PRESENTATION TO STEERING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING OF CITY COUNCIL

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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.