



MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK

3rd Floor 303 Portage Ave., Winnipeg MB R3B 2B4
Tel: 204-947-6511 www.mbeconetwork.org

Project Title: Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighbourhood

Abstract

The Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighbourhood project is an interdisciplinary study examining how inner-city and mature neighbourhood inhabitants are impacted by neighbouring industrial development and brownfield sites in Winnipeg, and the measures by which community members and municipal decision-makers can contribute to a more sustainable form of development in our city's future. This study combines legal research and community expertise, with the goal of increasing access to environmental justice for all inner-city inhabitants, but particularly the most low-income and marginalized individuals.

Background

Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods experience high levels of concentrated poverty¹, and are home to many of our city's Indigenous and newcomer residents, populations in which poverty and marginalization are more prevalent². Many privately owned units are priced lower and social housing opportunities are more abundant (although far from sufficient)³. The proximity of social services and public transit make the inner-city a logical choice for many low-income residents. As a result, Winnipeg's inner city is incredibly diverse and vibrant. The inner-city is also a hotbed for community activism, and home to many organizations who build community each day through their activities⁴.

Early city planning decisions in the development of Winnipeg continue to shape our city to this day. For example, the location of the CPR railyards cut off the working-class North End from the wealthier neighbourhoods of Southern Winnipeg⁵. The inner-city is impacted by industrial development and brownfield sites (like the CPR railyards) including many locations in Point Douglas, Weston and West Alexander/Centennial. The Mission Industrial Park, located just outside inner-city boundaries, is also an area of concern, with recent studies finding elevated levels of toxic chemicals in the soil⁶.

¹ City of Winnipeg (2020). Geographic Areas of Higher Poverty (map). City of Winnipeg:

<https://www.winnipeg.ca/cms/pdfs/GeographicAreasOfHigherPoverty.pdf>

² Molly McCracken, with Angela Myran and Alex Gachanja (2015). Introduction. In *Drawing on Our Strengths: State of the Inner-city Report 2015*. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. p. 2-3.

³ Carter, T. & Osborne, J. (2009) Housing and Neighbourhood Challenges of Refugee Resettlement in Declining Inner-city Neighbourhoods: A Winnipeg Case Study. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 7:3. 308-327.

⁴ Shayna Plaut (2020). Introduction. In *COVID 19: The Changing State of the Inner-city: State of the Inner-city Report 2020*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: Winnipeg. p. 5-6.

⁵ Silver, Jim (2010a). Segregated City: A Century of Poverty in Winnipeg. In Paul Thomas and Curtis Brown (eds.), *Manitoba Politics and Government: Issues, Institutions, Traditions*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

⁶ Solademi, F. (2020). Environmental study of Mission Industrial Area and South St. Boniface neighborhood, Winnipeg, Canada.



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Mature communities also are areas of concern. OurWinnipeg Complete Communities defines *mature communities* as areas of stability with limited opportunities for infill/intensification, and a focus on neighbourhood maintenance⁷. Many of Winnipeg's earliest neighbourhoods were developed before the 1950s and tend to have gridded streets with backlanes and sidewalks. Mature communities also have a variety of housing types in a lower-density makeup and a variety of land-uses along commercial roads⁸. St. Boniface is an example of a mature community, which also has a legacy of industry, both past and present, affecting the area. St. Boniface also was once on the border of the City of Winnipeg, which has since been expanded with more recent development. This increases the chances of this community being close to industrial uses that were strategically placed on the outskirts of town⁹. Many of these industries still exist today close to residential neighbourhoods.

Existing zoning, city plans, and programs do not go far enough to ensure that harmful industrial development is not located near the places where city residents live, work and play. Winnipeg does not have a comprehensive Brownfield Strategy and the current policy and regulatory regimes afford little opportunity to concerned residents and groups to have their voices heard and influence the decision-making process. There is also a general lack of information about the legislative framework and legal processes relating to industrial development and brownfield sites, which restricts the public's ability to advocate for environmental justice in their communities.

Project Overview & Research Questions

The *Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighbourhood* project will examine city planning, industrial development, and environmental and health impacts through an environmental justice lens. We are interested in demonstrating how Winnipeg's inner-city and mature neighbourhoods are impacted by the industrial development and brownfield sites in their midst and identifying the legal tools and resources residents and community groups have to address their concerns. Therefore, the *Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighbourhood* project seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the documented and undocumented environmental and health impacts of living, working, and/or playing, near industrial development and brownfield sites in Winnipeg's inner-city and mature neighbourhoods?
2. Do people who live, work and/or play in Winnipeg's inner-city and mature neighbourhoods, and particularly its poorer areas, have access to environmental justice? What means do residents

⁷ OurWinnipeg (2015). Complete Communities. p. 78-79.

<https://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/cityhall/ourwinnipeg/pdf/completemunities.pdf>

⁸ OurWinnipeg (2015). Complete Communities. p. 82-83.

<https://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/cityhall/ourwinnipeg/pdf/completemunities.pdf>

⁹ OurWinnipeg (2015). Complete Communities. p. 91.

<https://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/cityhall/ourwinnipeg/pdf/completemunities.pdf>



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and grassroots organizations have to address environmental health concerns through city planning and government decision-making processes?

3. What is the City of Winnipeg's strategy to deal with conflicts between industrial and other land uses, and the remediation/redevelopment of brownfield sites? How can this be improved to increase the quality of life and access to environmental justice for all inner-city inhabitants, but especially its most marginalized people and communities?

By addressing these questions, the *Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighbourhood* project will be conducting an assessment of environmental justice in Winnipeg's inner-city and mature communities and providing recommendations to move towards more sustainable development and better planning for our city.

Project Methodology

This project will be led by the Manitoba Eco-Network and supported by academic and community partners. The project will also be guided by an Advisory Committee comprised of key people who have knowledge of the inner-city and mature neighbourhoods and the experiences of its residents, community activism, environmental issues, and city planning. The project lead will coordinate all aspects of the project including research activities, convening project meetings, and knowledge mobilization. The project has received funding and support from the Manitoba Research Alliance, the Manitoba Law Foundation, the City of Winnipeg, the University of Winnipeg's Inner-city Work Study Program, and the University of Manitoba's Robson Hall chapter of Pro Bono Students Canada.

This project will take an interdisciplinary approach and include both legal research and non-legal analysis. Approximately 15 semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key individuals. This includes representatives of community renewal corporations, resident organizations, grassroots community groups, and government. Interviews will be transcribed and all data will be analyzed using a combination of computer based coding and discussion between project partners and advisory committee.

An extensive analysis of existing literature and government policy will be completed by a graduate student researcher to provide context and supporting evidence to the information gathered through the interview process. A student with legal research experience will be sought so this analysis can include consideration of relevant legislation and caselaw. By bringing together legal research, and lived and community experiences, this project addresses an important need to make legal information more accessible.

Our proposed outputs include a final report for publication through the Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA) and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba Office (CCPA) and an accompanying report launch (in-person or virtual), a plain language Fastfacts published by the CCPA and hopefully appearing as an Op-Ed in the Winnipeg Free Press, a briefing/letter sent to key decision-makers and public servants, and website and social media promotion of research results. These documents will



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educate the general public and government decision-makers on the impacts of industrial development and brownfield sites in Winnipeg's inner-city and mature neighbourhoods, and provide recommendations to inform policy and law reform and future city planning decisions.