Executive Policy Committee – March 14, 2007

Remarks by Partners in the Park, The Zoological Society & The Friends of the Conservatory

RE: Assiniboine Park Governance

Your Worship, Councillors of the Committee, CAO – Ms. Stenning, Ladies and Gentlemen

My name is Irene Merie and I am the Executive Director for Partners in the Park. I am here on behalf of our Chairman, Mr. Hartley Richardson who is traveling today and unable to be here. I am accompanied by Mike Stevens, Chair of the Zoological Society and Dianne Zuk, Acting President of The Friends of the Conservatory. We thank you for the opportunity to speak to the report on Park Governance, submitted by Assiniboine Park Enterprise.

My comments represent the collective view and consensus of the Boards and Management of our 3 non-profit organizations in Assiniboine Park. Together our organizations represent over 30 volunteer Board members – most from the business community, over 1,000 volunteers and over 6,000 members. To provide some background for our new Councillors, our organizations collectively have been responsible for much of the public programming and

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fundraising activities in the park. Programs such as the Annual Conservatory plant sale, Boo at the Zoo and the summer music concerts at the Lyric Theatre to name a few. Individually, we have fundraised in an excess of $25 Million Dollars for new capital development such as the Leo Mol Sculpture Garden, The Lyric Theatre, the Pavilion restoration project and Zoo upgrades. Further, we add over 14 staff years per year of volunteer hours. We are passionate about the Park and have a demonstrated track record of getting things done!

We would like to state at the outset that we recognize this has been an exhaustive process. We applaud, you Mayor Katz and City Council for your leadership, support and interest in seeing that Assiniboine Park realize its full potential. Our organizations have been part of the process for the past 3 years and we will continue to work constructively with Council and Administration to ensure this new organization becomes a reality. We also want to acknowledge the efforts of Administration and in particular Patti Sullivan and Frank Caldwell for getting us to this point. We are almost there!

Overall, we are pleased the report does recognize an independent corporation as the right model. We further believe that it should be a public/private partnership operating as a non-profit charitable

organization. Although the report makes a passing reference to charitable status, it is essential to be able to issue tax receipts for any fundraising activities. Our preference is to refer to it as a Conservancy as was originally recommended rather than a corporation.

While we whole heartedly support the move to an independent governance model – the report before you – as written – is vague and in our opinion requires further definition in three key areas.

The first issue relates to the organization's independence from Government. The report does not clearly define independence. Clearly we recognize the importance of accountability to Government; the City owns the assets and the reporting relationship should reflect that. We do not expect the City to simply turn over the Park to the Conservancy. Having said that, the governance report as it is currently written, does not define the nature of the reporting relationship to EPC. It is therefore unclear to what extent the Conservancy would be independent.

Further, the report does not address the role of the Province. Our understanding is that there have been no formal discussions with the Province to date, yet there appears to be an assumption they

will be a partner in the new Conservancy. If the Province is to be a significant participant in this organization, it is reasonable to assume they too will have their own reporting requirements. The Governance report is silent on this issue.

Further, the report is silent on staffing. Our position is the Board needs to be responsible for its own staffing commencing with the hiring of a CEO.

The second issue relates to adequate funding for the Conservancy. The success of this whole endeavor rests on increased funding from the City, the Province and the private sector. Clearly there has to be a balance between desired goals and available resources. To accomplish the goals as stated in the Framework Plan – more resources are required than is currently invested in the Park. Inadequate resources leads to unaccomplished goals and that would defeat the whole purpose of moving to a new governance structure. More dollars, not less is required. The report is silent on what financial commitment is required in total and specifically the funding commitment from the City by way of an Operating Grant. Again, without proper funding, this organization will be set up for failure.

On a related point, recommendation #5 in the governance report, states that $100,000 is to be provided for costs associated with the development of the new Board and for a Strategic Plan that is to be developed in the first 6 months. We have repeatedly expressed our concerns to Administration that this level of funding is completely inadequate. For comparative purposes, we would encourage Councillors to review the extent of the costs associated with the development of this governance report before you today and recognize that it took almost 3 years to complete. Based on this example alone, how can a new organization be expected to implement a new Board of Directors, incur the legal and financial start-up costs, AND develop a meaningful Strategic Plan in 6 months and with only $100,000? It is unclear to us how administration arrived at this recommendation. Again, inadequate resources lead to unaccomplished goals.

Third, the report is silent on the roles of our respective organizations throughout the implementation of the new organization. We understand and acknowledge that a move to a new governance model will have an impact on our existing organizations – but are unclear as to the extent and manner.

The report refers to a phased approach but fails to identify the phases other than the first one.

In the first phase is the creation of the Board of Directors. We completely support the recommendation that the Mayor appoints the Chair and that Council approves a recommended slate of Directors. We recognize and appreciate the report has suggested that our organizations have representation on the new Board. We also feel very strongly that the Board must have the best Directors possible and we would very much appreciate the opportunity to be part of a Nominating Committee that formulates the list of names that goes before Council for approval.

During the time that all of this is underway, the process should not hold up the on-going work of our 3 organizations. We currently have projects underway that we can not put on hold for the next 6 – 12 months. We have a collective track record of getting things done in Assiniboine Park and we ask your support in allowing our work to continue during this time of transition.

In closing, we are optimistic about the potential of a new Assiniboine Park Conservancy. We have tremendous passion and great interest to see the implementation to a new governance model

be completed properly. We therefore felt the prudent course of action was to bring to your attention the issues we feel need some more clarification before we could fully endorse the report.

In summary the three points for your consideration are:

1. To clarify what independent means by clearly defining the reporting relationships with Governments
2. Properly funding the new Conservancy and stating the amount of the Operating Grants from the City and Province if applicable
3. Confirm the involvement of our existing organizations throughout the transition process.

We believe much of these issues can be resolved through continued dialogue and we very much would like to continue to be part of the solution. We would welcome an opportunity to work constructively with Council and Administration to see the creation of a new conservancy that is in the best interest of Assiniboine Park and the citizens of Winnipeg.

On behalf of our organizations, thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to entertain any questions.