Exchange District BIZ
Position Paper Re: 2008 City of Winnipeg Operating Budget
Presentation to Executive Policy Committee, March 18, 2008 - FINAL

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The Exchange District BIZ

The Exchange District BIZ is one of 16 business improvement zones in Winnipeg created by a City of Winnipeg By-Law. Every business located within a BIZ is automatically a contributing member by virtue of its paying a special levy collected by the City along with business taxes each spring. The objects of a BIZ are a) to beautify, improve and maintain real property of the City, and b) to promote improvements and economic development in the zone.

The mission of the Exchange District BIZ is to champion the unique character of the district and to help create a safe, clean and thriving environment for business. My comments on the proposed 2008 operating budget are placed within this context. We have concerns about proposed cuts to both public art programming and graffiti removal partnerships. We are pleased with the direction the city is heading regarding downtown parking and policing. We are also in support of the establishment of rapid transit in Winnipeg.

Public Art

The Exchange District is Winnipeg's arts hot spot, and the BIZ feels this is a positive economic generator for the area. Therefore we are deeply concerned about the cuts to the Public Art program, for two main reasons: one – we are working with the Winnipeg Arts Council to establish public art as part of the redevelopment of Old Market Square. The second reason is Winnipeg is a hotbed of arts and culture. There is a group working toward having Winnipeg named as a City of Culture in 2010. Therefore it is critical that you our civic leaders recognize that a thriving public art program strengthens our reputation as an "Arts City" and contributes to the civic pride of our citizens.

Downtown Cleanliness – Graffiti

The BIZ is of the opinion that the most effective way to prevent graffiti is timely removal. Through our partnership with the City of Winnipeg via the Clean and Green funding that was announced last year we are now able to provide year round graffiti removal services in the Exchange. We are grateful that we have been able to work with the City to provide a free service to BIZ members recognizing they have been victims of vandalism.

We have learned that there has been a cut to the City's graffiti removal budget of over $200,000. We strongly support the continuation of the

enhanced graffiti funding into the future. Unfortunately this is not a problem that is going away. This has been the worst winter in memory, in spite of the cold, for getting tagged. Our partnership with the City has been critical in our success in reducing the amount of graffiti in the historic Exchange District to manageable levels.

Parking

The BIZ is supportive of the Winnipeg Parking Authority and feels that the creation of this agency represents a major contribution to the general revitalization of the downtown. The emphasis on customer service, upgrades to parking lots, and implementation of new technology such as solar powered meters have gone far to ameliorate the downtown parking situation.

However, it's critical to emphasize that short term, public parking is critical to the supporting commerce in the downtown. We want Winnipeg to have a dynamic downtown public parking experience, that improves from year to year, and we feel the public/private agency concept of the Parking Authority is the correct model for that. Over time we feel that the WPA should be increasing its Off Street holdings to provide access to more daily/monthly parking and "set the bar" higher for the private sector.

We were thrilled to hear that the City of Winnipeg has consolidated a new WPA dividend policy in future budgets; in other words the $ 5.3 milliom reduces to $ 3.7 million in fiscal 2008, and then to $ 0 in 2009 and 2010. We are fully in support of this change in direction.

I'd like to congratulate Council for having created something as progressive and far sighted as our award winning WPA, we feel it is a big success story. Us stakeholders would like to assist with the positive messaging that should be going out about the WPA. We feel that its business model combined with the proposed changes to its dividend policy will put the agency in a good position to make key contributions to the downtown. This is a high priority, as BIZ members tell us parking is one of the top challenges of doing business in the Exchange District.

Safety & Policing

Community policing in the Exchange District was cut back in 2004. We have been advocating for a reversal of this trend ever since. Public safety perceptions are another top challenge of doing business in the Exchange.

We were thrilled to see the WPS reinstate a beat officer to the Exchange District in the fall. We are also encouraged by the stated commitment of Chief Keith McKaskill to work with groups such as ours on localized safety problems. I would like to end my presentation by thanking the City of

Winnipeg for increasing the police budget and we look forward to working with you and the WPS on downtown safety issues in 2008.

Rapid Transit
I would like to go on record to state that the Exchange District BIZ fully supports the establishment of rapid transit in Winnipeg. Progressive cities with thriving downtowns have excellent transit systems.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to you during your budget deliberations.