



NMM in Winnipeg

Winnipeg is an isolated city on the Canadian Prairies – the closest major centre is Minneapolis, Minnesota, eight hours drive south. Its location marked the gateway to the fertile Prairies while topography and geology funnelled railways through the city. Early expansion was fuelled by agricultural and transportation roles. The Exchange District downtown still accommodates a fine collection of early twentieth century warehouse buildings that attest to its former economic strength.

Although economic circumstances changed with the opening of the Panama Canal – reducing the importance of trans-Canada rail transportation – the population continued to grow rapidly, fuelled by post-war immigration and the Baby Boom. However, since the early 1960s, growth has slowed. Between 1961 and 2001, the population grew from 475,989 to 619,544, less than 1% annually.

Since the 1960s, the footprint of the city has continued to expand and at rates that far outstrip demographic growth. In 1961, Winnipeg's urbanized area covered approximately 150 km2. By 1991 this had doubled, and in 2005 the

area exceeded 350km2. Despite continued slow population growth, large new residential neighbourhoods and commercial "power centres" are still being built on the south side of the city. In a time frame that saw the population increase by one third, the footprint of the city more than doubled.

The growth at the fringe is happening at the expense of the Downtown and the inner city. Although Downtown still provides 25% of the city's employment, only 2% of the population call the core "home." Those who continue to live in the inner city tend to be lower income households and the centre of the city accommodates much of the city's fast growing aboriginal population. However, it lacks the general amenities of everyday life (grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.) and Downtown is no longer a preferred shopping or entertainment destination for most Winnipeggers.

This pattern of development and distribution of wealth has significant ramifications for infrastructure and services: the efficiency of public transit has declined; this has supported the increased use of automobiles and demands for wider and faster roads; schools and recreation centres in the cen-

tre are underused, while affluent residents of new neighbourhoods lobby for new facilities.

This expansion of the urban footprint and a rapidly increasing infrastructure deficit are coinciding with a period of neoliberalism where the City government and its pro-business mayor support developers' agendas – arguing that home builders know best what customers want – and are set on continuing a thirteen year property tax freeze, while reducing business taxes.

The city's political and business leaders desire growth and this has been reflected in planning documents that have not simply taken into account the possibility of population growth, but have required this growth (growth that has not occurred). They have approved new suburbs (e.g. Waverley West) that provide an illusion of growth but increase the desire for roads rather than transit; advocated for major flagship projects to attract global attention (e.g. Canadian Museum of Human Rights); all of these without improving the lives of the city's most vulnerable inhabitants.

Canada 9'984'670Km2 * Inhabitants 34'019'000
Urban Region 7'500Km2 * Inhabitants 750'000



