Speaking Notes
Presentation to the Executive Policy Committee March 15, 2016
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on the City's 2016 budget.

My name is Josh Brandon and I'm a community animator at the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. For the councillors who do not know about the Social Planning Council, much of the work we do involves supporting community organizations and resident groups with the information that allows them to participate effectively in policy discussions. We do this because we know that these groups hold vast knowledge and expertise on the areas they are passionate about, and that when this is shared with decision-makers in the right way, it leads to improved public policy.

This year, despite promises of improved process, the consultation was not so different from the past.

An example of the flaws Winnipeg's consultation process was shown with the police budget last week. Despite widespread community support for a culture of safety for all approach that would emphasise community outreach and proactive policing, this year's budget will see the loss of important resources made available to implement this approach. This council should work towards making up the resources so those priorities can be maintained.

The Social Planning Council was one of the partners with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives working on the Alternative Municipal Budget (AMB). Today I'm going to focus on how the City could position itself as leader in reducing poverty as we did in the AMB. We are happy to support Mayor Bowman's efforts to make 2016 a Year of Reconciliation. These efforts should be matched by making 2016 a budget of reconciliation that addressed long standing inequalities that are at the heart of the racial divides of our city.

We are pleased to see the 2016 budget will again allocate $150,000 toward the United Way's Plan to End Homelessness in Winnipeg, this cannot be its only approach to addressing the complex issue of poverty. The United Way's Plan acknowledges that issues like poverty, and therefore upstream prevention of homelessness, are beyond its scope.

What Winnipeg really needs is a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and a body to implement it, which we have suggested should be a committee facilitated by the City itself so poverty reduction is considered when all decisions are made. Such a strategy requires support for more affordable housing. There are many ways the City can do more to support affordable housing without increased tax support, including requiring developers to pay for a portion of affordable housing with each new development. While we were happy to see some new development fees to allow new neighbourhoods to pay their share, these need to be matched with programs to increase affordable housing across Winnipeg including new neighbourhoods.

A comprehensive poverty reduction strategy requires improving and building on initiatives such as the Aboriginal Youth Strategy which funds community-based organizations to deliver youth

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programming and works to give youth access to good City jobs. If increased, a portion of funding for the Aboriginal Youth Strategy could be allocated to culturally-relevant community-based early childhood education and care programming so Aboriginal children can get the best possible start in life. Addressing systemic racism, the poverty it creates, is the only way to address individual racism. Supporting a good start for young Winnipeggers also includes a municipal food policy council to improve access to affordable and nutritious food, and improved access to recreation programming especially in the inner city. All these initiatives are explained and costed out in our AMB.

The City's poverty reduction strategy should ensure City employees and those of contracted services are paid a living wage – a wage that reflects what earners in a family really need in order to afford the actual costs of living in Winnipeg.

Poverty reduction also requires consideration of how things are paid for. When there's a great reliance on user fees, low-income Winnipeggers are effectively excluded from the benefits of the community. They cannot afford recreation, public transit or even potential life-saving measures such as calling an ambulance. Once again, this budget marks a shift towards increased frontage fees, which by their nature are more regressive than property tax increases.

Table 1) Property tax increases

Year	Property tax	Frontage fee increase (base $2.55)	Waste reduction fees
2010	0.00%	$0.00	-
2011	0.00%	$1.20	-
2012	3.50%	$0.00	$50
2013	3.87%	$0.00	-
2014	2.95%	$0.00	-
2015	2.30%	$0.60	$5
2016	2.33%	$1.10	
Increase	15.85%	114%	$55

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Comparison of taxes, frontage and waste fees based on assessed value

Property Value	Tax		Frontage (50 feet)		Waste fee		Total		Increase	If compost fee introduced	
	2010	2016	2010	2016	2010	2016	2010	2016	2010-16	2017?	Total increase*
$100,000	$565	$654	$128	$273	$0	$55	$693	$982	42%	$60	50%
$400,000	$2,181	$2,527	$128	$273	$0	$55	$2,309	$2,855	24%	$60	26%

*Increase since 2010 for many inner city houses would be double that of middle/high price range houses if compost fee added as surcharge

We believe equity should be considered in each budget decision. For this to happen, what we and many community partners have suggested would help is a clear connection between the budget and OurWinnipeg, and a business plan with clear direction for where the City intends to go with each budget decision. We know that many community groups and organizations have the expertise to contribute to the development of this budget plan. We look forward to 2017's budget consultations, where we hope the importance of poverty reduction will be front and centre, and will have an effect on the final budget.