Presentation to the Executive Policy Committee on the Need for a Strong Police Commission

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Winnipeg needs a strong and effective Police Commission that

1. **Has the means to accurately monitor and analyse all aspects of the Winnipeg Police Service** (WPS) activity, and to investigate effective policing methods in other parts of Canada and the World. In contrast, the proposed Police Advisory Board (PAB) appears to have only limited powers to ask the WPS for information in certain areas.
2. **Has a transparent and reasonable process for formulating new or changed policies** and the ability to ensure the changes to take place. In contrast the proposed PAB can at best offer advice via a convoluted process subject to political influence, and without the ability to report directly to the people who appear to determine WPS policy, such as the Mayor's office and the Chief Executive Officer.
3. **Is open and responsive to input from the public.** In contrast, the proposed PAB will hold most of its meetings in camera, and probably will not have public involvement in its reports and recommendations.
4. **Is not subject to the whims of political influence.** In contrast every aspect of the proposed PAB is subject to political influence (the appointments to the committee, politicians on the committee, reporting via various politically appointed committees).

The overall reasons for a strong police commission are that the WPS appears to be functioning very poorly. The current police governance, whatever that is, seems unable to address or remedy the problems with the WPS. In particular, the WPS is allocating its resources in ways that seem to be counter to the public interest and the good functioning of our society, such as decreased community-level police involvement. Furthermore, the WPS seems to have more resources and personnel every year but, to the frustration of citizens, appears to do less effective police work. These policies and problems do not seem to be open to any discussion or input from the people most affected by them – the public.

A strong Police Commission with would be able to address the many problems with current WPS policies, whereas the PAB will probably be quite ineffective. These problems include:

1. **The WPS currently uses the "Fire Department" model of policing and it is not working.** That is, the police respond to crimes (fires) with little or no background knowledge of the area or people involved. They attempt to deal with the problem (i.e. putting out the fire) and then leave for another problem somewhere else in the city. This model of policing may work if there is not too much crime, but quickly fails when the level of crime rises, as in Winnipeg. Other models of policing need to be considered, such as one based on Community Policing. At the recent police chief hearings conducted by Anita Stenning practically every delegation (mostly from inner city high crime areas) stressed the need for more community-level police officers who become familiar with the local people and problems.
   It is unlikely that the proposed PAB can address the overall strategy of the WPS, and even less likely that it can effectively transmit the need for a change to the police governance decision makers.
2. **In spite of increasing resources, the WPS has abandoned or drastically reduced many services.**
   (a) **Community policing has "withered on the vine".** Beat constables who get to know the problems and people in high-crime areas have been removed or re-assigned. Police service centres close early and are often totally closed for long periods without warning.
   (b) **Crime goes unreported and Winnipeg Crime Statistics are wrong.** This is because there is no

reasonable way for most people to report crime. The police non-emergency number, 986-6222, is always busy and the wait to get through is so long that many people give up

(c) **The traffic squad was eliminated** so there are now few, if any, police who work pro actively on safe driving on our streets. This has certainly increased irresponsible driving, such as running red lights, and resulted in many unnecessary road accidents and deaths

(d) **The WPS often does not even respond to crimes in progress!** A well-know case was the murder that occurred outside of the Westminster Hotel. In another recent example with which I am familiar, the WPS did not respond until the next day to a report by neighbours of a break-in in progress on Boyd Street.

(e) **The WPS does not respond promptly to crimes that have already taken place,** such as break-ins and stolen cars. This means that the chances of catching the criminals is reduced. In a recent case, a stolen car on a downtown street was reported on Friday to the WPS, but the police did not do anything about it until the following Tuesday.

(f) **The WPS is reducing its support for outreach and proactive activities.** This is undermining citizen support groups such as Neighbourhood Watch and Citizens for Crime Awareness that are working to prevent crime. Police personnel in these areas who retire are sometimes not replaced for long periods, and there is a lack of focus on making the programs work.

It is unlikely that the PAB will be able to address the problems of declining police services, and even less likely that it can initiate changes.

3. **The allocation of WPS resources is often highly questionable.** The use of police in inappropriate ways takes up enormous amounts of time that could be used for better quality policing. These include

(a) **Sending over 60 officers to shut down a few Texas Holdem Poker tournaments**.

(b) **Sending over 30 officers and 20 police cars to monitor Critical Mass bicycle rides**, as I counted in one case last year.

(c) **Domestic dispute policies** that cause an overuse and skewing of police resources. The "zero tolerance" rule applied in domestic disputes seems much too crude and wastes an enormous amount of police time.

(d) **Having two police officers in a cruiser on patrol** is an incredibly bad use of resources. With one police officer per car the number of cruisers on patrol could be doubled. This would allow several cars to attend in higher-risk police interventions, thus reducing the danger to police officers.

It is unlikely that the PAB will be able to address the mis-allocation of police resources, and even less likely that it can initiate changes.

4. **Beneficial improvements to the WPS do not happen.**

(a) **Employing more support staff and other changes will leave more police for active duty.** Police attending a stolen car have to wait there doing nothing until a tow truck arrives. Currently an absurd amount of an officers' time is spent in paper work.

(b) **Web-based crime reports** could substantially alleviate the difficulties of reporting crimes. Other police forces already have such a service, such as the RECOL system for reporting scams and frauds to the RCMP.

Again it is unlikely that the PAB will be able to address lack of innovation in the WPS, and even less likely that it can initiate changes.