Social
Planning
Council of
Winnipeg
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Committed
To
Community

Recommendation for a Community Poverty Reduction Strategy for the City of Winnipeg

Submission to the Executive Policy Committee

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Recommendation for a Community Poverty Reduction Strategy
Submission to the Executive Policy Committee, Wednesday April 19th, 2006

The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, established in 1919, is a membership based non profit organization in the voluntary sector whose vision is for a just, caring, inclusive, and responsive society. The Social Planning Council provides action oriented leadership in social planning and effecting social policy changes. The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg recommends that the Executive Policy Committee of the City of Winnipeg approve the amended recommendation from the April 10th 2006 meeting of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services:

1. That the Province of Manitoba be requested to further reduce the effects of poverty by supporting and strengthening inter-sectoral frameworks and efforts between governments and community organizations.

2. That the Social Planning Council be requested to identify key stakeholders and commence discussions regarding the identification of an inter-sectoral process and implementation plan for the purpose of determining a collaborative comprehensive community poverty reduction strategy for Winnipeg, and report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services no later than September 11, 2006.

3. That Council appoints political representation to engage in the inter-sectoral process which will determine a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

4. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

A process to develop a collaborative comprehensive community poverty reduction strategy for Winnipeg would build on the principles in Winnipeg's long term plan and would prove beneficial to the city in many ways. It would create a framework for progressive municipal programs, policies, and procedures within our city and would build sound governance by increasing the capacity of municipal institutions to respond to and represent the needs of all Winnipeg citizens. It would also provide the opportunity for stakeholders to identify cross-sectoral solutions to improve the quality of life in our city.

Other Canadian cities have undertaken action in the form of establishing committees, task forces, and other relevant initiatives to address the issue of poverty in their communities. Some of these are summarized at the end of this document. Other cities in Canada have also recognized the value of identifying and integrating social development priorities with their strategies for economic development. The City of Toronto, in their Social Development Strategy recognized that poverty and social exclusion affect the health and well being of their community. They also recognized that economic development is not the primary route to improve well being but must coincide with the social development of a community as well by concentrating on improving incomes, creating access to affordable housing, and other indicators that affect the health of a community.

Poverty in the City of Winnipeg

Poverty is a serious issue in the City of Winnipeg. According to the 2001 Census:

- 26,120 families or 14.3% of Winnipeg families are living in low income. This is higher than the Canadian average of 12.6%. 16.2% of Winnipeg residents (individuals 15 and over) are in low income.

- Aboriginal people are overrepresented among those who are living in poverty. In 2000, 46.2% of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg lived in low income and were nearly three times as likely to be in low income as the general population in the Winnipeg Census Metropolitan Area.[1]

- In Winnipeg, 60.5% of aboriginal children live in poverty, compared to 18.3% for non-Aboriginal children.

- Currently, one quarter of all households in the city live below the poverty line.[2]

- In 2004, 79% of immigrants to Manitoba settled in Winnipeg. The rate of poverty among newcomer children in Manitoba was 51.2% in 2001.

More recent data from Statistics Canada shows that in 2004, the total rate of poverty among children in Winnipeg was 22.6%. While this showed an improvement from the previous year, it is not cause for celebration. Families were still on average, $10,300 below the poverty line. The growth and concentration of poverty in urban areas suggests that municipal governments cannot afford to focus on physical infrastructure alone and must pay close attention to the social side of development in Canadian cities.

The Need for an Intergovernmental Approach

In the 2005 Manitoba Child and Family Poverty Report Card, the Social Planning Council called for a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty that has leadership and active participation from all levels of government. Poverty reduction is a key component in creating sustainable and healthy communities, which is of particular interest for all levels of government and communities across Canada. Municipal governments alone cannot address the complexity of poverty and its related issues and nor should they be expected to. Poverty is a complex problem that crosses all levels of government jurisdiction and responsibility.

All levels of government have a responsibility to work together and with community stakeholders through coordination and leadership in matters that impact on Canadians. While the provincial and federal levels of government have primary responsibility and

[1] Statistics Canada "Trends and Conditions in Census Metropolitan Areas: Low Income in Census Metropolitan Areas"

[2] Poverty Changes in Winnipeg Neighbourhoods 1981-2001

legislative authority for many social issues such as income assistance and transfers to families, there is a strong proactive role for the City of Winnipeg to play in developing a poverty reduction strategy; a role that does not fall outside of its mandate.

The Role of the City of Winnipeg

The City of Winnipeg by its own mandate has a leadership role to play in the engagement of the broader community in a multi sectoral process to develop a plan to reduce poverty. Section 5 (1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter defines the purposes of the city as: providing a good government; providing services, facilities or other things that council considers to be necessary or desirable for all or part of the city; developing and maintaining safe, orderly, viable, and sustainable communities; and promoting and maintaining the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants.

Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision, City Council's long range policy plan, "provides the foundation for all civic activity" and is concerned with addressing the broad physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions in the City. The Plan outlines a number of principles that Council sees as central to the Plan's policies and Winnipegger's vision for their city. Among these are principles that recognize the importance of partnerships and collaboration; promote healthy lifestyles to assist people to develop to their fullest potential; commitment to concepts of social equity and addressing issues such as child poverty; local empowerment to share decision making processes through citizen engagement and facilitating ongoing participation in local government; and providing leadership in addressing social concerns.

The impacts of poverty on individual health and wellbeing of communities are well documented. Research has shown that poverty reduction is central to the support of sustainable and healthy communities, and hence, should be a key priority for municipal governments.

The Social Role of Municipal Government

As the level of government that is considered the closest to the people, there have been many changes in understanding of the role of local governments. Traditionally, they have been responsible primarily for the physical infrastructure of the city, including streets, waste, water, etc. and social infrastructure responsibilities have typically focused on recreation, culture, and other leisure opportunities[3]. According to the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, "the social role of local governments has expanded well beyond these areas. This role has expanded in response to the evolving economic, social and political context that has created new pressures and new opportunities". With increasing urbanization (and the concentration of poverty in urban centres[4]), immigration, and

[3] Torjman, Sherri and Leviten-Reid, Eric (2003). *The Social Role of Local Government.* Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

[4] Poverty is becoming concentrated in urban centres across Canada. In 1980, 44.84% of children under eighteen living in poverty lived in fifteen Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) in Canada. By 2002, this number had increased to

competitiveness in the global market, cities have had to refocus on a broader understanding of social infrastructure and quality of life in order to attract and keep new investments, business, and people.[5]

Housing is an example of this expanded role of municipal governments. The City of Winnipeg has significant influence over the availability of affordable housing in Winnipeg, not only as a funding partner in the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative, but also through land use planning (such as Waverley West) and other policies that impact on development. Winnipeg's long range plan 2020 Vision is a prime example of its commitment to sustainable development.

The City also has a role in employment and labour market development with its responsibility for creating local economic policies that impact on employment and training, another important poverty reduction strategy. In this capacity, municipalities have impact on the use of the voluntary sector and community economic development as a means to strengthen local economies.[6]

A more specific example of how local governments can work, within their jurisdiction, to improve the circumstances for marginalized communities is through its responsibility for local economic development in Winnipeg. Opportunities exist for the development and implementation of local hiring strategies and living wage ordinances. The former requires developers who receive some form of public money (tax breaks, exemptions, subsidies, etc) to target a certain percentage of jobs for local residents. The goal of local hiring strategies is to connect economic development to local opportunities for training and employment.[7] The second strategy uses living wage ordinances that limit the City to contracting with employers who pay living wages to their employees. This would have immediate and direct benefits to Winnipeg's economy by increasing the spending power of citizens, but also by leading to job creation and other economic spin offs. As important, it also has a direct impact on quality of life by improving incomes and access to services.[8]

Another example is through active engagement and meaningful participation of marginalized individuals and communities in civic life and decision making. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities states that municipal governments can achieve the goals of working towards poverty reduction and sustainable development through "meaningful participation in decision making".[9] They advance that municipal

61.6%. This is not surprising given that Canada is one of the most urbanized countries in the world with approximately 80% of Canadians living in urban areas.

[5] Torjman, Sherri and Leviten-Reid, Eric (2003). *The Social Role of Local Government.* Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

[6] Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2000). *Local Government and Poverty Reduction: Canada's Contribution to Municipal Social Development.* Report for Istanbul +5.

[7] www.policylink.org

[8] www.policylink.org

[9] Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2000).

governments are better positioned to engage traditionally marginalized and voiceless communities in the decision making process, which has positive effects all around.

Public participation is important for a number of reasons. It both informs and educates the public about matters that affect the public and engages them in the decision making process.[10] It enables government to be more responsive to and reflective of local needs and issues by informing development priorities and supporting decision making and service delivery at the local level. It also promotes an environment of collaboration between the various levels of government and the communities they represent.

Canadian Examples of Municipal Leadership in Poverty Reduction

The following is a summary of examples of municipal leadership and action in the area of poverty reduction. What these examples show is that many Canadian cities have taken steps to address poverty and engage multiple sectors (including those directly affected) in a public participation process to jointly identify solutions.

Ottawa: Poverty Issues Advisory Committee

The mandate of the Poverty Issues Advisory Committee is to provide advice to Ottawa City Council, through the Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee, and its Departments, on issues that impact and address poverty in the City. The Poverty Issues Advisory Committee is responsible for:

- Providing a forum for citizens to raise issues and concerns regarding poverty in the City;
- Providing advice and guidance to Ottawa City Council, through the Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee, on matters pertaining to policies, practices and programs concerning poverty in the City;
- Conducting advocacy on policy issues on behalf of low-income citizens;
- Providing advice and guidance on the identification of initiatives, programs and policies that will help reduce poverty;
- Forming partnerships and cooperative efforts with low-income communities in Ottawa to facilitate problem solving and address issues of concern;
- Identifying ways of addressing emerging issues so as to reduce poverty;
- Advising on new policies originating from the People Services Department and other departments where applicable when they are considered to have an impact on poverty issues;
- Advising on training or associated initiatives to sensitize staff and the community on the issues and concerns affecting the low-income community.

Toronto: Community Services Committee

The Toronto Community Services Committee is responsible for:

- Social development policies and community grants

[10] Karpat, Jessica (n.d.). *New Directions in Public Participation: Learning Experiences in Seattle, WA.*

- Housing and homelessness, child care, social assistance, and employment programs, emergency shelter and assistance, seniors' services.
- Fire and ambulance services, emergency planning and communications.

Richmond: Poverty Response Committee

The Richmond Community Services Advisory Council (RCSAC) is an advisory body to Richmond City Council on social, health and community matters. Its mandate is to encourage and promote social policies and community services that contribute to the general health, welfare and quality of life of Richmond residents. The Council consists of community, agency and government representatives and two citizen appointees.

Saskatoon Social Policy Development Round Table

The Social Policy Development Round Table is advisory and was established by City Council in order to provide Council with advice on social policy issues at the strategic level. The Round Table is comprised of all members of Council plus one representative from each of the twelve advisory committees.

Surrey: Social Planning Committee

The purpose of the Social Planning Committee is to enhance the social well-being of the present and future residents of Surrey. This Committee is a Select Committee of Surrey City Council with a mandate to:

- Advise and assist Council in formulating policies which maintain and improve the social health of the community. This work includes identification of the causes of the social needs in the community, and of the major groups at risk; recommendations on ways in which these needs can be alleviated; policies to address the need for socializing and meeting places, and to investigate the provision of accommodation options for low income residents.
- Liaise with public and private agencies including senior governments, to encourage the provision of programs and services for Surrey residents.
- Consider social planning issues raised by Council, by any member of the Committee, or by the Administration and make recommendations to Council.

Brandon: Community Task Force on Impoverishment

This Committee of Council was to more forward on recommendations to alleviate impoverishment in Brandon emerging from the Civic Forum on Poverty and to advise City Council of its work as it progresses. This Committee is comprised of the Mayor and two Councillors and three representatives from the Brandon Social Planning Council.

In 1994, the City of Brandon established a Forum on Poverty and Impoverishment to solicit public views on poverty issues and ideas about things that might be done to alleviate poverty in the city. Virtually every organization involved with the poor, social programs and labour market issues made submissions. As well, many individuals gave personal testimony about their experiences living on low wages/low incomes, i.e., being poor. The forum produced many recommendations directed to various levels of government.

As a consequence of this forum, the Brandon Social Planning Council was formed and in 1997 Brandon City Council approved the creation of a Community Task Force on Impoverishment. The motion recommended that the task force include the mayor and two councillors and three members of the social planning council and that its mandate be to move forward the recommendations from the Forum on Poverty. The motion carried. In 2002, the Task Force became an entrenched committee of council. There are now five standing council committees in Brandon, namely: audit and finance; personnel; municipal heritage; grants review; and poverty. The entrenchment of the poverty committee as a council committee has ensured that poverty issues are part of council's ongoing agenda.

There are approximately ten meetings per year after which the committee chair gives a report to council. Meetings are also taped and televised on the access channel. In recent months, the Poverty Committee has made submissions to the Minimum Wage Board in November 2004, Theresa Oswald's hearings on healthy child initiatives, and the Just Income Coalition's hearings on low wages. There have also been some achievements including the establishment of off peak period bus passes as part of the entitlement of social assistance recipients, keeping the issue of low-income and affordable housing at the forefront of housing debates, and promoting legislation relating to money lenders.

Edmonton: Inter City Forum

The Inter-City Forum on Social Policy (ICFSP) acts as a vehicle for information-sharing, networking and advocacy for and among Alberta cities and other major urban areas, and the people who live in them, in an inter-governmental context. Its purpose is to address social policy, program and service issues that are of concern to Alberta urban municipalities.

Kitchener Safe & Healthy Community Advisory Committee

The committee advises Council and staff on a broad range of matters related to community services, community well-being and community development including but not limited to: personal safety and crime prevention, equity in accessing services, poverty and Opportunities 2000 Response, parks and recreation matters affecting programs and facilities, community mobilization, City's role in housing.