

The Manitoba Building & Construction Trades Council Call for Moratorium on
Suburban Development
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Sustainable development is defined by two essential characteristics; anything that is built must be within the means of the builders to affordably maintain for the full life cycle and once exhausted, it must be retired in a manner that extracts all useful materials without generating excess waste.

Many cities, including Winnipeg fail the test on both counts and the primary cause is unchecked urban sprawl. As the geographic footprint of a city spreads, it requires inordinate physical infrastructure to extend services.

Such investments include provision of hydro, water, gas, and communications services to new neighbourhoods as well as connecting them to the rest of the city by building expensive new road networks. New developments also demand services such as schools, fire, paramedic and policing.

Winnipeg has been expanding at a rate far higher than its population growth warrants. As one of the least densely populated cities in Canada, it relies on a much smaller population base to support the infrastructure it owns. That means that fewer residents than many other cities pay the cost of building and maintaining each kilometer of pipe, road and other essential infrastructure. That results in higher property tax rates.

When new suburban developments come on stream, there is a short-term benefit to the city as new neighbourhoods contribute new tax revenue while requiring minimal maintenance. This formula always fails in the long run as the cost of extending services and maintaining newly built infrastructure exceeds new revenue.

As Winnipeg builds unsustainable new neighbourhoods, older neighbourhoods continue to deteriorate. The result is a sparsely populated and crumbling inner core surrounded by new suburbs with both the old and the new generating less tax revenue than is necessary to sustain them.

Winnipeg cannot build its way out of the accumulated infrastructure deficit. A sustainable future for the city will require slowing down new developments and creating incentives to revitalize old neighbourhoods. This combination will finally halt the creation of new infrastructure until we can affordably maintain what is already in the ground.

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