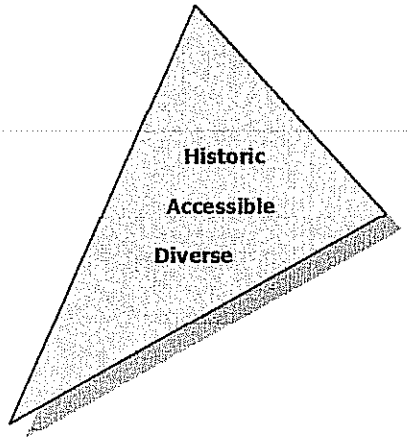
Point Douglas Residents Committee
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Re: City of Winnipeg Housing Strategy Review

Introduction

North Point Douglas, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, is a many-faceted, low-income community including both resident homeowners and tenants in public housing, aboriginal housing and privately owned rental properties, many of which are rooming-houses. This area is home to many people who live at the margins of our society. We border a long belt of industrial zoning between the CPR tracks and Sutherland Avenue (South Point Douglas) and we have several large institutions in our geographically small community – Manitoba Hydro, Holy Family Nursing Home and the Sharon Home/Magnus Centre that is a potential addictions treatment facility.

North Point Douglas needs secure funding for housing projects as we build capacity and improve housing conditions for the residents of the area. We provide a dynamic model for facing and working through housing and community development challenges.

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.

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.

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. Two new committees, Recreation and Business, reflect the direction we are taking towards building sustainable community in North Point Douglas.

The crime rate in North Point Douglas and the ongoing gang activity have diminished as residents and landlords have improved properties and taken back ownership of our streets. The Safety Committee of the Point Douglas Residents Committee has established a strong, positive relationship with community policing officers.

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.

Our efforts to improve and maintain the housing stock in our neighbourhood are ongoing.

- We recognize that there is a relationship between community safety and decent, affordable housing.
- PDRC collaborates with NECRC staff regarding housing and safety addressing such needs as exterior fix-up and improved lighting.
- We are taking the initiative in locating and supporting Seniors who would benefit from funding for improvements to accessibility and visitability in their homes.
- We are working with landlords to improve conditions in rental and rooming-house properties. We support good landlords and put pressure on landlords who need to act more responsibly towards their vulnerable tenants. We are doing this directly with landlords when possible, by supporting the TLC and through City departments that enforce standards.
- We are committed to capacity-building in North Point Douglas so that gains made in housing, safety and community development can be sustained.
- As we renew our North Point Douglas Neighbourhood Housing Plan 2003 –2008 community-run affordable housing is a priority.

We are committed to continuing to improve our neighbourhood and we understand housing and safety to be inter-connected. Secure funding that supports our efforts is a priority. Sustaining the hard-won gains in this neighbourhood is a necessity.

Basis of request for funding

Currently the City provides North Point Douglas with $160,000 each year to pay our portion of NECRC Housing Coordination costs, to support PDRC capacity-building, to fund the Exterior Fix-Up Program and the Minimum Home Repair Program and to provide some funding for infill and rehabilitation projects by such organizations as WHRC and NEHP. Funds have been provided to Sutherland Hotel and to Sistars

At times, North Point Douglas properties become available to the Point Douglas Residents' Committee at a reasonable and low price or in return for a charitable donation receipt. In the past we have approached agencies that specialize in acquiring and renovating properties, but none of them have felt able to take on these projects. As a result, opportunities for creative, community-centred, community-owned and operated housing are being lost. We need to set up a process that will allow us to respond quickly and effectively when suitable properties become available.

In North Point Douglas we have many substandard buildings that we are working to have brought up to standard so that people with limited means can live in affordable, decent housing. Some of our work with landlords in North Point Douglas includes using housing improvement funds as leverage to make living conditions better for tenants and for neighbourhood safety.

As the City of Winnipeg is reviewing its housing strategy, we request that inner city neighbourhoods continue to be funded in a manner that supports neighbourhood initiatives and gives neighbourhoods reasonable flexibility in apportioning funds from year to year to reflect a range of needs that may vary in the emphasis it is important to give them.

We request that a minimum of $160,000 be ear-marked for North Point Douglas annually. In the past, not all of these funds have been spent. Some of this has been due to people's project hopes not being borne out and to the hiatus in building by North End Housing Project and to few infill houses being built in North Point Douglas. We believe that a more flexible approach to allocation of funds will make it easier to use all the funding that is available.

Our concerns would be better-addressed if City Council approves a more substantial budget and we support increasing City funding from $1 million to $2 million annually.

Suggested ongoing budget for $160,000:

Housing Coordination (NECRC)	$21,000
Exterior Fix-Up Program	$30,000 - $60,000 (+$30,000)
Minimum Home Repair	$18,000 - $24,000
Resident Association Capacity Building	$10,000
Housing Development	$81,000 (flexible to reflect higher amounts for Exterior Fix-Up Program or Minimum Home Repair Program)

Housing development expenses include infill houses and rehabilitation of properties. As houses in North Point Douglas become available on the market it is important that we be able to secure some of these, especially on particularly problematic streets where the kind of housing available observably affects safety. This is increasingly needed as there are fewer vacant lots in our neighbourhood, but housing stock is still deteriorating. There are several fire-damaged buildings that need to be demolished, but that are privately owned and out of PDRC reach at this time.

Some examples of the frustration felt by community groups are:

1. We looked for ways to obtain a burned-out property on Euclid Avenue, but did not have core funding that would have allowed us to move ahead. This property has been vacant since the fire, nearly two years ago and ownership has changed twice. We hope that we can find ways of working with the current owner and that this person will provide 4 decent, affordable rental units at this location

2. A property that could be rehabilitated or developed by community agencies is currently available. The probably lack of availability of funding to move ahead with this property means that it will likely be sold to a landlord who does not plan improvements. This property borders the location of the planned SISTARS Hub.

3. Last year we had more than 100 requests for Exterior Fix-Up grants and while we were able to increase the funding allocated for these, we were not able to meet the need. We see a strong relationship between exterior fix-ups and reduction of neighbourhood crime.

4. City departments are "complaint-driven" regarding the enforcement of by-laws and this means that neighbourhood volunteers spend countless hours identifying and reporting problems related to poorly maintained housing and

to garbage pick-up. It seems that resolving these issues plays positively into both fire and crime prevention.

Request for increased and for dedicated funding

Pooling of funds for Neighbourhood Improvement Zones would, in our view, cause difficulty between neighbourhoods through competition for funds. For this reason and to support our need for secure core funding, we believe that a continuation of dedicated funding for North Point Douglas best serves this neighbourhood and the City.

We request that

- Funding be increased
- Funding be long-term and secure
- Funding be specific to neighbourhoods and that competition among neighbourhood not be a factor
- Funding be flexible so that we can respond swiftly to concerns and opportunities that may arise.

Respectfully submitted

Barbara Matheson
Point Douglas Residents' Committee
Housing Committee Chair