



Changes in Society  
Jewish Society  
The Market Driven Community  
Jewish Winnipeg Demographics  
Innovative Approaches to Judaism & Jewish Life

## **A Brief History of Jewish Winnipeg**

*Society has changed. Tremendous leaps in industrialization and technology have changed the way people build communities and civil society since the first settlements in North America. The way individuals relate to each other and to organizations has a significant impact on how communities need to adapt. The following is the sixth in a series of papers prepared for use as background for the various community planning efforts undertaken by the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg in 2016.*

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**Contents:**

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. The Jewish Federation and Planning | 3 |
| 2. A Brief History of Jewish Winnipeg | 8 |

## The Jewish Federation and Planning

### *Planning Activities and Outcomes*

The following are just some of the major activities undertaken by the Planning Committee and other ad hoc or high level committees, supported by the Planning Director. The following outlines processes and highlights of the outcomes that resulted from those planning efforts.

Community Needs Assessment (1988/89): Even before the creation of a Planning Department, our community was surveyed to determine their needs and interests, the results of which contributed to the development of the Asper Jewish Community Campus. The End of Decade Report, the Touche Ross Report, were two of the documents produced.

- Planning Committee established.
- Planning for a Jewish Community Campus initiated.

Community Retreat (March 1994): In an effort to get broad feedback, all Jewish organizations and the community at large were invited to a retreat, convened by a special Retreat Planning Committee, to identify high priority issues for our community.

- Retreat Action Planning initiated.

Campus Planning (1992-1996): The Federation formed a committee and then the corporation that would plan the facility, asking the Planning Committee to vet the program plans and facility requests that contributed to the architectural plans for the Campus.

- Vetted campus program plans.
- Consultations with agencies and other interested parties.
- Recommendations for membership structures, daycare, etc.

Seniors Planning (1994/95): The Committee on Aging, reporting to the Planning Committee, developed a community vision statement for serving the elderly that was shelved due to high level disagreement about the future of healthcare and the changing mandates of our organizations.

- Material was collected and working relationships developed as specific issues arose. This process laid the groundwork for later successful efforts.

Retreat Action Planning (1994/95): The retreat identified a number of issues and a committee was struck to act on these results, recommending Board reform and constitutional changes to improve our governing structure. These changes were debated and adopted by the Board.

- Governance and bylaw changes made to make the Board more inclusive and modernize major department definitions.
- Consultant contracted to review Jewish community management structures, an “organizational review”.

JOT (1994-1996): The Joint Organizational Transition Planning Committee was convened as the president of the major agencies entering the Campus realized that there were opportunities for closer working relationship. This committee initiated and assisted with several activities including support for:

- recruitment of an Executive Director for the new Rady JCC,
- JCC program planning,
- an organizational review across all our agencies, and ultimately the creation of the Campus Management Team who continue to meet regularly.

JCC Program Planning (1996): The JCC began to look at re-inventing itself in a new more attractive site, with a renewed focus on families and culture. The Planning Department was enlisted to assist with focus groups and the development of a business plan for a significantly expanded program and budget in their new centre.

- JCC Program Requirements for Campus program
- First Rady JCC Business Plan

Organisational Review (1994/95): A consultant was hired to review our structures and recommend areas for improvement afforded by our move into a single location. As a result the JOT Committee developed plans for:

- some shared services, beginning with technology support and marketing.
- Unified technology services implemented
- Contracts for bulk purchases of supplies developed

Strategic Planning (1997/98): Once our move to the Campus was complete, the Planning Committee initiated a strategic planning initiative to bring our attention back to programs and services. Agencies were invited to participate and the WJCC Board participated in a retreat to identify critical issues for the Council, one of which was Financial Resource Development. Before the process was quite complete, the Millennium Committee was formed and provided an opportunity to collect further data on community needs and wants.

- Agency Strategic Planning – as a service to agencies, the Planning Director led strategic planning processes and consulted with Gwen Sexter Creative Living Centre, the Jewish Heritage Centre, and the Gray Academy.

Millennium Committee (1998/99): The Opportunities and Responsibilities Sub-Committee of the Millennium Committee embarked on data collection in the fall of 1998 in order to provide a sound and rationale vision of unmet needs that could be used in FRD planning to estimate the size of the need and the methods required.

- Community wide attitudinal survey providing information available to all community organizations.

Process Improvements (1999): The Planning Committee tested a new approach to updating priorities through a specialized task force that identifies priorities and vision in

a particular area. It began trying a “goal setting” approach with the Education Sub-Committee which delivered its report in the fall of 1999.

*Planning for the Elderly (1999/2000)*: At the instigation of the professionals involved in service delivery to seniors, they have been meeting to network and plan together. To further empower the organizations, a new Committee on Aging was struck to gather available data and strategize on ways to develop co-ordinated plans. As recommended by that committee, the Coalition for Older Adults convened under the auspices of the Planning Committee to continue the joint planning of major agencies in serving the elderly.

- Annual COA sponsored collaborative activity
- Lobbying for improved Handi-Transit
- Initiated regular staff COA meetings to exchange information several times per year

*Community Planning (1999/2000)*: In June 2000 the Planning Committee spun off a Jewish Community Planning process, led by a separate committee, planning with and for the Jewish community. The process was published under separate cover, the Planning Guide which includes information on Jewish context, data available for use by the committees and others, and a timeline for producing vision, goals, and priorities.

- published the Community Agenda 2001
- Young Adult Division developed as a result of the renewed focus on young adult engagement in the community and then in CJA campaign

*Community Agenda 2003*: A broad based planning session with 5 focus areas was used to get feedback and broadcast resulting ideas and priorities to the Board and community agencies.

- Increased focus on and funding for immigrant integration
- GrowWinnipeg host family recruitment
- Focus on jobs for newcomers and youth
- Focus on communications to the community, improved use of web, community organizational phone book development – Making Connections

*Community Agenda 2004*: The subject of Jewish Identity was explored in depth tabling ideas that resulted in implementation by various agencies. For instance, a participant offered the idea of Melton Adult Mini School and the JCC proceeded with implementation some time later.

- Melton program now continues under the auspices of Shaarey Zedek Synagogue.

*Community Agenda 2005*: Using data from the 2001 census, the Poverty Roundtable examined issues related to poverty in the classic sense as well as economic disadvantage of middle income families. The Half Shekel Task Force was formed and worked over several years to raise awareness of the issues.

- Dare to Dream social and public awareness campaign
- Proposal for common assessment method vetted by agencies and ultimately rejected
- School awareness of Jewish poverty continues annually
- School project chosen by high school class of toiletries drive providing material that lasted JCFS for several years
- Publicity on poverty and the isolation of seniors results in the Tallman Fund for Seniors Transportation of the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba

Priorities 2006: With so many Issues and ideas on the table a community consultation process was conducted to identify the priorities for action in each of several areas. It began with a planning session titled “*Vision of a Vibrant Jewish Community*”, followed up by focus groups and publishing the results.

Federation Strategic Review 2007-2009: The Committee undertook a broad based consultation and planning process that resulted in the publication of an extensive report to the board, a community report in brochure form, and a follow up report two years later.

- Development of Machon Madrichim for Teens
- Jewish Engagement pilot projects initiated including
  - Limmud Winnipeg, as part of international movement
  - “Bring a Friend to Shul Day”
  - Global Day of Jewish Learning – participation from the first annual
- Professional Development Roundtable (2009-2012): A spin off from the Strategic Review was a roundtable of professionals from beneficiaries, synagogues and other Jewish organizations who met 2-3 times per year for several years, taking advantage of several out of town consultants to provide insights and training to Jewish communal professionals.
- Securing our Future 2010-2013: The Strategic Review results were used to develop FRD strategy under the Community Financial Planning sub-committee. This resulted in the campaign theme titled “Securing our Future”.
- Strategic Review Results provided to beneficiary agencies for use in submissions and briefing provided to Allocations Committee

Jewish Engagement Strategy 2010: While there were several major issues highlighted in the review, Jewish engagement was a major area with significant gaps and need for action. An implementation plan was developed and tabled.

- Hired staff to facilitate PJ Library and Limmud, pilot communications posters for holidays, participate in Global Day
- in 2012 hired staff to develop outreach and public space initiatives (Making Connections)
- While the strategy was monitored for several years by the Planning Committee, in 2015 the first Jewish Engagement committee was formed under the Community Engagement chair.

*Evaluation Methods 2010:* Following up on the recommendation of the Strategic Review that evaluation methodology is explored to examine what success looked like in planning a “Vibrant Jewish community”. The workshop was facilitated by a JFNA consultant and was offered to agency leadership as well. Various program evaluation techniques were discussed in the context of setting measurable goals.

- Planning Committee began to develop a “community report card” but did not complete.

*Community Land Use Task Force 2014-15:* With several pressing decisions in the community around priorities and use of land for community purposes, the task force briefly met and took a hard look at the priority issues to determine what could be done to provide various decisions makers with support and information. A key recommendation was to undertake more extensive vision development.

*Community Conversations 2016* – board based consultation process undertaken beginning in May 2016.

## A Brief History of Jewish Winnipeg

### A Brief History of Jewish Winnipeg<sup>1</sup>

There were approximately 30 Jews residing in Winnipeg before 1882. Most were small businessmen of British or German background and adherents of the Reform branch of Judaism.

This changed dramatically in 1882 with the start of mass Jewish immigration from the shtetls, towns and cities of Eastern Europe. Despite their small numbers and limited resources, Winnipeg Jews, on short notice, responded in a humanitarian manner and attempted to prepare the way for more than 8,000 refugees. A relief committee was formed, housing and employment was found, and so began the tradition of local Jews helping others settle in our community.

Today, Winnipeg has a Jewish population of approximately [14,000] from various streams of Judaism, and many parts of the world. [The Winnipeg Jewish community] is a vibrant and active community. [It has] contributed enormously to the creation of religious, cultural, philanthropic, recreational and educational institutions which strengthen our Jewish identity while enhancing the broader community in which we live.

We came here in waves in the early part of the last century, primarily from Eastern Europe. We brought with us traditions of caring. One of the first tasks was consecrating land for a cemetery to bury a baby who died very young. There were lots of institutional symbols like the development of landsmanschaften, free loan societies, created to lend money to other Jews interest-free to help them get a start in a new place. Early on our community leaders created a Jewish orphanage and Jewish schools, both religious and secular. These were grounded in Jewish values like the Torah prohibition on charging your fellow interest, and the strongly held value of education that pervaded the first generations in America.

We reflect a diverse mix of religious and secular movements – Zionists, communists, Talmud scholars, Yiddishists and more. Secular Jews came with principles and ideals about Jewish culture, politics, establishing a Jewish homeland and social democracy. While they rejected religious life, they were serious and committed Jews, instilling in their children and grandchildren a strong Jewish identity and respect for the Jewish values that could be used to improve the world. The Kaufman Silverberg Library boasts the largest Yiddish literature collection in the West. Jewish families were involved in political activism, union organizing and social welfare that are the foundation of our systems in Manitoba. We are a community founded on basic Jewish values, with a longstanding habit

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<sup>1</sup> Making Connections, A Winnipeg Jewish Resource Directory, page 1.

of providing everything our community needs, while contributing to the general community in disproportionate measure.

Winnipeg, as a city, has a wide variety of music, theatre, culture, and services of larger centres. We have a history of doing things for ourselves and setting high expectations as a city isolated from other population. As a Jewish community, Winnipeg is home to a full array of Jewish institutions and services that is more reflective of a community twice the size. We have a reputation as a Jewish community of accomplishment and strength of identity.

**Zionsim** – With a background as avid Zionists and supporters of Israel, we continue to have high rate of travel to Israel among our youth and young adults. There are stories told to this day of how the Winnipeg Jewish community responded to the war in 1967 raising \$1.5 million in one day. Our community boasts IDF veterans who left Winnipeg to sign up in Israel to fight in 1948. Aliyah from Winnipeg continues to this day as a result of close relationships with Israel.

**Synagogue history** - Winnipeg's synagogues have a long history as well, both of growth and strength and of more recent amalgamation of three North End congregations when circumstances required. While the sheer number of Orthodox congregations has decreased as the congregants aged, an Orthodox congregation with a rabbi continues at Herzlia Adas Yeshurun which itself was the amalgamation of the Herzlia Academy and the Adas Yeshurun Congregation in 1955, creating a new home in River Heights which had become a popular neighbourhood for Jews. The development of Chabad's new Jewish Learning Centre is a result of renewed interest in traditional learning with a modern style and the second home in Chabad's long history in Winnipeg.

Our Conservative synagogues have adapted and changed from operating without movement affiliation to developing new music and some uniquely local music, acceptance of bat mitzvah and eventually egalitarianism, and the development of alternative options for high holidays These are some of the notable changes in the history of our synagogue community.

When the first Shaarey Zedek was planned in 1883 there were estimated to be about 400 Jews living in Winnipeg.<sup>2</sup> (Chiel, .pg 79).

It was the hope of the founders of Shaarey Zedek that the membership of the new congregation would embrace the entire Jewish community. To facilitate a single, united congregation Shaarey Zedek leaders made provision for services to be held according to both prayer rituals, the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic,

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<sup>2</sup> (The Jews in Manitoba, A Social History, by Arthur A. Chiel Issued under the Auspices of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, University of Toronto Press, 1961)  
Synagogues of Western Canada by Lynn Milstone, Sheldon Levitt, Sid Tenenbaum, 1977, courtesy of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada.

since there observers of both rituals living in Winnipeg. Minhag Ashkenaz prayers were to be read in the main worship hall while Minhag Sephard ones were to be followed in an adjoining small chapel.

Rabbi Chiel's chapter on Religious Life goes on to describe how the two minyans would co-exist in one building with separate clergy, leadership and services but one membership structure. This structure led to conflict and didn't last which resulted in the Sephardic group forming a new congregation which eventually became the Rosh Pina. (It should be understood here that Sephardic refers to the nusach and customs brought from a European community some of whose traditions originated in Spain. Today you can order an "Ashkenazi" siddur based on Nusach Sephard.)

Winnipeg has a long history of amalgamating and splitting congregations both to revitalize shuls and economize on buildings.