

Re-inventing the City:
The University of Winnipeg as a Catalyst for Urban Renewal

**Remarks by Dr. Lloyd Axworthy,
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Check against Delivery

Ladies and gentlemen, members of Financial Executives International, CEOs, thank you for this opportunity to address you.

This spring, *The Economist* magazine devoted a special section on the world's cities.

The occasion was to mark an important passage in the history of the planet: there are now more people living in urban areas than in rural regions.

And this is just a harbinger of the future where it is expected that in this new century 80 per cent of the world's population will be urban dwellers. In this country, we have already surpassed this milestone.

The Economist writers foresee a globe where there is a vast, intricate interconnected network of virtual city-states.

A globe where there will be intense competition to define what will be the specialized and distinctive role each of these city-regions will play in this urbanized world.

The fundamentals of how we live – our prosperity, our security, our sustainability will be largely determined by what we do in our cities. It will be as the ancient Greeks prophesied: “First we shape our cities, then they shape us”.

There is a serious message in that statement. Because depending on the choices we make, or in some cases, the choices we avoid making on what we see as the future of our city, this will determine whether we succeed or fail in this emerging global urban network.

In thinking about the challenges of this new landscape, I am immediately drawn to the difficult time we faced last month at The University of Winnipeg – a threat of violence against the University community was written on a washroom wall by an unknown person with a targeted date and time.

As this date has now passed, it appears that this may have been an empty threat by a malicious prankster – but this event serves to highlight the complex new challenges that our communities are now facing.

The Economist provides a simple but challenging answer: “In order to be continuously successful, a city has to be able to reinvent itself, perhaps several times”

Anne Golden, the President of the Conference Board of Canada strongly concurs with this statement. In a foreword to John Lorinc’s recent book on the state of Canada’s urban centres entitled, *The New City*, Golden writes:

“Cities are now the platform of the international export of goods and services. [They are] centres of knowledge and innovation . . . Places where people, R&D, and high-value services are concentrated in close proximity.”

They are home to what American academic Richard Florida describes as “the creative class” – talented people who are driven by creativity and intellectual expertise who in turn fuel a nation’s prosperity.

My reason for relating this overview of an evolving global landscape dominated by urban regions is to focus on the issue of how our own city will fit into this challenging but dynamic landscape.

What will be our niche? How are we re-inventing ourselves to meet the challenge?

The answer, to me, is clear. Winnipeg must be a “Smart City” – one where investments in education and learning become our hallmark, become our signature, help define us and be a major element in our re-invention.

In her recent book, Judith Rodin, the former president of the University of Pennsylvania writes about the challenges that her university, surrounded by the physical decline, poverty and crime of Philadelphia’s West End, faced. These characteristics – hallmarks of inner-cities throughout Canada and the US – parallel the challenges faced by Winnipeg’s core area.

As Rodin notes, “by virtue of their mission, intellectual capital, and investments in physical facilities, urban universities are uniquely positioned to play a leading role in their communities in powerful ways”

And as a model for this re-invention, I would like to use – as you might expect – The University of Winnipeg as a reference point.

Today, we are involved in a major strategic effort to re-define our role in the city and how that can be a major element in the re-invention of Winnipeg, enabling it to become one of the success stories in the swirling competitive global environment and economy that we now must face.

Let me begin by referring to the icon of our university, the venerable Wesley Hall.

It was built over a century ago – in 1894 – as a testimony of our pioneer forbearers to the importance of education in the young settlement at The Forks of the two rivers as it defined itself as an emerging hub of trade, transportation, and commerce in the opening of the West.

They saw even then that you can't succeed without having a place where learning can take place.

Not just in the technical sense of acquiring skills but even more importantly as a fundamental building block of a community that inculcates values, shapes a society based on discourse, debate and a belief in rules of law and opens opportunity for successive generations to improve themselves. That helped define our city.

And it has been doing so ever since – providing high-quality education and opening doors of opportunity.

I can speak to that personally as a North End kid who graduated in '61. I have always seen my experience at United College, as it was called then, as a turning point in my life.

But Wesley Hall, while retaining its basic contours and shape is also symbolic of the changes taking place at the university.

With a new facelift, Wesley Hall has a new function in education.

It is home to our Global College.

It is also a starting point of a major re-think of our institution not only as a centre of traditional arts and science education but as a catalyst for downtown development and renewal.

This is particularly important as the demographics of our city and our country change.

Take for example our increasing aging population. Over the next 20 years, the proportion of people over 65 in large cities will almost double as the baby boomer generation retires.

In 1998, there were 3.7 million seniors in Canada; by 2031 there be 9.7 million – a three-fold increase.

The fact is that already more than 80 per cent of seniors live in large urban centres.

So as more people retire, they will be an increasing demand for suitable housing, recreational activities, educational programs, etc. to meet their needs.

And seniors will be looking for places where they find all of these things in close proximity – the inner city.

There is also another urgent demographic trend that needs to be addressed – the rapidly growing urban Aboriginal population.

According to a 1996 study by the Canadian Council on Social Development on urban poverty, more than half of all urban Aboriginals lived beneath the poverty line, compared with 24 percent of the general population.

This is particularly acute here in Winnipeg, where there are more First Nations residents that in all of the Northwest Territories.

It is a transient population – almost one in three of the city's estimated 56,000 Aboriginal residents moved in the year prior to the 2001 census.

And when families move so frequently, it's often a symptom of underlying social problems: inadequate housing, crime, lack of employment.

The result is that Aboriginal children have a far harder time with school, even though urban Aboriginal youth are more likely to graduate than those who live on reserves.

So as our population ages and looks for a place to retire.

As our young Aboriginal population continues to grow and search for ways to a better life.

As the 10,000 new Canadians who arrive in Manitoba every year, looking for a place to start a new life. As more young people look for opportunities to grow and prosper, and to stay in Manitoba.

These people will be looking to come downtown, to the inner city, as a place to live, to learn and to invest.

There has been a significant shift by experts in the thinking about cities, particularly in abandoning the Calamity Jane approach that saw only decline, gang wars and social pathology as the determining character of our urban areas. The city neighbourhood, especially the older, inner city and inner suburban rings of cities are now seen as places of opportunity within the smart growth scenario.

By limiting sprawl, taking advantage of the higher inner city densities, building on existing infrastructure, and recognizing the benefits of a downtown diversified labour force, the market potential of older neighbourhoods within the broad regional context can be maximized.

This has been fuelled by very important but little understood changes in the income and skill potential that have been building up in the lower income working family groups within our urban populations.

As a consequence of social policy reforms that emphasized transferring income to working families through extended tax credit programs and changing employment benefits to emphasize work assisted training and subsidies – an extension of the Social Review recommendations I initiated in 1995 – there has been a slow but important infusion of income and upgrading of employability of the city populace.

This leads both to a greater sense of empowerment and a more attractive incentive for investment in retail and service jobs in the city. The "make work pay" approach is paying dividends by making older urban communities active players in the urban economy.

While not yet fully understood, expert analysis and research is beginning to show that this adds traction to urban neighbourhoods in participating in the regional economy, particularly transitional and distressed neighbourhoods by slowly adding to their income base and the employability.

The more that this capacity building can be increased and enhanced the more such communities can begin to command services, retail activity and jobs development back into these areas because of the proximity of a increasing skilled work force.

In other words it begins to add value to lower income urban regions as market players. It increases their economic empowerment and provides incentive for jobs. To borrow from Jane Jacobs once more, "You can't rely on bringing people downtown; you have to put them there."

There is no shortage of good ideas or innovative practices. There is an incredible talent in Winnipeg, dedicated to making our cities liveable. This richness of individual, community and business inventiveness must now be translated into action.

We want to respond to this demographic challenge by being ahead of the curve, by responding proactively as this trend develops.

The University of Winnipeg is adding to the dynamic created by efforts to re-shape the physical space of the downtown through the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, the MTS Centre, the Manitoba Hydro building, the Centennial Library among others.

We are a major contributor to the emergence of an institutional precinct of research and invention in the inner city, helping to establish Winnipeg as a leader in sustainability and environmental innovation and as a place to meet the human challenges of a changing city by opening doors to the new waves of immigrants.

For in the words of Richard Florida: "A great city has two hallmarks: tolerance for strangers and intolerance for mediocrity."

And this will happen downtown by becoming a Learning City, a Security City and a Sustainable City. With more than 10,000 students, faculty and staff, The University of

Winnipeg is the largest cohort of people in the downtown. And as a result, we are well-positioned to be an agent of positive change.

Over the past few years, we have steadily worked towards fostering an increased sense of global citizenship and environmental responsibility among our university community and reducing the ecological impact of our institution.

Our ultimate goal is to create a truly sustainable campus – Bringing human rights, social justice, and environmental responsibility together to address the most pressing issues in the world today and to prepare our future leaders for the world they are inheriting.

This amounts to an institutional contribution to what Tom Kelly, Director of the Office of Sustainability Programs at the University of New Hampshire, has called a “*reform project that envisions a reorientation of the entire international community towards the balancing of economic viability with ecological health and human well-being.*”

Let me show you what I mean- emphasizing the three main elements of The University of Winnipeg’s Sustainability Strategy: Physical, Economic and Social Sustainability

****MOVE TO SLIDES****

1. Physical Sustainability: Downtown Development

- Map of UW Development
- Portage Commons
- Spence Street Duckworth Centre expansion
- Science Complex (4 slides)
- CanWest Centre for Theatre and Film (3 slides)
- Convocation Hall

2. Economic Sustainability: Innovation and Enterprise

- New faculty of Economics and Business
- Institute of Environmental Finance
- Network for Innovation

3. Social Sustainability: Social Responsibility, City of Opportunity

- Innovative Aboriginal Programming
- Aboriginal Education Roundtable
- Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre
- Innovative Learning Centre (Eco-Kids, Enviro-Techs)
- \$10 Opportunity Fund

This is an unfolding, evolving story, one that is now set in motion but will take on new forms and definitions over the forthcoming decade and beyond.

Our university community – academics, students, members of the Board of Regents alike – are becoming fully engaged in this renewal.

It is built on co-operation and partnership and community support.

Private sector contributions from a variety of businesses and individuals have been essential in its implementation and will continue to be with new theatres, facilities and inner-city programs.

All levels of government have been essential from the closing of Spence Street, the investment in the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex, and the development of new housing and daycare facilities.

Neighbourhood partners, schools and community associations have been a crucial part of the planning and implementation – particularly through The University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation. We hope to continue building on this spirit of mutual involvement.

For universities and community colleges are increasingly central to the development of Canada's cities.

We are “urban creatures,” according to John Lorinc, helping cities to attract top-flight academics and graduate students – establishing R&D partnerships with investors, corporations, hospitals, and other agencies.

Lorinc adds that: “Cities depend on the social and cultural energy created by a steady influx of young people attending post-secondary institutions . . . not just in providing higher education but also in serving as a hub of urban vitality.”

This is also more than just one university undertaking re-invention in its own bailiwick. This is a two-way street.

We see this as working towards answers that can help our business community, governments, and civil society groups undertake their own renewal.

We can be an incubator for new environmental technologies, help our schools meet the demands of a diverse population, give older adults new learning opportunities, help governments find new policies and practices to improve our environment and shape a new city strategy.

We are also responding to the urgent need to make post-secondary education more accessible to First Nations and Metis students.

This is why The University of Winnipeg is taking a leadership role in this effort through initiatives such as the Opportunity Fund and the Wii Chiwaakanak Learning Centre.

The University of Winnipeg will also play a role in helping to integrate our city into the larger global system and network.

Student interns, collaboration with international universities, direct projects of development in other countries.

Our Global College held a major human rights conference last February, attracting leading experts and students from around the world, as a prelude to our defining Winnipeg as a human rights city.

This past summer, we offered a variety of institutes on Filipino culture and history, Chinese mandarin languages, international pandemics and global ethics.

And I recently returned from a major trip that we sponsored for a number of prominent American philanthropists to view our research on boreal forests and climate change impacts in Churchill.

We look forward to a dynamic new phase of transformation, of dramatic revitalization and rejuvenation in the heart of Winnipeg, and just celebrated an important milestone: 40 years since United College transformed into the institution we know today, The University of Winnipeg.

With 40 years as a University and more than a century of academic excellence in this city, our strategic location in the heart of the downtown gives both opportunity and responsibility in re-shaping this wonderful place called Winnipeg for the years ahead.

We are excited to be part of a re-invention of our city.

Thank you.