Executive Policy Committee – July 19, 2006
Remarks by Irene Merie, Executive Director – Partners in the Park
RE: Assiniboine Park Governance

Your worship, Councilors of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Irene Merie and I am the Executive Director of Partners In The Park.

On behalf of our Chairman, Mr. Hartley Richardson and our entire Board of Directors, we wish to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here to speak in support of the recommendation on Park Governance by the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services.

Our position is on record.

Partners In The Park supports the Conservancy Model of Governance. This is a very exciting time for Assiniboine Park and we applaud both Council and the Administration for taking this step in the evolution of Assiniboine Park. The potential to turn our

Park into the world class attraction that it can be is just a decision away.

And the time for change is now.

Since the topic of park governance has been in the public forum, there has been much discussion and question as to why and if a new governance model is necessary. Our response is yes and for the following reasons: currently there is significant fragmentation within the Park. We have multiple City departments involved in the operations, maintenance, planning and development. There are other groups who are involved in programming and fundraising. And everyone does not always talk to each other! Another problem is that past city Administrations and Governments have not seen the park as a priority. Therefore, the City has not been able to invest the resources necessary to develop a cohesive strategy for future planning nor has the City been able to meet the escalating financial demands for both capital and operating funding for operations, maintenance and development in the Park.

As a result of this neglect, private interest groups such as The Zoological Society, Friends of the Conservatory and Partners In The Park have picked up the ball and injected some much needed resources to the Park.

The Zoological Society clearly have demonstrated their sound Management capability by consistently showing a surplus each year and having money to invest back into the Zoo. The Friends have accumulated a Volunteer base in the Park that is truly impressive. Finally, Partners In The Park have a demonstrated track record of raising capital for the development and improvement of infrastructure projects to the tune of over $23 Million dollars. If not for the collective efforts of these groups, the park would be in much more serious decay than it's current state. The success for both government and private citizens rests with the ability of these groups to work in partnership with the City of Winnipeg yet to independently mobilize both financial and human resources to effect significant and positive change in the park for all citizens to enjoy. Can you picture Assiniboine Park without outdoor concerts at the Lyric Theatre, or the spectacular Canada Day Celebrations or the popular plant sale or Boo at the Zoo? All of these and much more were initiated by the stakeholder groups in the park, working in partnership with the City of Winnipeg.

The challenge before us now, is to harness the individual passions these groups bring to the table and to wrap that energy in a single collective governance model. Imagine the potential if all of our efforts are working together within a coordinated strategy for the Park!

The City of Winnipeg can not and should not lead the development of such a strategy but rather there role should continue to be one of support and facilitation. Thus a true public/private partnership.

As with any recommendation, the devil is often in the detail. While Partners In The Park is on record as supporting the recommendation to move to the Conservancy Governance model, there are some concerns we have with respects to the recommendations provided in the Acumen Report and in the Community Services report. Both of which are attached to the recommendation from Standing Policy Committee. For the record, I will clarify our position of what Partners In The Park does and does not support.

First what we do support:

1. We **support and agree** with the creation of a not-for-profit corporation that is arms length from Government.
2. We **support and agree** with approaching the Province of Manitoba to be a partner in the new Governance Model.
3. We **strongly believe** the leadership of this organization, including all strategic planning and development must be led by the new Board of Directors.

4. We **support** that The Board of Directors will be made up of members of both the public and private sectors. Initial consideration must be given to the existing entities within the park. However, the Board must also have the ability to appoint it's own Directors. We do not necessarily believe that requiring a specific number of directors from each partner organization and each level of government is the most efficient way to proceed. Rather, we need the best Directors available for the task. Period.
5. We **believe** the first task of the Board of Directors is to hire the CEO. Under the strategic direction of the Board of Directors, the CEO should complete the business planning process with the support of administration. Once the business plan receives the necessary approvals, the new organization led by the Board of Directors and the CEO would commence with implementation.
6. We **recognize** that empowering a new Board and Management model will mean the existing Boards and Management in the Park will most likely take on a different role. The existing Boards must be part of the process to determine the evolution of their respective organizations within the context of the new organization. Further, we recognize that likewise, the current department, Assiniboine

Park Enterprise in it's current form, may be redundant. Simply stated, you can't have it both ways.

What we do not support:

1. We **do not agree** with the further development of any plan for Assiniboine Park prior to the implementation of the new Governance Model. This includes, business planning, capital campaign development, staffing and any and all other functions that will involve the new organization.
2. Given the financial constraints imposed on our City, **we do not support** further financial expenditures on studies or reports for further analysis of the Governance Study. We have a proposed model that has the agreement of the main stakeholders in the Park. Let's just get on with it.
3. We **disagree** with Recommendation (f) in the Governance report – page 48. The recommendation in essence states that "...upon granting policy approval to proceed that the City authorize planning of a high level business plan..." Further, we do not support the Administration's recommendation that they alone "identify future processes, structures and functions necessary for a new governance structure to effectively fulfill it's mandate including division of authorities, responsibilities among stakeholders, Board of Director role and

responsibilities and mechanisms to ensure accountability." In our opinion, this recommendation is no different than a "transition committee" which was originally proposed and we are all on record as opposing. Clearly any planning must be done by the new organization with the Board and CEO in place. While we applaud the leadership shown by the current administration to undertake this study, respectfully, government bureaucracies are usually not in the best position to do the business planning for any agency. Quite frankly, if they were, we would probably not be here today having this discussion. In our opinion, the role of administration is to work in partnership with this new organization to support and assist with its' efforts, but clearly the new Board and CEO have to drive the planning as they will ultimately be the ones accountable to City and Provincial governments.

In closing, much has been said about the success of the Central Park Conservancy model in New York. While it is true, they have enjoyed tremendous success since moving to the conservancy model of governance, we should also look in our own backyard to see how community leadership has improved our own community. One example is the Winnipeg Airports Authority. Since transferring the operations and development to the WAA from Transport Canada in 1997, you can see remarkable improvements

at the airport. The airport continues to make significant investments in the community and show strong financial results year over year through creative revenue generating opportunities and realizing efficiencies by incorporating best business practices. In 2005 alone, in excess of $32 Million was invested in our community. The development of the new air terminal building is the largest construction project in the City of Winnipeg and will have the largest economic impact on the City next to the Floodway development project.

Another example is Destination Winnipeg. As a not for profit, private sector led initiative that is supported by both the City and Provincial governments; Destination Winnipeg can take government dollars and leverage those into significant contributions from the private sector. Something that government can not do on it's own. Both the WAA and Destination Winnipeg are led by a public/private sector Board and a CEO . Together, they are responsible and accountable for both the development of and the delivery of their strategic and business planning. We believe the Conservancy Model of Governance should operate in a similar fashion.

The City has taken the first step in transforming Assiniboine Park to it's true world-class potential by commissioning the Governance

study. We encourage you to take the next step and support the recommendation to adopt the Conservancy Model of Governance. Looking ahead, once the Governance Model is established and the Board of Directors are in place, we ask that you recognize that all future planning for the Park, must be led by those who will be responsible and accountable for the delivery. Allow the new organization along with the support of City administration, to get on with the job at hand in the true spirit of public/private partnership.

Thank you for the opportunity to state our position. I would be happy to entertain any questions.