

Presentation to Executive Policy Committee
City of Winnipeg
March 14, 2011

Right to Housing is concerned about the proposed amendment to the budget that would cut city funding to the WHHI, seriously affecting the capacity of the Neighbourhood Development Corporations to do their work. Frankly, we are confused about the intent of this amendment and hope that EPC will not approve it. Here are our reasons:

- Halving the funding to the Neighbourhood Development Corporations will cripple their capacity to improve the housing stock in the inner city. They have done much good work in repairing, renewing and developing the neediest neighbourhoods in our city. Anyone familiar with these neighbourhoods only has to drive through them to see the improvement; fewer boarded up houses, much better exterior repair and condition of the buildings and new infill housing and multi-family dwellings. Why would the City want to curtail this?

- What message will this send to our partners in the WHHI. You know that the city money is but a small fraction of the money levered into the inner city through the WHHI. If the city isn't committed to its own renewal, how can we expect the Federal and Provincial money to be sustained?

- Is this part of a bigger plan? If so, what is the plan? We recently attended the WHHI Forum where we learned that the Our Winnipeg, Complete Communities plan is calling for 83,000 new housing units in the next 16 years to accommodate the project population increase of 180,000. We also learned of the limits of expanding the outer boundaries of the city and the need for higher density and in-fill housing in the inner city to accommodate this growth. Does EPC support the Our Winnipeg plan as it sits in the hands of the Province? How does this proposed amendment fit with Our Winnipeg?

- This debate is about more than housing. It is about building safe and engaged communities, a job that the Neighbourhood Development Corporations have been doing as they have facilitated the housing improvements. Crime prevention is first and foremost about healthy and settled communities where neighbours know each other and have a voice in the upkeep and growth of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhoods that will be affected if this amendment passes are those most susceptible to poverty and the crime that too often goes with it.

- Finally this amendment raises the impression that despite what they would have us believe, some councillors are still prepared to sacrifice the needs of the inner city to advantage their suburban ridings. They are prepared to advantage home owners at the expense of renters. Home owners receive a disproportionate amount of tax advantage over renters by a factor of 5 to 1 as it is. There will always be a need for safe and affordable rental accommodation, something of which our city has almost none of at present. If we are serious about reducing homelessness we need to continue to invest in the housing that most addresses homelessness.

Councillors may not know that Right to Housing Coalition works with three levels of government to advocate for safe affordable housing for all Canadians because no one level of government can bring this about on its own. We meet regularly with the public service of the City and this year presented a paper to the Housing Steering Committee putting forward some practical tools that have proven useful for other cities in dealing with the housing needs of their inner cities. You may only see us at budget time but we spend more time working on city issues than provincial and federal issues combined. That being said we readily admit that there is much we don't understand about the City's political and budgetary processes. What we do know is that the needs of the inner city are far from being resolved and that this amendment is not at all helpful.