

CASE-IN-POINT

Approaches to Planning in a Cross-Cultural Rural Setting - Planning to Manage the Development of On-Farm Small Scale Industries in the South Interlake Planning District

MPPI

by Roger Lam in Collaboration with Bill Budd, MCP MCIP

Synopsis

Changes in the agricultural way of life are having huge impacts on rural Manitoba. More and more, traditional farming practices are encountering economic difficulties and are forced to either adapt or be absorbed by larger corporate farming operations. This is having a great impact on Hutterite colonies. The colonies are similar to small towns and attempt to be self-sufficient. This case study looks at the process that led to the amendment of the South Interlake Planning District's development plan. The plan now allows the Hutterite colony and other farmers to generate supplementary income to support their farming operations. Specifically, it allows for on-farm small scale industries as a conditional use. The process used to arrive at this amendment sought to heal wounds within the community, be culturally sensitive, and to arrive at a solution acceptable to all stakeholders. This is an innovative Manitoba approach, to more inclusive planning in the rural areas, that is now being replicated in other areas of the Province.



The truss manufacturing operation at the Prairie Blossom Hutterite Colony

HIGHLIGHTS

Summary:
Rural planners are increasingly working in cross-cultural settings

Focus: Rural planning, cross-cultural planning, by-law and development plan amendments

Timeline:
1995-2003

Background and Context

In Manitoba, the changing rural economic conditions are having a significant impact on the agricultural way of life. There are less and less small independently-owned farming operations. Over the last decade Manitoba's rural areas, much like those across North America, have seen the appearance of large-scale corporate farms. A major issue now facing

rural Manitoba is the evolution of agricultural practices. Farmers are looking at other means, such as the development of small industries, to supplement their farm incomes.

In 1995 an issue arose in the South Interlake Planning District (SIPD), when area residents complained that the Prairie Blossom Hutterite colony was illegally manufacturing roof trusses. The colony was in breach of the SIPD development plan, which zoned the area as agricultural and did not permit any industrial or commercial uses. The colony made two attempts to rectify the situation by applying for an amendment to the development plan and then for a conditional use; both attempts were rejected. As reported in the *Stonewall Argus*, the issue was dividing the community in two.

On the one hand, the then Mayor of Stonewall, Dave Lethbridge, stated that "the colony knew they weren't authorized to manufacture on the land because we told them repeatedly. They seemed to feel that they had a right to conduct such business in that zone. We disagree." (*Stonewall Argus*, Oct 1996, p.2) On the other hand, Sam Kleinsesser of Concord Colony was saying that, "the planning district should take the distinct life style of Hutterite colonies into consideration in its development regulations." (*Stonewall Argus*, Dec 1996, p.3) The colony had held an open house and public meeting where residents were invited to voice their concerns and to visit the operation in question. Residents who attended the public hearing were quoted as saying: "The activity is benign, it's not a threat to my enjoyment of the agricultural nature of the entire area." Meanwhile other residents voiced some concerns, "we're left to bear the burden of the results of poor economic planning on their part" and "this has nothing to do with lifestyle; it has to do with agricultural land." (*Stonewall Argus*, Dec 1996, p.3)

deeply entrenched in their positions and were prepared to take legal action. At this time there was also a change in the principal actors and consequently in the attitudes towards the issue. A new and invigorated desire to avoid costly and time-consuming litigation developed within the SIPD and the Provincial department of Intergovernmental Affairs (IAF). Some research into the matter found that there was room for a compromise that could bring both parties to a mutual agreement. What ensued was a different approach to planning, Elija referred to this as a, "shift in the role of planners from caretakers to initiator of change."

Marry Bishop, in the Millennium edition of *Plan Canada*, addresses this changing role that planners need to play to help rural communities resolve new conflicts, "My hope is that our profession will find ways to contribute to the revival and survival of these communities in the face of global change... develop new ways to think about our rural communities – about the quality of life they provide, and their role in our regional, provincial and national economies...we will have an important role in helping local governments to sort out what is happening to their communities and why, and in helping them effect change in a manner that leads to future prosperity" (Bishop, 1999, p.23).



Prairie Blossom Colony. Notice the round circle is the colony housing, the rectangle leading from the north of the circle is the manufacturing operation and the rectangle leading to the west is the school and church.

In 2000, Elija Bijelic joined the South Interlake Planning District to discover that the issue remained unresolved. In fact, the situation had been allowed to fester. Both sides had become

Facts of the Case

The Issue:

In 1995 Prairie Blossom Hutterite Colony started a small manufacturing operation, constructing roof trusses for homes, on land zoned for agriculture. This was in direct violation of the SIPD development plan and created an enforcement situation. The positions of the major actors at this time were:

- 1) The colony needed this small industrial operation to supplement their farm income.
- 2) The SIPD found that the industrial operation was contradictory to the development plan and should be halted.
- 3) There was a "Zero Tolerance Attitude" by Planning Board members for zoning violations such as illegal land use operations in agricultural areas. There were no tools available to resolve the issue at hand within the current planning by-laws.

According to background information on the file, "the initial planning advice to the South Interlake Planning District back in 1996 was that the agricultural land should not be redesignated to 'Special Industrial Area' and that all industry should be directed to settlement centres or other appropriate areas." Although the municipal planners of the day recognized that, "a Hutterite colony operates in a unique manner" the planning advice at that time emphasized that, "an essential requirement of planning is that the regulations are applied to everyone in an equitable and



The colony does have a considerable agricultural operation. In the background you can see the greenhouses and other farm sheds.

Planners

South Interlake Planning District – District Board and Elija Bijelic (administrator)
 Intergovernmental Affairs – Hugh Brown, (Community Planner) and Lloyd Talbot (Regional Manager)
 Lombard North Group (1984) Ltd. – David Palubeski (consultant)

Stakeholders

South Interlake Planning District Board Members;
 Rural Municipality of Rosser
 Rural Municipality of Rockwood
 Town of Stonewall – David Lethbridge (former Mayor)
 Town of Teulon – Ted Hodgkinson (former Mayor)
 Concord Colony – Sam Kleinsesser
 Prairie Blossom Hutterite Colony – Jake Maendal

Where

Rural Municipality of Rockwood adjacent to the Settlement Centre of Balmoral.

When

Started in 1995
 Revisited in 2000
 Resolved in 2002

consistent manner" (SIPD Background File Information). The R.M. of Rockwood Council of the day was also firmly opposed to having any manufacturing operations in agricultural areas and was concerned about a poor planning precedent being set. At Planning Board hearings on the matter in 1996, a councillor stated, "We do not need industry brought into these areas, for if this one is allowed, I am sure there is more waiting to do the same."

PLANNERS' CASEBOOK

The plan:

SIPD and IAF worked together to identify stakeholders and bring them into a process designed to find an acceptable solution and initiate community healing. Lloyd Talbot referred, in an interview, to a process that he had worked with in Saskatchewan before coming to Manitoba. This process involved the planner meeting one-on-one with the individual stakeholders and helping them to determine their needs and areas for compromise. Following this, the planner brought the stakeholders together and facilitated an open dialogue using the agreed areas of compromise as building blocks. In this case, planners met regularly with each of the stakeholders. Their task was difficult because people's mindsets were still influenced by five years of conflict. Their main goal was to help stakeholders see past the conflict and to become part of a process towards a mutually acceptable solution.

Challenges

Changing the cultural mindset of rural Manitobans. There is an ingrained sense of agricultural tradition and change has not been welcome. Residents feel threatened by the development of the Hutterite Colonies and their different way of life. One of the planners alluded to the prevailing attitude of rural residents being, "why can't they do it like we do?" Michael Ignatieff talks of the need to formally recognize and honour the way of life of all groups, "*you can't act effectively in the world and take responsibility for yourself unless you respect yourself. And you can't do that unless your identity as member of a people is honoured by the political system in which you live.*" (2000, p.61)

Releasing the tension and healing the divide in the community. From the start of the conflict in 1995, all parties were adversarial, including the planners. They created a situation that was allowed to fester for over five years. It is difficult to bring people together who have sat at the opposite end of the table for so many years. When dealing with complex conflicts, Edward De Bono talks about the need to use

a process of un-designing, which "involves unravelling the strands that have come together in this way and seeking to put them together in another way." (1991, p.41)

Working within the legislative framework.

One of the difficulties for planners was to find a solution that was not only acceptable for the stakeholders but was also consistent with legislation. In this case, amendments to both the development plan and local zoning by-laws were required. Peter Mah talks about the changing nature of the approach to planning, "the preparation, the processing and the amendment of conventional planning and zoning bylaws is not any less important today; conversely, they have become more important, but they are performed in a less technical manner. Rural planning mechanisms and processes must adapt if they are to continue to be relevant." (Mah, 1998, p.26)

Lessons Learned

Resolving conflict enabled stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the process.

Through various means, the planners sought to find ways of addressing and including issues relevant to stakeholders. This allowed for education among stakeholders of the needs and concerns of the other stakeholders. Edward De Bono talks about the need to not only solve conflict but also to add value, "it is not, as a matter of removing a problem or effecting a compromise. There is a designed something which was not there before." (1991, p41) In



The truss manufacturing operation is a new and modern facility.



The church, school, and heart of the Prairie Blossom Hutterite Colony.

this case, the process allowed for the creation of a common language of understanding.

Having a strong representative from each stakeholder group allowed for broader acceptance. Representatives were able to participate in the process by bringing the interests of their constituents. They could then return to their constituents and report on the progress of the process in a way that made sense to them. Gerald Hodge states that in dealing with rural communities, "the mode of public consultation may have to be adapted to the means of communication with which the community is most able to articulate its aspirations." (2003, p.365) In this case, having strong representatives from each group allowed each group to have a strong voice.

Building a relationship of trust creates social capital which can be used to overcome future challenges. The participants felt comfortable pursuing relationships created during this process after the fact. This ensures that future processes will have greater acceptance within the community. Peter Mah refers to the changing nature of planning where planners, "engage communities to self-direct their own futures." (1998, p.29)

Be innovative in approaches to dealing with land use conflicts. The amendments to these plans called for flexibility in locating small scale industries on farms and ensuring that operations were sustainable with no impact on the surrounding area. The open process involved with decision making, including conditional uses, focused on also finding legal means to solve the conflict. Gerald Hodge states that "planning tools act as an interface between the politics of the plan and the aim of those who make decisions that transform the physical environment." (2003, p.206) In this case, the tool that was required was a different approach to interpreting the law to reflect the realities of the day.

Outcomes

This process managed to heal five years of animosity within the community. This achievement alone has greater implications for community building than the adoption of amendments to the development plan and zoning by-laws. Planners continually endeavour to help communities find, maintain, and promote that sense of community. This comes through a complex process of continually evaluating the feeling of community and finding ways of expressing this sentiment. Policy analyst David Joplin explained that this project was of particular importance because the local planners kept the decision making local without having to refer it to either the Municipal Board or the Minister. Ideally, the Province would like communities to be able to resolve their own conflicts locally by generating more planning and discussion earlier on in the process. (April 5th, 2003)

This process developed a framework that can be modified for specific situations and applied broadly across the Province. A number of other rural municipalities within the Province are facing similar issues of planning in cross-cultural and increasingly conflicting environments. Hodge states that, "planners need to be able to cross cultural boundaries in seeking to understand ethnic-community

concerns as well as the expectations the community has of the planning process." (2003, pp.1365) Processes such as this, seek to transcend the barriers of culture by including the elements of that culture as issues that are relevant to the process. Once the issues are acknowledged they give a sense of legitimacy and acceptance to that culture.

Winning the Manitoba Planning Excellence Award goes a long way to giving all stakeholders who were a part of this process recognition and a sense of accomplishment.

This award emphasized that the importance of this planning endeavour to the entire Province. As stated by Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Jean Friesen at the awards ceremony, "The benefits that result from good planning are felt throughout the province, especially by future generations." (Stonewall Argus, March 2003, p.2) The award went one step further to acknowledge the innovative nature of not only the solution but also the process they embarked upon.

6. Conclusion

This project is innovative in its approach to creating a process that can be applied to similar situations in the future. Often planners are faced with deeply entrenched, opposing sides. The increasing multicultural nature of Canadian society will likely increase the number of conflicts based on cultural differences. This process seeks to legitimize the views of the stakeholders and acknowledge their individuality while searching for areas of concession and solution that are acceptable for all. In this case, all interested parties were rewarded for their efforts, the rift within the community was mended and a solution to the planning problem was found.



Colony housing, the houses are built in a half circle around a community centre.

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Roger Lam BA advanced, is currently working at completing a masters in City Planning. His thesis topic is *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Qualitative Indicators in Measuring the Impact of the work of Community Renewal Corporations*. He has recently completed work with the federal government's Office of Critical Infrastructure and Emergency Preparedness and as a research assistant with Dr. Sheri Blake in a project with the Province of Manitoba's Neighbourhoods Alive!. He is currently working in a co-op position with the Province of British Columbia's Ministry of Community Aboriginal and Women's Services, housing policy branch as a research officer.



Bill Budd, MCP MCIP, is a graduate of the University of Manitoba's City Planning program as well as a member of the Manitoba Professional Planners Institute and the Canadian Institute of Planners. He is currently employed as a planner with the Province of Manitoba's Intergovernmental Affairs in the Selkirk regional office.