Parents for an Aware Community - Presentation to the City – March 14, 2007

I. Intro:
   a. Good morning. My name is Barbara Coombs and this is Catherine Purchase. We are here as representatives of our group, Parents for an Aware Community.
   b. On March 5, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services approved a motion to recommend the City commence negotiations with the Winnipeg School Division and the Province as 1/3 funding partners in an expansion of the School Resource Officer Program to include our initiative and CEDA's. We sincerely thank the Policy Committee for recognizing the need for a division-wide School Resource Officer program.
   c. In turn, we recognize that this decision is absolutely in keeping with one of the city's top priorities of the proposed budget - reduction in crime. It will also save the city 2/3 cost of one police officer's position.

II. So, who are we?

Parents for an Aware Community is a volunteer group composed of parents from the South District of the Winnipeg School Division. We have created our own website with an online petition.

a. We are not a group of "overprotective moms." Our young adults attend Ecole River Heights, College Churchill, Churchill High School, Grant Park School, and Kelvin High School. Collectively, we represent all the high schools in the South District. Each of us is active in our respective parent council groups as well. For some of us, this will be our young adults' last year in public school; however, we will still be active members of our group working toward the goal we have set before you today.

b. (Draw attention to progress report available electronically). We have letters of support from 100% of the high school and junior high schools of the South District and 80% of the total schools as indicated by letters and written petitions. Since we began last spring, we have always had strong administrative support from all our high schools and senior administrators within the division. Our two city councillors, Jenny Gerbasi and Deputy Mayor Brenda Leipsic, are strong supporters. And two days ago, the WSD approved our request for 1/3 funding of this position.

c. The Winnipeg Police Services is also listed as one of our supporters, at their request; however, this is only verbal support as the police administrators lack the funding to financially support this proposal. It is our city councillors we need to address to deal with the funding issue.

III. Our purpose:

a. We feel that building relationships between our youth and peacekeeping forces is a necessary component towards maintaining peace in our community.

b. Our goal is to re-establish a proactive, closer relationship between our city police and our youth. Almost three years ago, our Community Police Officers were reassigned, without the consultation of the trustees or superintendents. To be blunt, if this service had not been cut, we probably would not be here today. Our CPO service was long established in our district.

c. The CPOs handled non-emergency calls, emerging issues, made regular visits to the high schools, counselled students and parents, and were readily available to our administrators. They got to know the hot spots in our district and followed the students as they moved from the feeder schools into high schools.

d. Over the last three years, we have absolutely noticed an increase in frequency in parents' questions around safety issues, both those raised in informal settings and at our Parent Council meetings.

e. We have sensed our administrators' concerns that they are now dealing with safety and discipline issues which used to be appropriately dealt with by the city police officers.

f. We are concluding that there IS a connection between these safety concerns and the cut in police service.

IV. The safety issues we face:

a. First of all, safety issues with our kids happen ALL weekday long and over the weekend; on the cell phones, at the mall, the community centres, the party – these spill over into the school OR SCHOOLS. And, our schools are connected.

b. The general categories of these issues are:
    1. Drug related
    2. Bullying
    3. Internet and Cell Phone safety
    4. Threat of gangs
    5. Violence at home and in school

c. Some of these issues were recently manifested in the very public "drug bust gone bad" on Jubilee Ave., in November, 2006. Jubilee Ave. is the southernmost boundary of WSD. It is within our South District.

d. We have hot spots in our district, or our schools are within a lunchtime walk to a hot spot of illegal activities.

e. Many of our students have disposable income making them targets for criminals.

f. With the decentralization of lower income housing, all communities have a range of income levels.

g. Our English as Additional Language students, and this population is increasing throughout the division, need positive role models as well as our youth–at–risk.

V. As we explained to the Standing Policy Committee, our district is loosing out on police support because we are caught between the parameters established by each of our prospective funders. Please refer to your three maps:

a. WSD – (Map 1). WSD is divided into four districts. We are the only one on the south side of the Assiniboine River but we are absolutely part of the Winnipeg School Division. Our district encompasses RH, Crescw, and Ft. R. Crime prevention programming exists in the three districts north of the Assiniboine. Currently, the City provides partial financial support for three SROs in the North End. Two of these SROs are found in the Inner City District and one in the North District. In the Central District, the city provides complete financial support for its CPO officers.

b. (Map 2). However, our district now relies upon Planned Response Officers from District 6 – Planned Response is not crime prevention. Therefore, we are the only district in WSD without a crime prevention program such as SRO or CPO represent. We are not criticizing the Planned Response service; but we saying that Planned Response service is not the same as our CPO service.

c. (Map 3). Neighbourhoods Alive! We are also loosing out in financial support from the provincial viewpoint. The province is openly supportive of establishing SROs through Neighbourhoods Alive!; however, no portion of our district is covered under Neighbourhoods Alive! At the moment, we do not have a similar agency to which we can apply for funding.

d. In short, we are seeking an equitable distribution of city police support resources for our district. We are seeking inclusion with the rest of our division's crime prevention programming. Right now, we feel like we have been excluded.

VI. Our next steps:

a. We know we are not done with our work after our presentation to you today.
b. We feel that we need to reach the community-at-large to demonstrate further support. We have been in touch with our area city community centre president and are hoping to do a presentation at their April Community Club Presidents` meeting. We are also hoping to gain many signatures on our online petition from the community centre link. The community centres are concerned about the safety of children in moving from the schools to the centres.
c. We will continue to be in contact with school parents through their school newsletters.
d. We will be contacting high school parents through mass emails and report card attachments to obtain more signatures on our online petition.
e. And with regard to the province, we have spoken with officials in the Justice Department and have briefly spoken with MLAs Jon Gerrard and Diane McGifford. We have requested meetings with Min. of Justice Dave Chomiak, Min. of Intergovernmental Affairs Steve Ashton, and will be contacting the Min. of Education as well. Our issue in the media spotlight seemed to generate some interest from the province as we received two phone calls from provincial offices last week.

VII. Conclusion:

a. To conclude and summarize, we feel deploying a city police officer is an essential, positive step toward re-building the relationship between our youth the city police. As we are requesting partial funding, we are saving the city some money.
b. Our crime prevention services were cut three years ago. Now, we are simply looking to be included in a similar crime prevention programming that exists in other districts of our division.
c. We have strong support from our district's parent councils and high school administrators, and our school division. We now have one funder who is willing and interested in coming to the bargaining table.
d. As the Standing Policy Committee recognized, combining our request with CEDA`s current proposal, and the fact that in our division there already exist 3 SROs in place, makes the push for crime prevention programming a division-wide issue.
e. We are requesting this officer can be in place by this September and request this officer be based in Churchill High School.
f. As a side note, we would like to sincerely thank our city councillors Brenda Leipsic and Jenny Gerbasi for their strong support and guidance. We would also like to thank Tom Simms from CEDA for his advice over the past few weeks.
g. We thank you for your time and attention today.