Speaking notes
Good Morning council members of EPC.

At the outset, The BIZ would like to congratulate the City of Winnipeg, and all those, behind the efforts of the Tim Hortens Brier hosted last week. What an incredible event. Our Downtown was very much alive and hoping with people almost all hours of the day. We should be very proud of what our City has accomplished.

In fact there is much for our city and our Downtown to be proud of over this last year, whether it another condo development on waterfront Drive, or the fact that only a few condo remain for sale in our Downtown, or the near completion of Manitoba Hydro head office, the wonderful efforts of CentreVenture in the future renewal of Main Street, or the fact that the Downtown BIZ hired 3 street people, through Mission off the Street as part of our enhanced downtown cleaning program, our Downtown is inching towards where we envision it.

I have had the fortunate to work with many of the wonderful City staff, whether they are from the dept. planning or public works, or from the Mayors office. The dedication and determination I see form these people is the foundation in which we can continue to move our city and downtown forward, under the leadership of City Hall.

It is under this pretext that the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone (BIZ) would like to provide some feedback from the Downtown Business community regarding the 2008 City draft budget.

Our feedback is a result of significant number of surveys and consultations the BIZ has undertaken over the last year, and based on unanimous opinions and thoughts of the 16-member BIZ Board of directors.

Three items which if addressed today could lay the foundation for a healthier and more vibrant Downtown and city for decades to come.

1. Bus Rapid Transit
2. The proposed City 5 per cent Hotel Tax, and;
3. Planning

Bus Rapid Transit

92% **of downtown businesses and stakeholders said the BIZ should advocate for a rapid transit system (2007 Downtown BIZ member survey)**

The BIZ feel there is an opportunity for rapid Transit NOW for the following reasons:

1. A new BRT system is part of a comprehensive plan, as outlined in Plan Winnipeg … 2020 Vision, to improve the environment, revitalize the downtown, provide for more compact urban development and strengthen the local economy.

2. The City of Winnipeg has already made significant commitments in transit modernization initiatives, ranging from new buses and shelters enhanced signage and communications systems, which all lay the groundwork for this next phase, BRT.

3. The recent Federal budget included approximately $18 **million for Manitoba** if a transit project can be announced by March 31, 2008. There would then be two years to expend the funds.

If the Province and the City matched that funding, Winnipeg could build phase one of the South West transit corridor from downtown to Jubilee Avenue.

4. Our downtown today receives **millions more visitors than just four years ago**. Downtown is revitalizing, changing and growing. Moving everyone who lives, works and plays downtown in and out of downtown in a fast, environmentally friendly way is important to the future of our downtown and city. To keep up with and build on this growth, we need to create alternatives that provide less congestion and less pollution, and more viable and current options on how Winnipeggers can come downtown reliably and quickly. It is important to put the infrastructure in place today, so that we can better plan for tomorrow. Rapid transit is a key part of this solution.

5. A bus rapid transit line could stimulate many opportunities for the higher level density development of urbane neighbourhoods and neighborhood-scaled businesses. This would need to be planned with the private sector.

6. Lastly, it's simply time to evolve transit in our city and invest back into our city's transportation system, into something better, something like a BRT which is found in every other major urban centre the size of our city.

Rapid transit is a must for a prosperous & sustainable city. Not only that, but initiatives like rapid transit send a message that Winnipeg is an environmentally friendly city. Environment issues are huge for our youth, and what a great

message for them to see that Winnipeg is progressive and positive. It's something our young people can be proud of and has the potential to be a contributing factor to keeping them here.

The proposed City of Winnipeg 5 Per cent Hotel Tax

All Downtown Hotels are members of the Downtown BIZ. Their success is directly related to the success of our downtown retail and service industries that support the tourists that visit our Downtown.

Subsequently our members have some concerns with regards to the 5% per cent Hotel Tax being proposed by City Hall.

At the outset it's important to state that our downtown hotels and the city have a common interest, contributing towards a great idea that will enhance tourism development in our City and Downtown. The Hoteliers agrees that collectively our City needs to do more to attract more tourism and convention opportunities, and our Hoteliers are prepared to fund it. This is a good common ground in which continued dialogue I am sure will lead to consensus and resolution.

Some of the guiding principles that are important to our members, which the BIZ supports, include:

1. A hotel tax or a destination marketing fee must be competitive with similar models in others cities in North America. If the tax or fee is too high, it will hurt the industry and no doubt businesses will suffer. Let's price ourselves competitively.

2. The revenue generated and contributed by the hotels must be used to augment and enhance existing resources contributed by the City and Province to promote and develop the tourism industry, and not replace existing funding. Doing more to promote tourism is critical for being competitive to attract tourist dollars, which will lead to more economic development in our Downtown and City. Any hotel tax or hotel fee should be used to enhance this strategy and create more economic growth. This approach will lead to more jobs and more businesses for our city and downtown, and more taxes for all levels of government. The same resources will produce the same results. More resources will produce more economic results. This fundamental value is important.

3. The Hotel Association and our / their members are partners that can bring resources to the table. A mechanism, which empowers this industry in how these funds are used and direct accountability, is critical. The Hotel industry needs to drive this, with the city playing as strong supportive and coordinating role. Utilize volunteer marketing professionals in the industry and create a broad range of tourism and event stakeholders via a committee to oversee

implementation. Dialogue, consensus building, partnerships and good will is what separates successful strategies from no successful ones. And great cities from average ones. Engaging the private sector has proven to be effective in other cities.

This is a positive initiative; the BIZ board has much faith in the two parties addressing these and other challenges, collectively.

Planning

There are some exciting initiatives; strategies and planning related recommendations that our City Planning Department is currently working on with the Downtown stakeholders, including the BIZ.

-An Employment Lands Strategy which proactively assesses the type and future demand for office in our Downtown, and strategically identifies where it should go.
-A Housing Strategy for the Downtown, which will lay out a series of recommendation on how to put downtown housing development into higher gear. The renewal of Center Plan, and a series of recommendations that will need to be acted upon. Even Bus Rapid Transit which has the potential to leverage high density development opportunities, if and only if planned properly.

....and other initiatives leading to recommendation which if approved by City Hall will require significant amount of planning resources and staffing to achieve implementation and success. With the multitude of progressive plans in the midst of being developed and implemented, Its almost as if we should create a downtown planning arm of forward thinking, dedicated to quickly finishing these proposal and upon their approval, focus on implementation.

We want to encourage the City to get ahead of the curve and provide the planning department with the budgetary resources to not only fill current vacancies, but augment current resources to ensure that these proposals will have the ability to be fully developed and implemented and in a timely manner.

In addition, it's critical our downtown developed secondary plans, which paint the picture for the future growth of our downtown districts.

For example, Chinatown. What is the future of this rough jewel in our Downtown? The need to create a district plan (secondary plan) is fundamental to its growth and in sending signals not only to the neighbourhood but also to the the investment community as to how the neighbourhood will grow.

To undertake these important planning efforts, significant staffing resources are needed.

If there is no business plan, there is no future growth which is coordinated leading to the end goal of sustainable growth. This is a fundamental principle that currently is flagged in CentrePlan, the city guiding blueprint for downtown development. And the fact that little action over the last decade has been taken in this critical area of creating district plan leads the BIZ to believe there is a resource issue that needs to be addressed as a primary goal in revitalizing our downtown and attracting investment all driving towards a common vision for our districts and our downtown.

The issues we have focused on have one thing in common; investing today will lead to economic spin-offs, growth and investment in our city in a manner in which we envision leaving behind a healthier and prosperous downtown and city.

A strong rapid transit system will lead to less investment in expansion of traditional street infrastructure systems, less future congestions, less parking issues, and a healthier city.

A stronger tourism industry driven by the private sector in partnership with the City will lead to a stronger tourism economy, more jobs and more businesses.

A Downtown that has a clear vision for each of its districts and is fully resources so it can implement planning decision will promote confidence and has a better ability to attract the right investment, creating economic spin-offs.

We also recognize that the Province has a huge role in financially partnering with the City, and that the burden of some of the costs will need to be shared.

Thank-you for this opportunity for the BIZ to bring forward some of its thoughts and idea.

Thank-you