**Minutes – Executive Policy Committee – September 19, 2007**

## REPORTS

**Minute No. 517 Winnipeg Committee for Safety – Review of Vacant and Derelict Buildings By-law No. 35/2004**
**File EX**

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee referred the recommendation of the Winnipeg Committee for Safety to the Administration for report back in conjunction with the Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development's recommendation to Council to evaluate the minimum standards for occupied and unoccupied dwellings.

(See Minute 532)

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Swandel,

That the recommendation of the Winnipeg Committee for Safety be referred to the Administration for report back in conjunction with the Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development's recommendation to Council to evaluate the minimum standards for occupied and unoccupied dwellings.

Carried

Sel Burrows, Chair, Point Douglas Residents Committee, submitted communications (2) undated with respect to the review of Vacant and Derelict Buildings By-law No. 35/2004.

WINNIPEG FOR SAFETY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 13, 2007, the Winnipeg Committee for Safety considered the matter of healthy and safety concerns for those who live, work, walk and play around a burned out building, and requested the Executive Policy Committee to give favourable consideration to having the Vacant and Derelict Buildings By-law No. 35/2004 reviewed to measure its effectiveness and the impact of enforcement, or lack of enforcement, in the community.

Presentation to:
City of Winnipeg Executive Policy Committee

Sel Burrows
Chair
Point Douglas Residents Committee

It is fortuitous that there are items on the executive policy committee agenda today dealing with Housing and Policing. Both are issues that are crucial to the quality of life of people in the inner city. I had planned to come before you today to provide you with some advice, but fortunately I will be able to provide you with some praise first.
Some weeks ago I made a presentation to the steering committee on Housing. I am not going to repeat that presentation but I have appended it for your information.

At the time of the presentation we in Point Douglas were having a difficult time getting the city to enforce its own By-laws. We had suggestions about improvement in wording but our main thrust was that there was a need to act on the ugly vacant housing and the insanitary slum homes.

I am very pleased to tell you that the improvement in the enforcement in Point Douglas is very noticeable. We would like you to know that we appreciate this improvement. During the last 5 weeks we have reported approximately 30 houses to the two branches of your government that deal with substandard housing.

We can now say that the derelict houses that should be boarded up are now properly boarded up, registered and paying their fees as required.

Orders have been issued to numerous slum landlords to bring their houses up to reasonable standards.

We have worked with the North End Community Renewal Corp to provide grants to landlords willing to put some of their own money into repairs.

We are happy to report that three of the worst slums in our area are now up for sale and several other landlords are accepting the grants to fix up their homes.

There is no one answer to improving an inner city neighbourhood. However the elimination of ugly housing and the provision of decent housing is a key factor.

By the way, many of our excellent landlords have thanked us for putting pressure on the slum landlords. They see inadequate rental housing as not only immoral but also unfair competition for those who choose to abide by the rules.

As you deal with the housing items on your agenda, please do so with our thanks and appreciation for your help in improving our neighbourhood. Any improved standards will be greatfully appreciated.

I said in my introduction that I came to give you some advice. As politicians you are used to receiving unsolicited guidance. Today you are dealing with the complicated issue of police governance.

A police commission or a police advisory board, which shall it be?

I want to suggest to you that this decision is not the crucial point that two competing groupings have made it out to be.
Whether it is a police advisory board or a police commission is secondary to the issue of police-community relations.

I do not understand how the divide between the community and the police has grown so wide. I don't claim to know all the answers as to how this divide can be overcome.
What I want to say is that it must be overcome.

It will be the responsibility of this body and your new chief of police to ensure that the sense of personal safety returns to our city.

Poor people and inner city people depend on the police more than any one else.

Offenders tend to gather in poorer areas and offend against others who choose to live there or have to live there.

Presently the linkage between the police & the community is very damaged.

Individual senior officers have shown an interest but the system does not have a mechanism to cooperate with community…and it is the community that has the information.

I am requesting that you build into your structure measures that will ensure that the community can communicate efficiently with the police and vice versa.

Presently in Point Douglas we have developed a system of over 25 safety representatives. The Women's Centre, Sistars, The residents committee, all have committed to working together to create a state of safety and well being. We want to work with the police, in fact we need to work with the police to succeed. Your decision on governance and police chief are part of our success or failure.

Personally and organizationally, I can tell you, we prefer a police commission and a form of community based policing. However, today my advice is more ephemeral. You will decide on the governance structure. You will choose the chief of police. Please, please do both with the thought of success in mind. Think of a city where the community is safe. Where crime is prevented whenever possible. I don't want the kid who assaulted me arrested. I just don't want him to assault me. Think of methodologies where the police can take advantage of the information our 25 resident safety reps have.

We need a police system, and here I am personifying a system, that can think outside the normal parameters. A system that can use modern management techniques and community knowledge.

I am going to digress for a moment.

Car thieves are graded.

Level 1 are those who might steal a car.

Level 2 are those who have stolen a car.

Level 3 more than one car.

Level 4 are the compulsive repetitive car thieves.

Did you know that all the level 4 car thieves in Winnipeg live in the R2W postal code.

I represent some of that R2W postal code. I am not proud of that statistic.

We have serious problems with youth gangs, not big organized gangs but punky type gangs that hang around, sell crack and beat vulnerable people up.

These are the kids that would be playing soccer or hockey if there were soccer or hockey teams.

If they don't have a team….they will join a gang.

In fact, these gangs are their substitute for a team.

Right now they are joining gangs, stealing cars, selling crack and taking up an inordinate amount of police time.

Please,
Think outside the normal parameters.
Think of enforcement of your housing by laws as a public safety mechanism.
Think of a police force who knows where the potential criminals are before they harm our kids or ourselves.
Think of a society when we say 'a gang of kids' we are referring to the gang of kids who are winning soccer titles or baseball titles for our community.

When I was a rec director for the city, we had so many youth programs going that the deputy chief of police drove through my area to see why the crime rate had dropped 75%.

This is possible, but only if we escape the division that has developed over policing in our community. We need a City Council that will go beyond structures and think about efficiency and effectiveness.

An efficient and effective public safety program is not one that just puts more people in jail after they have committed crimes. It is a system that results in fewer crimes being committed.

Ten minutes is an awfully short time to give you all of my collected wisdom on this subject.
I will close with one last thought.

Which ever structure you decide on, you as our elected politicians will also be deciding who will sit on this body. Will it be people who care deeply about safety and security of all residents of our community?
Will it be people who can think outside the normal parameters?
Will it be people that understand that the police need the support of the community to provide us with a safe city.

Choose well, my community depends on you.

Sel Burrows
Chair
Point Douglas Residents Committee

PRESENTATION TO STEERING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING OF CITY COUNCIL

BY SEL BURROWS
CHAIR
POINT DOUGLAS RESIDENTS COMMITTEE

# IT'S ACCEPTABLE FOR THE AREA

North Point Douglas, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, is a many-faceted, low-income community with a blend of resident homeowners and tenants in public housing, aboriginal housing and privately owned rental properties and rooming-houses. This area is home to many people who live at the margins of our society. The crime rate in North Point Douglas is high, including illegal gang activity, and police presence is generally low, but improving.

The Housing Committee of PDRC is committed to the revitalization of our historic neighbourhood and to alleviating the effects of poverty, violence, homelessness, isolation and marginalization in the lives of our community members thorough addressing substandard housing and safety issues.

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History of Point Douglas Residents' Committee (PDRC)

The PDRC has been in existence since the 1960's as a vehicle for improving the social and physical conditions of the North Point Douglas community. Comprised of long-time and new residents of the community, landlords and business owners, PDRC, meets monthly at Norquay School. PDRC represents and speaks for the community in a number of venues. We were incorporated on December 18, 1989 and our incorporation status is current.

An excellent 5-year Housing Plan was approved at the PDRC AGM in March, 2003. Challenges identified in the Housing Plan include securing adequate funding to fix up owner-occupied housing and to improve and maintain rental properties. This is a 110 page document which can be accessed on the City of Winnipeg website at **http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/planning/pdf_folder/npd_nbhd.pdf**

I have not reproduced it in an interest of saving trees, but it is a guide for our work on housing in Point Douglas.
At this time, our work for neighbourhood revitalization is spearheaded by several committees along with the PDRC Board Executive and Members-at-Large. The long-standing committees are Environment, Safety, Housing and Communication.

## The Positive

1. Housing renewal has been extremely successful in Point Douglas.
    - Increase in owner occupied homes
    - Fix up of formerly ugly homes
    - Improvement of many landlord homes

2. Housing grant system has been a major factor in improvement in housing
    - NECRC fix up grant for homeowners & landlords
    - RRAP grants
    - WHHI grants
    - North End Housing Program
    - Aboriginal Housing programs
    - Habitat for Humanity
    - City property tax rebates

3. The Housing grant system should be maintained

4. When enforced, City of Winnipeg by-laws are useful in improving housing stock

5. There are fewer remaining extremely run down homes that can be purchased & upgraded.

6. Point Douglas has become a neighbourhood of choice to many new groups of residents, for example:
    - Three new homeowners from Calgary in the last few months.
    - Increased number of new immigrants to Canada
    - Increase in number of artists
    - Increase in the number of aboriginal students

The three levels of Government should be complemented on their support for the improvement in the housing in Point Douglas.

The City of Winnipeg should recognize the interim success of having designated Point Douglas a Housing Improvement Zone.

The Point Douglas residents committee looks forward to continue working with the City to continue the improvement of the Point Douglas Neighbourhood.

## The Difficult

The next stage of improvement in the housing situation in Point Douglas is more complex and more subtle. There are individual "UGLY" houses that detract from the overall improvement in the Point Douglas neighbourhood.
To have a overall better community that allows for diversity of residents there is a need to improve these ugly houses. This requires cooperation between the city and the residents and other actors in the community.

1. There are still pockets of inadequate housing.
    - Most are owned by absentee landlords but some by local landlords
    - The enforcement of city by-laws is very uneven
    - The system of by-laws is very confusing

2. It is unfair to good landlords to allow substandard rental housing

3. It is unfair to people who maintain their homes well that they are forced to live beside or near extremely unkempt housing.

4. Presently three to five departments are involved in Housing condition enforcement. They do not all talk to each other. It is an extremely inefficient & ineffective system.

5. There exists an internal intra net housing registry which every department has access to. Each department is supposed to enter all of its contacts with an address on the internal registry. We are told that some departments enter significant information while others make extremely brief comments.

6. The vacant & derelict building by law is our greatest frustration. It is enforced by both the fire department & the Housing & existing buildings branch.

It is here we draw the title of our presentation.

# It's ACCEPTABLE FOR THE AREA

We have been told that absolutely disgusting housing meets the standards of the neighbourhood.

One house in particular has had numerous orders to improve its condition. The Fire Department visits it almost every week however the owner is allowed to do minimal repair. A few weeks ago seven neighbours met with the housing inspector out of total frustration. However the order was strictly to fix all the broken windows.

We were told this house was "ACCEPTABLE FOR THE AREA" WE DO NOT ACCEPT THAT UGLY SUBSTANDARD HOUSING THAT WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE IN OTHER NEIGHBOURHOODS SHOULD BE ACCEPTABLE BECAUSE WE ARE A POORER NEIGHBOURHOOD.

How can we maintain and improve the housing in our area if a city department indicates it will not enforce housing standard by laws.

Allowing substandard, inadequate, ugly houses detracts from all the positive work the city has done through its fix up grants and other positive upgrading that has taken place in Point Douglas.

We have attempted to cooperate with the Housing & Existing Building branch but have had very little feedback.

The new health inspector came to our neighbourhood and met with members of the community and has been extremely cooperative.

The Zoning Branch responsible for Rooming House zoning has actively sought out our advice and input on rooming house zoning renewals.

We would like to cooperate with the city departments. We can provide input on where ugly houses that contradict city by laws are . However we need some sense that this is welcome and acceptable.

## Recommendations:

1. The city improve the communication between departments enforcing housing by-laws
2. The city review its by-laws so that standards for vacant housing is as strict as it is for occupied housing
3. That city departments working with inner city housing be amalgamated to provide clarity and effective enforcement of city by-laws
4. City staff be encouraged to work with inner city residents group to eliminate the blight of substandard housing
5. Substandard housing should not be acceptable strictly because it is in a poorer neighbourhood.
6. Residents groups be informed of orders issued against houses in their community
7. Staff be trained in cross department by-law enforcement
8. Entries into the intra net system be checked to ensure all departments are providing full and complete information on their dealings with each address.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO:

We realize the city should not be held wholly responsible for the condition of housing in the city. We as community members accept we share responsibility.
We undertake to:

1. Maintain a registry of problem houses and inform the relevant city department
2. To meet with owners of problem houses when possible to encourage them to improve their properties
3. To organize the many good landlords to assist us in pressuring the problem landlords to improve their properties.
4. To assist in maintaining and improving the neighbourhood wherever possible.

5. To encourage problem houses to take advantage of existing grants and tax incentives.

Conclusion:

I hope you will note that we have not come here looking for additional money. (That may come at another time.) What we are asking for is that the city improve its enforcement of existing by laws, improve some of the by laws and improve the efficiency of how its by laws are enforced. We believe that together we can continue the improvement of Point Douglas where it once again can hold its head high as a positive historical neighbourhood where poor and low income people can enjoy the benefits of living safely close to the amenities of our wonderful city.