Presentation to:
City of Winnipeg Executive Policy Committee

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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.

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