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Steps to halt the deterioration of the urban environment

In an address to the Pacific Science Congress in Vancouver, British Columbia, August 27, Urban Affairs Minister Barney Danson spoke of the "tri-level process", a mechanism used in Canada in an effort to prevent the deterioration of the urban environment. This process, he said, brought together federal, provincial and municipal leaders to determine the objectives to ensure "rational and deliberate planning".

As an example, the Minister used Winnipeg, Manitoba, to illustrate what was being done to solve the problems common to most Canadian cities:

* * * *

Winnipeg possesses all of the elements of a good city — universities, cultural centres, sport facilities, examples of fine architecture and the economic base which is essential to its function. Because of the open spaces, however, these are often spread far apart.

Walking becomes less and less practical as the core dies. This is particularly so in a city where the winter climate frequently sees the temperatures drop to 40 degrees below zero, where wind velocities of 30 miles an hour are not uncommon.

The precious natural features of the rivers with their potential for beauty and recreation are there but thousands of citizens of Winnipeg are denied their enjoyment.

City could be worse — or better

This is far from a disaster area. It is an enjoyable civilized city with the potential to be even better. It also has the potential to become worse and the citizens of Winnipeg along with their political representatives at all levels are determined, as are those of other cities, to do their very best to effect change for the better.

And there is this startling fact: There's enough unused or misused space in downtown Winnipeg alone to accommodate its natural growth for the next 15 to 20 years.

It is our responsibility in Urban Affairs to work with the other governments and other interested parties to come to an agreement on what needs to be done, what policies need to be in place to do something about this situation.

When we sat down with the other two levels of government to assess the situation, we found that there were over 30 independent major activities in the public sector alone, each affecting the growth of the city in an *ad hoc*, fragmented way and frequently at cross purposes.

In the private sector a number of major projects were in the planning stages. One of these was a huge complex of office buildings at the main corner in the central business section.

The intersection of Portage and Main streets is famous across Canada particularly in mid-winter where some of the statues have been known to stamp their feet and hug themselves and comment on the cold.

At the same time, another commercial office complex was planned for the western part of the central core. One of the biggest commercial operations on the main street was planning a significant expansion. This raises the question of whether or not any one of these can be viable if all proceed at the same time.

The railroads were talking of moving their marshalling yards out while at the same time another plan was being studied by another body to build an overpass over these same railyards.

Another railway and a major service enterprise are investigating a massive joint-development program including office space and commercial uses. This plan alone would be of such a scale that it would have enormous impact on the whole future of the central core.

These are just some of the examples of private plans unilaterally conceived — a pattern which is being repeated in city after city across our country.

Finance Minister resigns

John Turner, the Minister of Finance, resigned from the Cabinet on September 11.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. Turner said that he would retain his seat in the House of Commons "until there has been ample opportunity for an orderly transition...."

"I have come to the conclusion that after almost four years in the finance portfolio and almost ten years in the Government of Canada I should return to private life," he said.

Details in next week's issue.