurs. Spurring the smart growth movement are demographic shifts, a strong environmental ethic, increased fiscal concerns, and more a sophisticated

Sprawl development pattern, Baltimore (Aitken and MacLean, 2001)
(Smart Growth Network, 2000)

understanding of growth.

As the Government of Ontario says:

> *"You should be interested in Smart Growth because it deals with some of the most fundamental parts of your life: your community, your environment and, in some cases, your livelihood. Decisions we make today become legacies 10, 20 and 30 years from now. We're talking about our future and that of our children." (Ontario Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2001).*

Principles of Smart Growth
♦ Mix land uses.
♦ Take advantage of compact building design.
♦ Create housing opportunities and choices.
♦ Create walkable communities.
♦ Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
♦ Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
♦ Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.
♦ Provide a variety of transportation choices.
♦ Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective.
♦ Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

The features that constitute smart growth for a community vary from place to place. In general, smart growth considers not only how new development occurs, but the overall context for development, including the health and sustainability of existing neighbourhoods.

Smart growth ordinances are generally based on and support more traditional development standards in terms of land use, streets, etc., to try to even out the balance between old and new. Smart growth also creates a context for development whereby the pressure for more physical growth can be evaluated against redevelopment of existing urban areas. An often-cited example of smart growth practices is to deliberately allocate a specific portion of civic spending to support central and core neighbourhoods, while respecting the demand for new suburban development.

Smart growth is transit and pedestrian oriented, and promotes a greater mix of housing, commercial and retail uses. It also aims to preserve open space and other environmental amenities. Specific models for development have evolved that attempt to codify smart growth principles, ranging from the self-explanatory Transit-Oriented (TOD) or Pedestrian-Oriented Development (POD) guidelines, to neo-traditionalism and new urbanism, which attempt to specify how development should occur.

Most cities that have formally adopted smart growth practices do so by adopting definitions of "smart growth" in their governing ordinances:

> *Smart neighbourhoods are relatively self-contained communities with a compact mix of residential, commercial, employment/office, and civic land uses and range of housing choices, with a design that fosters pedestrian and bicycle activity, public safety, environmental protection, long-term investment, efficient use of infrastructure, and efficient provision of public services". (Maryland) (Hirschhorn and Souza, 2001)*

Adherence to smart growth principles is facilitated in part by revising the development approvals process. For example, producing a **Smart Growth Criteria Matrix** that provides measurable standards that any new development must meet, based on a weighted point system, with approvals subject to achieving a specified score, is one way to measure Smart Growth development. (City of Austin, 2000) [See Appendix and Section 10 – Development Systems]

"Successful communities do tend to have one thing in common--a vision of where they want to go and of what things they value in their community--and their plans for development reflect these values." (Smart Growth Network, 2001) In this regard, the Plan Saskatoon report is clearly a "smart growth" process and document. The *Development Plan 1998* (Bylaw 7799) that resulted from Plan Saskatoon sets the fundamental guidelines for how development should occur. Other tools, such as the Zoning Bylaw, Subdivision Bylaw and Engineering Standards are the mechanisms by which the goals of Plan Saskatoon are to be realized, in the context of the financing and building systems in which development occurs. The question is whether the current set of tools is able to help us achieve the vision of Plan Saskatoon, or whether additional tools are needed.

Neo-Traditionalism

The perception of traditional, "inner-city" neighbourhoods as high-quality and desirable places to live in has led many cities to attempt to codify the principles behind those neighbourhoods in order to guide the development of new neighbourhoods.

Neotraditionalism, or neotraditional planning, is modeled on pre-World War II development patterns, and represents an attempt to find solutions to some of the problems associated with post-war suburban development patterns. It defines a specific model for

Characteristics of Neo-Traditional Development
♦ Mixed use core within walking distance of residents.
♦ Neighbourhoods focused on employment and civic centers.
♦ Grid street that provide multiple paths for drivers and pedestrians.
♦ Narrow streets with sidewalks and lanes behind homes.
♦ Housing for different income levels integrated throughout neighbourhood.
♦ Higher housing densities and narrower lots.
♦ Streets that are social spaces as well as for transportation.
♦ Common open spaces, such as a village green.
♦ Distinct architecture modeled on the region's vernacular.
♦ Creation of an identifiable sense of community.

(Berman, 1996)

development that is in keeping with smart growth principles, but overlays a particular kind of aesthetic that starts to direct how neighbourhoods should both look and function.

Often equated with New Urbanism, Neo-traditionalism is sometimes criticized as being too simplistic an approach to the complex issues underlying how and why new neighbourhoods are developed:

> *"Neotraditionalism … revolves around the false belief that the design of older neighborhoods and cities can simply be transferred to the suburbs without copying the underlying transportation systems necessitated by plans based around the pedestrian… (comparing) historic cities, such as Georgetown, Charleston, and Savannah, to various non-descript suburbs in Arizona, California, and Florida … is like comparing an eighteenth-century clipper ship to a twentieth-century container ship." (Marshall, 2001)*

Difficulties faced by proponents of neo-traditionalism include inadequate access to financing, due to perceptions of risk on the part of financial institutions, and the inertia of working with regulations and codes that were developed primarily to get away from the perceived "congestion" and squalor of traditional neighbourhoods.

New Urbanism

New Urbanism is a somewhat poorly defined term that describes a particular approach to neo-traditionalism, but one that appears to have become more focused on the architectural characteristics of neighbourhood design. In most cases, such as McKenzie Towne in Calgary, the term New Urbanism is applied more as a marketing term to distinguish the way the development looks. At the extreme, New Urbanist developers set strict design controls, including defining the kinds and colours of materials used for different kinds of buildings, and other site design guidelines. New Urbanism continues to be adopted by private developers across the country, but the model continues to be criticized as simply better looking sprawl:

> *"There are now several dozen of these (new urbanist developments) around the country; in essence, conventional suburban subdivisions draped in the clothing of urbanism. This means gridded streets, front porches, smaller set backs, and so forth. But they remain isolated developments, sitting off main highways, linked by necessity to the local shopping mall and defined by the automobile. They function pretty much like any other subdivision." (Marshall, 2001).*

Sustainability

Principles of Community Sustainability
♦ Different building types and uses are located in the same neighbourhood and on the same street.
♦ Buildings, streets and open spaces work together to create socially friendly spaces.
♦ Transit and shops should be within a five-minute walking distance to all homes.
♦ Street systems are interconnected rather than segregated.
♦ Infrastructure is lighter, greener, cheaper and "smarter".
♦ Development works with the environment rather than against it, e.g., natural drainage systems.

(Condon, 2000)

The concern underlying smart growth and specific new development models is to try to achieve greater fiscal, social and environmental sustainability. Primarily, this is in response to the conclusions by some that conventional development practices are inherently unsustainable, for a number of reasons as discussed earlier.

The concept of the "Integrated Community" is being promoted by some researchers as the key to sustainability, in that greater social and economic diversity is essential to create a healthy community, and that the physical form of community needs to support and encourage such diversity rather than constraint it. For example, sustainable neighbourhoods are able to adapt to demographic and economic shifts because they provide a richer variety of housing options and opportunities than single-use neighbourhoods (CMHC 1997b).

Smart growth is, by definition, primarily concerned with sustainability, and addresses not just new development but the need to support existing communities. While often credited as being more sustainable forms of development, new urbanism and neo-traditionalism do not by themselves necessarily result in more sustainable communities. (McCarter, 1998). The problem is that these models are being applied without addressing the underlying systems that support conventional development practices. The implementation of, often times, excessive engineering standards applied to roads and infrastructure, and the disproportionate segregation of uses inherent in current zoning and financing practices have resulted in sprawl. The systems that resulted in sprawl need to be addressed, not just the appearance. In this context, simply changing the road design standards and encouraging more mixed use development will not, in and of itself, lead to greater sustainability without also addressing the way development is financed, serviced and provided with social and cultural amenities.

In the end, sustainability is whatever we define it to be, but there are some key issues to address that directly relate to the way we build all of our neighbourhoods.

	A Less Sustainable Community	A More Sustainable Community
Fiscal	- High development costs - High infrastructure costs - High maintenance costs - High operating costs	- Lower costs through: - More compact urban form - Better utilization of services - Less infrastructure
Social	- Little sense of community, belonging or neighbourliness - Lack of housing choice excludes certain household types and lifestyles - Design of public areas discourages walking and socializing - Few goods and services provided within community - Rigid separation of uses - Car essential	- Strong sense of belonging to a community, vibrant neighbourhood life - Wide housing choice catering to many household types and lifestyles - Public areas encourage walking and attract socializing - Most routine shopping needs met within community - Some mix of uses, including employment - Need for car reduced
Environmental	- Inefficient use of land - High level of air pollution through dependency on cars - Community design promotes excessive use of water, energy and other resources - No protection of environmentally sensitive areas	- More efficient use of land - Reduced air pollution through reduced vehicle trips - Community design promotes lifestyles where consumption and waste can be reduced and conservation encouraged - Significant environmentally sensitive areas are protected and integrated into the regional open space system

Adapted from "Sustainable Suburbs Study: Creating More Fiscally, Socially and Environmentally Sustainable Communities", by the City of Calgary Planning and Building Department, 1995.

Urban Sprawl

Urban sprawl is the term often used to describe the rapid suburban growth of most urban centers in North America. Sprawl is characterized by pockets of disconnected "leap-frog" development within a city, with a predominance of low-density single-family houses, and sharply segregated alternative uses such as multi-family dwellings, shopping and parks.

In communities across North America, there is a growing concern that this pattern of development is no longer in the long-term interest of our cities, existing suburbs, small towns, rural communities, or wilderness areas. Though supportive of growth, communities are questioning the economic costs of abandoning infrastructure in the city, only to rebuild it further out, and polluting the air of an entire region by driving farther to get places (Anderson, 1998).

Current conventions in neighbourhood development are characterized by:

- Distinct land use separations and often single use blocks and/or parcels of land - "pods";

- A predominance of low-density single-family houses, with sharply segregated alternative uses such as multi-family dwellings;
- Highly differentiated and poorly interconnected streets, ranging from curving and cul-de-sac'd local streets to collectors and major arterials;
- Limited transportation choices and transportation congestion;
- Alienation, economic segregation and social exclusion;
- Lack of diversity in the neighbourhood population;
- A lack of housing choices and unaffordable housing; and
- Detrimental environmental impacts, such as pollution, loss of farmland, and loss of wildlife habitat.

The opposite to sprawl is considered to be the generally higher-density, mixed use development that occurred before World War II, typified by grid streets, a mix of housing forms, styles and uses, and the inclusion of neighbourhood amenities such as shopping within walking distance of most homes. Unfortunately, most of these characteristics have become prohibited under current development regulations, even as the fiscal, social and environmental sustainability of new development practices are coming into question.

Sprawl is of course a very complex issue, with advocates for and against status quo. Advocates remind us that "sprawl is caused by affluence and population growth, and which of these, exactly, do we propose to prohibit?" (Hayward, 2000). Many people suggest that the low-density, car oriented development most associated with sprawl is simply a case of the market responding to consumer demands – people want large houses on large lots, and society's job is to cater to that demand. Others suggest that sprawl is actually good for the environment as compared to the intense impact that high-density development has on their immediate ecological and social systems (Gordon and Richardson, 1997).

On the opposing side are those who point to the fact that there are a number of systemic reasons that sprawl is enabled to continue, including direct and indirect public subsidy. They suggest that there really is little choice in the market for those who might prefer alternative forms of development. In fact, where more choice is available, homes in the non-sprawl "alternative" developments typically command higher prices than similar homes in conventional neighbourhoods, which suggests that perhaps that the market has not fully responded to consumer preferences in the past. (Frankel, 2001, and others)

Sprawl versus Growth

It is important to distinguish between sprawl and growth. Sprawl is a way of describing how many urban centers are currently expanding as a result of growth, but growth can and does occur without sprawl. An example is that the population of our lowest income neighbourhoods expanded 9 times faster than the city as a whole between 1996 and 2001 (27% compared to 3%), yet all of that growth was achieved (inappropriately?) without any increase in housing stock, and little improvement in existing infrastructure or services. The goal is to achieve more balance between neighbourhoods and more sustainability in the way our City is growing.

It is certain that the current development system favours the continuation of lower-density development, from the standards applied to preparing new land for development to the way development is financed. Builders attempting to follow non-conventional approaches like neo-traditional or new urbanism often find that their access to financing is severely curtailed, and that many existing regulations, from zoning and building codes to engineering standards, do not easily accommodate different ways of doing things.

Regardless, there is general agreement that some aspects of conventional development practices do need to change, even if just to respond to changing consumer preferences as the baby boom begins to move on from the family-focused home.

The question is, does Saskatoon need to worry about sprawl? A number of observers have commented that the explanations for sprawl in the United States, namely the flight from the inner city to the suburbs, do not apply to Canadian cities, which tend to continue to have relatively healthy inner-cities (Filion, 1992).

However, these studies are primarily concerned with larger urban centers such as Toronto and Vancouver, which continued to attract residents to their downtown neighbourhoods when US cities were being abandoned. Western, and particularly Prairie cities in Canada seem to be showing development patterns very similar to many American cities, such as declining socio-economic conditions in the inner-city and ever-continuing growth at the city's edge. One need only to look to Winnipeg, with it's mostly vacant core area neighbourhoods, where over the past 10 years property values dropped from an average of $40,000 to $20,000. Even Regina has a significant inventory of vacant lots in some of its core neighbourhoods, and stagnant if not declining property values in these areas.

So far, Saskatoon has escaped the worst of these effects, but there are signs that sprawl-type issues are with us. For example, the recent report on future planning for the South Sector of the Saskatoon Planning District pointed out that between 1966 and 1996, Saskatoon experienced the 8th fastest rate of growth (89%) of Canadian cities. More important is that in 1966, Saskatoon housed 100% of its Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) population in the urban core and urban fringe area. In 1996, only 88.4% of the population was within the urban area, with the remaining 11.6% living in rural communities within the CMA. This shift in population to exurban areas was greater than

that of either Calgary or Winnipeg. As noted in the report, this has significant implications for growth management (Crosby Hanna & Associates, 2001).

Perhaps the main point to be made is that Saskatoon needs to start paying attention to how we grow before problems arise. In fact, issues common to sprawling communities are already apparent, including:

- the increasing difficulty in paying for new or maintaining existing roads, schools sewers and other public infrastructure;
- the rising cost of servicing land for new development;
- increased congestion on major roads;
- relatively decreased investment in older neighbourhoods; and
- increased economic segregation between high-income and low income residents and neighbourhoods.

Conventional & Traditional Development

Since sprawl includes the connotation of uncontrolled growth, this report will substitute the term "**conventional development**" to describe the development standards that have prevailed across North America since the 1970's. Neighbourhoods in Saskatoon that demonstrate this kind of development style include Briarwood, Erindale, Arbor Creek and Lakeridge. The term "**traditional development**" will be used to describe the pre-war style of development visible in neighbourhoods such as Nutana, City Park, Riversdale and Caswell Hill.

Neighbourhood development styles in Saskatoon

Neighbourhood	Number	Population	% Population	No. Units	Average Density
Conventional	25	98,551	52%	41,007	10.88
Traditional	21	68,919	36%	35,532	13.63
Blend	7	21,509	11%	8,466	9.50

(1996 Neighbourhood Profiles)

Saskatoon may not be experiencing sprawl in the literal sense of discontinuous, leap-frog development, but is experiencing other aspects, including continued decentralization of the urban fabric; relatively low-density development in new neighbourhoods, with strict segregation of uses (e.g., multi-unit versus single-family homes); increasing costs for provision and maintenance of services, including roads and schools; and economic segregation and increasing concentrations of poverty coupled with minimal reinvestment into many older neighbourhoods. New models for development such as New Urbanism may have much to teach us, but Saskatoon is a unique place and needs to find unique solutions.

Saskatoon has taken some important steps towards improved practices, including new design standards for the proposed Willowgrove neighbourhood that introduce features such as a "village center", interconnected parks and open spaces, more appropriate

clustering of higher density housing and greater mixing of housing forms and uses. The City has been a pro-active leader in working with the community to address some of the need for affordable housing, and has programs in place to attract residential development to the downtown area to support its key role in the regional economy. The on-going Local Area Planning process is enabling core neighbourhoods to shape and implement their vision of their neighbourhoods, in the context of working towards a healthy community and high quality of life.

Establishing a Baseline for New Neighbourhoods

A number of issues still need to be addressed. For example, there remains some imbalance between the kind of development standards that apply to new neighbourhoods compared to those that exist in older, traditional neighbourhoods. One option would be to adopt a baseline set of standards that reflect and in fact allow the continuation of street layouts, design, setbacks, building code standards and mix of uses common to traditional neighbourhoods. This would not affect the ability of developers of new neighbourhoods to adopt "higher" standards, but would open up the possibility of greater choice, while both protecting and upholding the standards that prevail in the majority Saskatoon's neighbourhoods.

Establishing a common baseline for all neighbourhoods would also allow better understanding of the cost implications (positive and negative) of applying standards in excess of the baseline, and thus allow for better and more informed decisions in and by the marketplace.

More importantly, the vision and goals of Plan Saskatoon and the Development Plan may need to be translated to defined objectives by which development decisions can be assessed. This approach provides greater flexibility within the system, and allows developers to respond to market demands in a variety of ways. It allows cities to make better decisions about when and where public amenities such as parks, schools, transit and other facilities will be provided. In general terms, developments that more closely support the City's identified smart growth objectives will tend to have more access to public amenities, while those that do not are more likely to have to fund such facilities on their own.

Conclusions

- **Creating the tools for change**

A recent planning journal carried the headline "Change is Here – Learn to Live With It". (Gruen, 2001). For a variety of reasons, the assumptions, supports and mechanisms that currently shape our new neighbourhoods are being confronted with change. New tools and new ways of working are needed to deal with change, and to ensure that we can continue and improve the high quality of life that Saskatoon's residents currently enjoy.

A number of questions arise as we explore how to make the shift towards more sustainable practices. Is the market ready for change? Can the City affect other aspects of the development system to enable change? Where is the line between creating opportunities for alternatives and social engineering? Can we just change regulations, or do we need to change how we work?

While certainly not offering any definitive answers to these and other questions, this report has attempted to outline the issues in terms of how they inter-relate and how change might in fact be facilitated and supported. The key points are:

- Current development practices are imbalanced, and have largely been able to ignore the outcomes and effects of development, in part by shifting some of the costs to other areas of the public economy. For example, public social housing programs were developed in the 1960's and 70's to house people who could not afford to live in the communities we were creating. The need for these programs was a direct result of public policy (mortgage insurance, low-cost land, funding for new schools and roads at the expense of older infrastructure) that favoured the large-scale development of low-density single-family neighbourhoods that many people could not (and cannot) afford.

- The various components of day-to-day living have become rigidly separated, not only between major uses such as residential, commercial, institutional and recreational, but also within those use categories, for example the geographic separation between multi-unit and single-unit dwellings. The outcomes include neighbourhoods that are fragmented into pockets of activity; communities that are not adaptable to changing needs and thus not sustainable through their population life-cycle; and increased economic and geographic segregation within the city as a whole.

- The components of the development system have themselves become fragmented, with each interest operating largely independently from others. For example, the design and provision of streets and roads became fixated on the efficiency of traffic movements, to the point where the ability to move pedestrians around neighbourhoods or even to plant trees on streets became secondary.

A more sustainable development system would address the following issues:

- Neighbourhoods are complex systems that need to adapt to and support a variety of human uses, from lifestyle cycles and choices, to work, shopping and leisure, and cannot be adequately addressed with piecemeal policies or programs.

- Both the immediate and long-term costs of development need to be accounted for, including recognition of social and environmental costs and outcomes.

- The system would introduce balance between the existing built community and any additions to it, including being more inclusive of a wider range of households and lifestyles, and more integrated approach to the provision of services and amenities throughout the life of the neighbourhood.

The question that arises from this discussion is what does this mean for the development system – the set of standards, regulations and practices that ultimately shape our neighbourhoods, intentionally or otherwise.

Comment has been made that the current policies and regulations in Saskatoon do not prohibit better design or more sustainable practices. While this appears to be true, it does not address why many development practices are not living up to the potential for improved outcomes.

The most important response seems to be that the overall objectives of development need to be better defined, so that the performance of development can be assessed in whole, rather than allowing one isolated factor to become the primary driver of neighbourhood design.

"Smart growth" is a concept increasingly being used to guide planning and development decisions towards more sustainable practices. Smart growth demands the crafting of a shared vision of how a community wants to grow, and codifies the goals of that vision in realistic, measurable and enforceable standards that are used to guide development decisions.

This approach requires flexibility and introduces greater choice into the system, because there can be multiple ways of achieving desired objectives. This process has been adopted by other cities in North America, with the best example being Austin, Texas, which assesses proposed developments against a "smart growth" matrix to determine the level of public infrastructure that will be applied. This approach provides flexibility within a defined system, and allows developers to respond to market demands in a variety of ways. It allows cities to make better decisions about when and where public amenities such as parks, schools, transit and other facilities will be provided.

Saskatoon has a good foundation to work from in this regard with the Plan Saskatoon process and the resulting Development Plan, and we continue to refine this vision via

processes like the Local Area Plans underway in the core neighbourhoods. However, more work is required to turn that vision into defined and measurable objectives.

Qualitative elements are just as (if not more) important than quantitative elements. For example, increasing densities can be done by simply building more apartment blocks but the way in which these are designed and positioned in the neighbourhood will have a long and lasting effect on its social and economic well being. Not only must individual neighbourhoods be designed efficiently, the linkages between these neighbourhoods and how they relate to each other are equally important.

It is important to add that while focused on new neighbourhoods, these approaches apply equally to existing neighbourhoods, and it is essential that any smart growth strategy clearly addresses how older parts of the city are dealt with. This may include defining baseline standards that work for all neighbourhoods in the City, old and new, so that the costs and benefits of differing development designs are more transparent.

We also need new flexibility in the terminology we use to describe things such as "parks", "streets" and even "housing". Rather than limiting our options, policies for developing these kinds of features should allow greater variety and choice in what and how our neighbourhoods are developed and redeveloped, in keeping with an overall vision of the neighbourhood itself.

Finally, the need to look at the whole of the development system when considering revised approaches cannot be overstated. For example, a number of commentators have pointed to the impact that the way development charges are assessed is critical to the choices developers make. Careful consideration of development charges could be a powerful tool for achieving desired development goals.

To summarize, the building of neighbourhoods, new and old, must be done in the context of the health and well-being of the community as a whole, and must address long-term considerations of fiscal, social and environmental sustainability. We cannot afford not to plan and build for the future, but we need to find ways to do it that make sense for the present.

To that end, this report recommends:

- That the City develop and adopt a "smart growth" definition in the Development Plan and other key policies that regulate the shape of the city.
- That priorities and goals for development be identified in terms of measurable outcomes and applied via a rated assessment matrix to assist with development decisions and allocation of public resources, to provide:
    - Better balance between the development practices in new neighbourhoods and those in existing older neighbourhoods;
    - Increased and better integrated mixing of land uses and building forms;

  - The provision of a greater range of housing choices throughout a neighbourhood;
  - Design that encourages alternative transportation, including transit and improved “walkability”;
  - Focusing neighbourhoods on a “village center”;
  - Promoting greater interconnectivity with and between neighbourhoods and precincts;
  - Improved adaptability of uses over time to meet changing needs without the need to rezone.
- That regulatory instruments be revised to focus on performance and outcomes of development rather than prescriptive controls.

Rather than limiting our options, these recommendations should allow greater adaptability and choice in our neighbourhoods, in keeping with an overall vision of “what kind of City we want.”

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