WINNIPEG LABOUR COUNCIL

Presentation to Executive Policy Committee

RE: PROPOSED 2011 OPERATING BUDGET

March 14, 2011

PRESENTATION FROM THE WINNIPEG LABOUR COUNCIL

Your Worship and Councillors.

The Winnipeg Labour Council is grateful for this opportunity to appear before the Executive Policy Committee to present our views on the proposed operating budget for 2011.

First let me begin by introducing myself – my name is David Sauer, President of the Winnipeg Labour Council.

The Winnipeg Labour Council is comprised of about 70 affiliate Locals with a membership of over 42,000 working men and women in Winnipeg. We represent working people in both the public and private sectors. Among the member unions of the Labour Council are all of the Civic Unions with the exception of the Winnipeg Police Association and WAPSO. We have a long and proud history of community involvement and social and political activism. We look after the best interests of all of our affiliates and their members.

There are some key areas in the budget that we would like to focus our comments on:

First, we'd like to comment on some of the merits to the proposed

budget.

In general, increases to public safety functions (i.e. police, fire and paramedic) are important and will improve services. Some targeted neighborhood services as well as the Millennium Library and Assiniboine Park Conservatory also fare well.

However, we have some concerns that we think are important to express:

We believe this budget does not deal with the essential needs of our physical infrastructure for the present and into the future. In proposing the 14th straight year of a property tax freeze, our city will continue to fall further behind in addressing long standing infrastructure and new service needs. While the budget does propose $14.4 million in revenue from an increase to frontage levies dedicated for water and sewer upgrades, street and sidewalk repairs and improved lighting, this is simply a drop in the bucket to what is needed to adequately resource our crumbling infrastructure.

The following commentary is taken from the City's 2003 Preliminary Operating budget that drives home this point remains relevant today:

"...Winnipeg is facing a problem of aging infrastructure.

Roads, buildings and other infrastructure built during a period of growth are in need of repair or replacement. The City is getting further and further behind in this investment. In addition, service levels expected by the community will continue to put pressure on expenditures. Inflationary pressures alone cannot be covered through even the modest increases in property taxes." (page 29)

We are concerned that by deferring maintenance costs and not adequately resourcing the upkeep of our roads, water and sewage network, civic buildings and parks, we are only passing on the cost to future generations of taxpayers.

I also believe in the importance of a solid social infrastructure for our city, which helps build the type of communities the citizens want and deserve. In our view, raising user fees for recreation will negatively impact low income families and prevent many children from participating in City programs.

This City budget calls for a $926,000 increase for recreation fees. The report contains an $847 million spending budget, a plan to increase 177 of 178 group and individual recreational fees listed by the City. Some fees would increase by more than 20%, while only one set to remain the same is the 25 cent fee to check valuables at city pools. Arena ice time for adult will increase from $157 to $191 an hour.

This is the time when we should be encouraging more citizens to be more physically active. This added fee will only prevent participation especially for low income families, children and senior citizens. How can the city possibly defend raising the cost of arena prime time ice rentals by $44.00 dollars per hour? In fact, there is by September, a 10% proposed increase on all of the Leisure Guide core programming including Learn to Swim, and Learn to Skate programs and a 20% increase on all other programs. Are these rising costs necessary? These increases will make it more difficult for families to keep their children in fitness programs. There is enough evidence across our country relative to obesity and the benefits of more exercise and recreation activity.

The Winnipeg Labour Council strongly urges its government to remove these added fees and keep these programs affordable for the citizens of our city. We should be encouraging physical activity, not making it unaffordable to families. These added fees are completely out of step with the Federal government's fitness tax credit program that encourages activity and tries to offset the costs.

We believe that the residents of the City of Winnipeg want value for their tax dollars. They want a level of services that provide a good quality of life in this city. They want to be able to go to parks that are well kept and safe, they want their streets and sidewalks maintained, and their sewer and water lines maintained. They want green spaces

and affordable recreational programs so their kids and their neighbours' kids can develop and play. These public services are what make our community a good place to live.

Let me conclude by saying that Winnipeg is a wonderful place to live. We are proud to be a part of this community. We have fine services and facilities, and great people delivering them. Let's keep our city well serviced and well maintained and a great place to live.

Thank you very much.

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