

Improving the Interface between Urban Municipalities and Aboriginal Communities

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Résumé

La façon dont les municipalités urbaines comprennent et fonctionnent dans le contexte des communautés autochtones, leurs aspirations et leurs besoins vont avoir un effet sur les développements urbains futurs, sur leurs aspects physiques, sociales, économiques et les secteurs culturels. Il est essentiel d'avoir un excellent aménagement pour aider et rendre réelle les aspirations communautaires autochtones. Basé selon les recherches académiques et leurs collaborateurs, les municipalités et la communauté autochtone professionnelle et leurs partenaires financiers dans sept villes, cinq priorités ont été identifiées afin d'apporter des améliorations entre les municipalités urbaines et les communautés autochtones et ainsi aider des recherches futures antérieures. Les catégories sont 1) l'engagement et la participation des citoyens; 2) relations gouvernementales–municipale et autochtone; 3) la culture autochtone comme atout pour la municipalité; 4) les développements économiques et sociales, et, 5) les réserves urbaines, l'accord des services & les relations régionales. Il y a des discussions en cours sur chaque priorité, en prenant compte de plusieurs différentes considérations, qui aideront à bien guider certaines pensées stratégiques à mesure que les municipalités s'engagent dans le procédé d'une vision future changeante avec les communautés autochtones.

Mots clés: municipale; aménagement; Autochtone; Indigène; urbain

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Abstract

The ways in which urban municipalities understand and work within the context of Aboriginal community aspirations and needs will affect the quality of future urban development, in physical, social, economic and cultural sectors. Planning is central to shaping the institutional arrangements to help actualise Aboriginal community aspirations. Based on research with academic and practitioner collaborators, municipal officials and Aboriginal community professionals and stakeholders in seven cities, five priority areas were derived to target improvements at the interface between urban municipalities and Aboriginal communities and to help direct further research. The areas are: 1) citizen participation and engagement; 2) governance interface—municipal and Aboriginal; 3) Aboriginal culture as municipal asset; 4) economic and social development; and 5) urban reserves, service agreements and regional relationships. Considerations are discussed under each priority area to help guide strategic thinking as municipalities engage in a transformative future-seeking process with Aboriginal communities.

Key words: municipal; planning; Aboriginal; Indigenous; urban

Over half of those people in Canada who identify as Aboriginal (i.e., First Nation, Métis, Inuit) live in urban areas (Statistics Canada 2008). In urban municipalities, a growing proportion of the population—particularly in western cities—identifies as Aboriginal. Moreover, it is of interest to municipalities that Aboriginal youth form a cohort offering significant potential for urban development and increased quality of life now and in the near future. About half of the Aboriginal population was under 25 years of age at the 2001 Census, compared to one-third in the non-Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal people continue, however, to have shorter life expectancies, lower educational attainment and incomes, and higher housing hardship than non-Aboriginal Canadians (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2006). Social exclusion of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas is a significant issue. Thus, the ways in which municipalities understand and work within the context of Aboriginal aspirations and needs will have a great deal to do with the quality of future urban development, in physical, social, economic and cultural sectors. Planning is central to shaping the institutional arrangements in an urban municipality to help actualize Aboriginal community aspirations.

This paper provides five priority areas for improvement in practice by municipal planners and officials in departments such as community services, urban design and economic development that interface with Aboriginal communities. These areas also highlight research priorities that would advance the state of the art

in planning and municipal engagement with Aboriginal communities in urban areas. A conceptual basis for the importance of improving work at the municipal–Aboriginal urban interface is provided, followed by a discussion of the research process that enabled the identification and elaboration of five areas. These are then discussed, exploring opportunities and challenges for planners, municipal officials in other departments, provincial and federal officials concerned with urban affairs and politicians.

Conceptualizing Municipal Planning with Aboriginal Communities

The cultural diversity in many cities includes a growing young Aboriginal population that is more mobile than the urban average, moving between areas of the city and reserves or rural communities elsewhere (Cardinal 2006; Distasio and Sylvestre 2004). This mobility contributes to a need within urban municipalities for services that aid in social and economic integration for migrants (Carter et al. 2004). Socio-economic disparities attributable largely to the effects of colonization and residential schools lead to high service demands in the Aboriginal urban community, many of which are met by a growing range of urban Aboriginal service providers and institutions or by universal municipal services.

There is a capacity and desire within urban Aboriginal organizations to design and deliver culturally relevant services that reflect the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities and result in better outcomes (Cardinal 2006; Carter et al. 2004; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). There is a desire on the part of municipalities to figure out how best to interface with their Aboriginal citizens in appropriate and beneficial ways (Mountjoy 1999; Walker 2005). Among other things, there is a rich economic and cultural asset in a growing young Aboriginal urban population that will affect the way urban development proceeds for decades to come. A comprehensive study of both multicultural and Aboriginal policy within Australian local governments revealed that they were better at symbolic inclusion of cultural diversity in municipal affairs (e.g., festivals, broad inclusionary policy statements) than they were at integrating cultural pluralism into municipal operations (Dunn et al. 2001; Dunn, Hanna, and Thompson 2001). Overall, the Canadian experience seems similar.

Considerable improvements can be made at the municipal–Aboriginal urban interface, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens. Local government in New Zealand, for example, is more advanced in its partnership with Māori people, yet that is largely on account of the statutory requirements for local governments to consult and work with Māori under the *Local Government Act* and *Resource Management Act*. In New Zealand, the central government's obligations under the *Treaty of Waitangi* permeate through its levers of control over local government to hit the ground where local community planning occurs (Berke et al. 2002). The levers are different in Canada, between central and local governments. The

federal government exercises treaty relations, while municipalities are governed by provincial statutes, making the relationship between local government and treaties indirect, unlike in New Zealand where there is no provincial government. But the provinces could do more on this front in Canada, and the federal government could as well through its increasingly direct relationship with municipalities. While statutory measures at the provincial level (e.g., in *The Cities Act* or *Planning and Development Act* in Saskatchewan) in how municipal governments work with Aboriginal communities might be a progressive shift in urban Aboriginal affairs, this paper argues that municipalities should not wait around for other governments and should improve work with Aboriginal communities because they have the power to do so and it is impractical not to.

To improve, transformative planning will need to occur, where theory and practice draw lessons from local experiences, to combine “analysis, social vision, and hard strategic thinking with the intent to shape ongoing political practice, even as it continuously absorbs new learning” (Friedmann 1987, 389-90). Working with Friedmann’s (1987) seminal piece, Lane and Hibbard (2005) describe transformative planning by or with Indigenous peoples as a process of identifying and implementing strategies that transform structures of oppression. The kind of oppression I am referring to in the case of the municipal–Aboriginal urban interface is the type that is more difficult to identify and understand than overt forms of racism and discrimination. As Young (1990) and Lane and Hibbard (2005) describe oppression, it inhibits people’s ability to actualize their aspirations based on their own assessment of needs and feelings, resulting from structural and systemic constraints. Nilsen argues—interpreting Healey (1998) in the context of planning in northern Aboriginal communities—that ‘place’ is a social construct where individuals “give meaning to particular locations, each within their own social context, and in relation to the experiences of *being* in those social contexts” (2005, 24, emphasis original). The places that planners work to create are meeting points for social and cultural relations with physical form, each affecting the other, using what exists in place to imagine something better or guard what is believed to be precious or well-functioning. We know, however, that despite our best intentions planning practice is not value neutral and it privileges the momentum of western place conceptions and processes over others, such as those of Aboriginal peoples (Peters and Walker 2005; Sandercock 2004). Yet there are few Aboriginal planning practitioners and transformative planning in the urban context will need to occur mostly by non-Aboriginal planners *with* Aboriginal community members.

With the example of “The Great Indian Bus Tour of Toronto” run by the late Rodney Bobiwash, an influential Aboriginal community leader, activist and intellectual, Rahder and Milgrom (2004) discuss how the millennia-long Aboriginal peoples’ history in Toronto is made visible through the deliberate activity of someone committed to introducing it as part of the local civic identity to a major-

ity of people unaware of its presence. The authors (2004, 40) make the important observation that “[w]hen marginalized groups begin to see their contributions to the city represented in the city’s form, they may be more willing to participate in planning processes.” I agree with this point but note an omission they and other planning practitioners and academics (e.g., Qadeer 1994) seem to make when discussing Aboriginal affairs. Working with Aboriginal peoples in a process of transformative planning will fail to reach the full measure of success without recognition of the Aboriginal right and community aspirations for meaningful measures of self-determination (Porter 2004; Walker 2003). It is not surprising that Aboriginal communities mobilize to resist incorporation into mainstream planning processes rather than ‘play along’ (Healey 2004), when resistance is the better strategy for achieving recognition of something as fundamental as the right to a mutually respectful partnership and an imagination for how self-determination could be given local meaning in a cosmopolitan urban setting.

Little research has been done in Canada to improve the municipal–Aboriginal urban interface. Promising practices in urban Aboriginal intergovernmental and cross-sectoral policy and programming were developed by the Canada West Foundation (Hanselmann 2002) and have been well received and used in many policy circles. The focus was across all levels of government and non-governmental sectors, however, and does not provide focused lessons or advice to municipalities. Work has been undertaken on how to create urban reserves to mutual benefit for First Nations and municipalities (Barron and Garcea 1999; Federation of Canadian Municipalities n.d.; Peters 2007; Sully and Emmons 2004). Research has also been done on improving neighbourhood-level planning processes with Aboriginal citizens (Walker 2003; 2006). A theme that permeates all of this work and which serves as a pre-cursor to constructive engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (and governments) is an understanding and appreciation for the pursuit of self-determining autonomy and what that amounts to in different contexts (Maaka and Fleras 2005).

Self-determination, or the derivative self-government, is still largely misunderstood in non-Aboriginal society. Work has been done to translate what these right-based community aspirations mean into practical application (e.g., Green 1997; Hunter 2006; Hylton 1999; Peters 1992; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996), but in the public imagination the idea of self-government or self-determination still evokes zero-sum ideas of separation, segregation, and special treatment (e.g., *StarPhoenix* 2002). The concept of self-determination emanates from prior occupancy of Aboriginal peoples to the creation of a Canadian state and its governments. In other words, Aboriginal societies were determining their own affairs prior to re-settlement and never alienated their right to continue doing so, although the nature of self-determination changes to account for treaty relationships that opened up the Canadian nation-state together with non-Ab-

original society and governments. Self-determination confers a different place in Canadian society for Aboriginal peoples than for immigrant ethnic minority groups by virtue of prior occupancy, treaties and constitutional recognition.

As with non-Aboriginal peoples, urbanization has created new community identities, linked to the urban experience as well as connections to the land and traditions originating in time and space outside of the contemporary urban experience, yet no less legitimate. Urban Aboriginal communities are more cosmopolitan—often with many Aboriginal national and cultural groups—than perhaps are reserves where one First Nation is the majority. But community structures have continued to adapt to the urban scale in settler countries around the world (Barcham 1998; LaGrand 2002; Maaka 1994; Morgan 2006; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). The ways in which self-determination is implemented in urban areas are highly variable and can be designed collaboratively with non-Aboriginal governments with the over-arching goal being to find good ways of “living together differently without drifting apart” (Maaka and Fleras 2005, 300). One size does not fit all when implementing self-determination and municipalities can be equal partners with Aboriginal communities in designing meaningful ways of doing this in planning and urban development which impact positively on their collective quality of place.

Research Process

A three-stage process was used to determine priority areas at the municipal–Aboriginal urban interface. First a group of collaborators was assembled from the University of Saskatchewan and City of Saskatoon who could bring a wide and varied set of perspectives to bear upon this multi-faceted research problem. Five academic collaborators were involved and are listed by name in the acknowledgement section. Included in this group are three Aboriginal scholars—one First Nations, one Métis and one Māori—along with three non-Aboriginal scholars, altogether bringing forward expertise in city planning, urban geography, native studies, political studies, law and public administration. Managers of planning, community development and urban design at the City of Saskatoon completed the team of collaborators.

We met as a group for a three-hour discussion, which I facilitated, where consensus was reached on what we felt were the highest priority areas that have a direct municipal connection. In order to prepare collaborators for this discussion, they were asked to read a recent report on issues for municipalities and Aboriginal peoples (Carter et al. 2004). They were asked to use the findings from that report, along with their own personal experiences and insights from past and present research, to move the state of knowledge forward by articulating tangible priority areas that municipal planners and officials from other departments could address within their practice. Facilitating the meeting I was careful to focus on two im-

portant subtleties to address weaknesses of past research: 1) keep ideas focused on positive ways to improve work at the municipal–Aboriginal interface, as opposed to creating a list of problems that could be dealt with; and, 2) keep ideas focused on what municipalities can address within their mandated powers, as opposed to deriving a list of social trends affecting urban areas that require attention at the provincial and federal levels. Following the meeting I drafted a brief discussion document that articulated our priority areas and posed a number of open ended questions for participants in stage two of the project. The document was circulated to collaborators for review before embarking on the next stage.

The second stage of the research involved circulating the discussion document, along with a covering letter, by email or fax to relevant department managers (e.g., planning, community development, urban design, economic development), municipal Aboriginal community liaison officers, and personnel from Aboriginal community organizations in other urban municipalities. To ensure the highest possible interest and commitment to the project, all prospective participants were contacted by telephone first to discuss the project and ask for their assistance. Seven municipalities were involved in stage two, including Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Yellowknife, Winnipeg, and Toronto. These were chosen to reflect municipalities with among the highest Aboriginal identity populations, and to reflect smaller urban (Prince Albert) and northern urban (Yellowknife) experiences. Feedback was received on the discussion document from municipal officials and Aboriginal organizations in all seven municipalities, totalling 18 responses. On a couple of occasions, municipal departments responded separately, giving two or more responses from one municipality. Most solicited input from staff across several departments and collated it into one response. Nine Aboriginal community organizations provided input, with at least one from each of the seven cities, representing a range of First Nation, Métis and urban Aboriginal community perspectives.

Participants were asked whether they agreed with our choices of high priority areas, what they would add or remove, and to comment as extensively as they could on the content of the document and what they perceived, in their own experience, to be the greatest priority areas, opportunities and challenges. Their feedback caused our priority areas to change, the addition of a fifth priority, and changes to the content under each. Participants also ranked the priority areas. The ranking is reflected in the order in which priority areas are discussed in the next section.

The third stage of the research involved summarizing the feedback from the seven communities and discussing it with the team of collaborators in order to incorporate it and revise our initial priority areas and discussion of considerations within each. The identified areas and considerations may be understood as focal points for attention by practitioners as well as areas for further research. The

reader will notice that specific initiatives, policies and practices undertaken by municipalities at the present time are not discussed in this paper. This is a deliberate measure taken to focus attention on the broad issues faced in common by municipalities and Aboriginal urban communities, without embarking on a full appraisal of most promising practices, which was beyond the scope of this study. The results presented below do account, however, for what is working and not working in at least seven municipalities, without singling out initiatives for direct praise or criticism.

Areas of Highest Priority, Opportunities & Challenges

Five priority areas were derived from the three-stage research process and are discussed below, including some considerations within each. The areas are: 1) citizen participation and engagement; 2) governance interface—municipal and Aboriginal; 3) Aboriginal culture as municipal asset; 4) economic and social development; and, 5) urban reserves, service agreements and regional relationships.

1) Citizen Participation and Engagement

The municipal–Aboriginal urban interface would be improved with a stronger process for ensuring Aboriginal citizen participation from the scale of the household, to community/neighbourhood, to city council. Some cities have realized, as one person put it, that ‘the distance between the individual citizen and city hall is large’ and that engagement processes at the neighbourhood/community scale are important tools for municipalities and citizens alike. Saskatoon and Winnipeg, for example, have a system of community/neighbourhood associations adhering to neighbourhood boundaries and run by resident volunteers, which are involved in a range of municipal sectors from recreation services to local area planning. Despite its strengths, a few issues have been identified with local engagement of this kind. One is that the process of neighbourhood-level engagement can privilege an ‘area-based’ logic over one that is more explicitly ‘people-centred.’ For example, Aboriginal mobility in inner city neighbourhoods is well-documented (Distasio and Sylvester 2004; Norris and Clatworthy 2003), and mobility between neighbourhoods and between the city and communities outside of the city places constraints on getting involved in community development processes at a single neighbourhood scale.

There may be other ways of organizing locally that are more meaningful to Aboriginal residents than according to neighbourhoods, such as through local cultural, service or educational organizations (to name a few possibilities) that transcend neighbourhood boundaries. Another factor is that community/neighbourhood associations can be driven by a committed group of often like-minded volunteers that are not always ‘representative’ of the community as a whole. It is not clear what mechanisms work best for consulting and decision-making with

Aboriginal communities and their leadership in regard to municipal affairs. Without formal processes in place that regularize an ongoing working relationship between city council and Aboriginal communities, consultation can be sporadic, carried out differently each time, or not carried out at all if it is believed that it will be too time-consuming or politically charged.

2) Governance Interface—Municipal and Aboriginal

The argument is often made that municipal governments have not been equipped legislatively or with the financial resources to deal with distinct Aboriginal affairs (i.e., as distinct from other groups in the city) (e.g., Mountjoy 1999). Variations of this argument have been made in different contexts by all levels of government, which has resulted in more trepidation on Aboriginal issues than is warranted (Graham and Peters 2002). Notwithstanding legitimate concern about other levels of government off-loading their responsibilities onto municipalities without additional financial resources, there are benefits to bracketing this concern and being proactive about the opportunities presented by large and growing Aboriginal urban communities and pursuing new arrangements to engage constructively with them. Including federal and provincial officials or politicians and bringing resources from these governments to bear on municipal issues can be very effective. While at times intergovernmental arrangements can be developed, this is not always the case. Municipalities can often be more responsive and creative than other levels of government despite their fewer financial resources because, among other things, they have a tighter staff complement (who know what one another are doing), and officials and politicians live and maintain personal connections—as a whole Council—within the close and tangible scale where they govern.

It is clear that Aboriginal communities have urban aspirations, such as culturally appropriate municipal services and governance arrangements with municipal councils, and a visible presence in place-making endeavours like urban design and heritage articulation. They seek to exercise self-determining autonomy locally in partnership with non-Aboriginal Canadian society. There are at least two different types of working relationship that need to be regularized. One is with individual Aboriginal reserve/rural communities with their own governments (e.g., band councils, Métis locals) that have proximity, citizens or economic interests in the municipality. A second is with a less discrete and more multicultural/diverse urban population that includes people from different Aboriginal nations and communities that have some common and overlapping interests in urban affairs. Urban Aboriginal communities, for example, may have developed their own urban identity over several decades of urban experience going back to ‘status-blind’ institutions such as Friendship Centres, organizations incubated there, and urban Aboriginal housing corporations.

For the first type, specific protocols could be established with individual Aboriginal governments. Examples already exist at some municipalities (e.g., City of Powell River, BC, with Sliammon First Nation). A legislative basis from federal/provincial governments that ensures this will occur with some consistency over time could be helpful, but is not a necessary precursor to developing protocols. Among other things, this would assist with addressing issues of common purpose where mobility between city and rural/reserve community is an important aspect of the urban experience.

For the second type, a municipal Aboriginal advisory body with members who represent the various Aboriginal communities and their leaders could co-ordinate Aboriginal consultation and decision-making on municipal matters and engage in an ongoing process of consultation on municipal issues such as community services, planning and design. This would regularize the consultation process and create a system for collaborative decision-making. Such a body could be advisory on some municipal issues, and a facilitator of broader Aboriginal consultation on others. It could provide a venue for community members to raise specific issues related to municipal affairs and assist community members and municipal government to navigate through jurisdictional issues and intergovernmental relationships that affect Aboriginal people. One important word of caution, however, is that advisory and governance bodies are most effective when they have tangible projects before them, rather than carrying on simply to meet periodically. New initiatives at the municipal–Aboriginal governance interface will be most effective when undertaken in tandem with priority-setting, action planning and project implementation. Without a clear focus, initiatives like governance or advisory bodies have become irrelevant or even self-destructed in some cities in the past.

Careful consideration needs to be given to how such an advisory body is structured. Selection processes for any kind of council are often contentious, and that is fine. But if the process is fundamentally flawed, it could do more harm than good. Some communities with federal Urban Aboriginal Strategies and programs to address Aboriginal housing and homelessness have created good mechanisms for selecting Aboriginal community leadership for advisory and decision-making roles. The Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre Initiative through Canadian Heritage also has a fairly robust means for striking Aboriginal youth advisory committees through a process of community nomination and selection.

The research brought forth some common issues to bear in mind while composing an Aboriginal advisory body. First, members' skills and community standing need to match the council's mandate. Executive directors and staff members of Aboriginal organizations are not proxies for community leadership (although the two can coincide); and an elected position as an Aboriginal community leader (e.g., President of Métis local) does not signify service delivery expertise. Community leaders with the highest standing are often not elected but are widely

known and respected in their Aboriginal communities for their knowledge and wisdom. Second, representation from different Aboriginal urban communities (e.g., First Nation, Métis, Inuit, status-blind), age groups and genders are vital. Finally, leaders selected through nomination by Aboriginal communities bear legitimacy that top-down appointments do not. Advisory and decision-making bodies that seem to have good success in urban areas often have a combination of community nomination and a stratification process for inclusion of people from different Aboriginal nations and political communities, elders, service providers, community members, representatives from different levels of government and so forth. The presence of different Aboriginal nations and political organizations and a variety of service organizations would require a nuanced approach to assembling a legitimate and balanced set of working relationships that reflect the communities of each city.

3) Aboriginal Culture as Municipal Asset

Aboriginal peoples in urban areas are often characterized in terms of social problems (e.g., Carter et al. 2004), and consequently municipalities might wonder what to address in the broad area of Aboriginal affairs, particularly given that the federal and provincial governments are the primary players in social programming. In contrast, I argue that local Aboriginal culture is a great municipal asset that can provide a rich entry point to meaningful change in Aboriginal affairs. As discussed earlier most non-Aboriginal citizens do not have a clear understanding of local Aboriginal history, historic and contemporary cultural landscapes within city boundaries, and the urban aspirations of Aboriginal communities. Municipal governments, unlike the federal government, do not have a statutory basis for addressing Aboriginal issues in distinct ways and often do not have a mandate from municipal voters to do so. Initiatives, if taken at all, must often be couched within a broader 'diversity' or 'race relations' portfolio. This can run counter to Aboriginal community goals which have a basis in prior occupancy and community self-determination in partnership with non-Aboriginal citizens and governments.

With Aboriginal populations growing, particularly in western cities, there is an opportunity for municipalities and Aboriginal communities to strengthen their interface and change from an image of social deficit to a vision of cultural and economic asset. Municipalities and Aboriginal communities can work together to 'expand the local imaginary' and the 'depth of civic identity' to include Aboriginal culture (historic and contemporary) in planning and urban design, community services, public art and monuments, street and park naming, civic engagement, economic development, heritage, tourism and place promotion, civic history and consciousness-raising, to name a few areas.

Operational changes across departments to break new ground in these areas could be a worthwhile municipal enterprise. A single office might become a

champion for this—as has occurred in some municipalities—but it is important to ensure that strides taken by a single office (e.g., Diversity, ‘Race’ Relations) are translated into corporate operations in line departments. Wherever initial responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs is housed at City Hall, it is important to ensure that specific staff is committed to it and that the specific culture and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples are dealt with recognizing their place in the Canadian mosaic as First Peoples, an important distinction from immigrant cultural minorities.

Municipal human resource strategies are an important part of realizing Aboriginal culture as a municipal asset. Aboriginal role model and mentorship programs could be developed to foster an increased presence of Aboriginal citizens in all levels of the municipal organization. Staff training, recruitment and retention initiatives can be tailored as appropriate to foster the advancement of Aboriginal staff.

4) Economic and Social Development

Some areas of social and economic development are more explicitly part of the municipal mandate, while others constitute a more indirect and usually unfunded mandate. Municipalities should work closely with Aboriginal communities to ensure culturally appropriate policing and community (including health) services are delivered. Where the population size and community capacity are present, services designed and delivered by Aboriginal organizations have been linked to better outcomes (for resources expended) for Aboriginal people than ‘mainstream’ universal programs (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Salée, Newhouse and Lévesque 2006). Sport, recreation and community art programs, particularly for Aboriginal youth, are promising program areas where municipalities can affect significant and meaningful change in community quality of life.

Local economic development is an area where greater partnership with Aboriginal communities can yield substantial gains. Strengthening the presence of Aboriginal culture and history in municipal heritage, tourism, and place-promotion, as discussed above, may contribute to local economic and social development. Initiatives taken with private sector partners to provide job-skill training, entrepreneurship training and business development with Aboriginal community members can be explored.

The scarcity of adequate, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing is an enormous concern in many urban municipalities and it affects Aboriginal peoples most acutely on account of their (average) lower socioeconomic standing and racism among private and public sector landlords. While programs to build new low-cost housing are fundamentally an economic redistribution responsibility of federal and provincial governments, some municipalities are increasing their involvement in this policy area generally and Aboriginal housing specifically. The

City of Winnipeg's Aboriginal Housing Program is one example, operated out of the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative office.

Strategic planning for joint economic and social development projects with nearby First Nations could be explored further (also discussed below), particularly where combining assets and expertise can promote joint gains within municipal boundaries and on reserve. The same point applies for partnerships with Métis locals or urban Aboriginal councils where assets and expertise can be combined.

Municipalities can continue to evaluate their service delivery mechanisms to improve outcomes for Aboriginal citizens. In areas beyond their unilateral reach, they can join with Aboriginal community leaders—perhaps most easily through new governance mechanisms such as those discussed earlier—to bring pressure on other levels of government that can reasonably be expected to invest more or in more appropriate ways into the urban Aboriginal sectors such as housing, health, education, community services, legal services, sport and recreation. There are examples of successful tripartite urban development initiatives in Aboriginal affairs in some cities and these can be pursued and promoted elsewhere.

5) Urban Reserves, Service Agreements and Regional Relationships

The designation of reserve status to urban lands acquired by First Nations through means such as land claim settlements or purchase for economic development or other social, cultural and political goals will continue and perhaps increase over time. There are around 30 urban reserves in Saskatchewan for example, and many emerging in Manitoba, including a prominent new urban reserve recently announced near downtown Winnipeg. The federal government's *Additions to Reserves Policy* (ATR) and provincial *Treaty Land Entitlement Framework Agreements* in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, all enacted within the past 15-20 years, set out provisions and processes for their creation. Urban reserves are different from reserves that have become adjacent to or located within cities on account of urban growth. As some participants pointed out though, in some jurisdictions developing service agreements and regional relationships with neighbouring or adjacent First Nations is the focus of attention, rather than the location of new reserve lands inside municipal boundaries. Many of the issues are transferable.

Although urban reserves are currently mostly a Saskatchewan and Manitoba phenomenon, the provisions of the federal ATR make urban reserves a potential part of urban development across Canada. In British Columbia and North West Territories, for example, where sizable land claims agreements are being negotiated, land as urban reserves can provide good economic development opportunities—for First Nations and municipalities—and a chance to improve First Nation presence socially and culturally with members living in the city.

While there are guidelines and practices in place (e.g., see Federation of Canadian Municipalities *Land Management Project*) to assist municipalities and First Nations as they build relationships and agreements during the establishment of urban reserves, there is still considerable work to be done. The relationship between the First Nation and federal government is more formalized, while the relationship with the municipality within which the reserve is established is open to greater flexibility and case-by-case interpretation, opening up uncertainty and trepidation at times and in places where the experience is unknown to municipal officials and citizens. In negotiations with First Nations and federal government on the siting of urban reserves, there is potential for tension around the compatibility of land uses, service agreements and compensation for municipal taxes lost in transition to reserve status, and the adherence to standards and codes such as fire, building and infrastructure. This potential for tension could be diffused if municipalities and First Nations met early and often to discuss compatibilities, agreements and compensation. While the most important *formal* relationship in the establishment of urban reserves may be between First Nation and federal government, the most important *strategic* long-term relationship is with the municipality.

Municipalities are still sometimes left out of the picture in the substantial negotiation of urban reserves and land settlements in some parts of Canada, and are brought in as ‘junior partners’ to deal with service and compatibility issues after other major decisions have been reached. This can create uncertainty and jeopardize the incalculable value of ‘good neighbour’ relationships down the road, relationships that can bear more fruit over time than official agreements. Joint planning for the future could be undertaken to determine where the First Nation investments in urban lands—with or without reserve status—might fit most strategically within municipal urban development plans.

The term ‘reserve’ reportedly holds negative connotations among many in the non-Aboriginal community and some have proposed replacing the term with something like Aboriginal ‘development area’ or ‘business improvement zone’ (Peters 2007). Publicizing the success of established urban reserves may help build public profile. It has been noted in Saskatoon that a prominent urban reserve in the city, for example, has had positive economic spin-offs for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens alike, and has led to increased real estate values surrounding it. Foregone property tax revenues can be replaced with municipal service agreements. Yet by and large, citizens and municipal councils are either split 50:50 or less favourably inclined toward having new urban reserves situated in their city.

Conclusion

This paper provides a set of five priority areas for urban planners, municipal officials in other departments and politicians to direct their strategic thinking as they

engage in a transformative future-seeking process with Aboriginal communities. Equally, these five priority areas provide a way to organize future research programs, perhaps in partnership with practitioners in interested municipalities. Historic path-dependency in planning and municipal processes that has privileged western place-making concepts and priorities can be re-calibrated in creative and inclusive ways to 'expand the local imaginary' and the 'depth of civic identity.' By addressing the priority areas discussed in this paper, we can begin to change the structural and systemic constraints that inhibit the ability of Aboriginal community members to actualize their urban aspirations based on their own assessment of needs and feelings (Lane and Hibbard 2005). We can capitalize on Aboriginal culture as a municipal asset for all citizens. As Rahder and Milgrom (2004) suggest, when Aboriginal peoples begin to see their contributions to the city represented in the urban landscape through tangible processes and outcomes, participation in all aspects of planning and municipal affairs will likely increase.

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