Members of EPC,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the proposed 2018 City Budget.

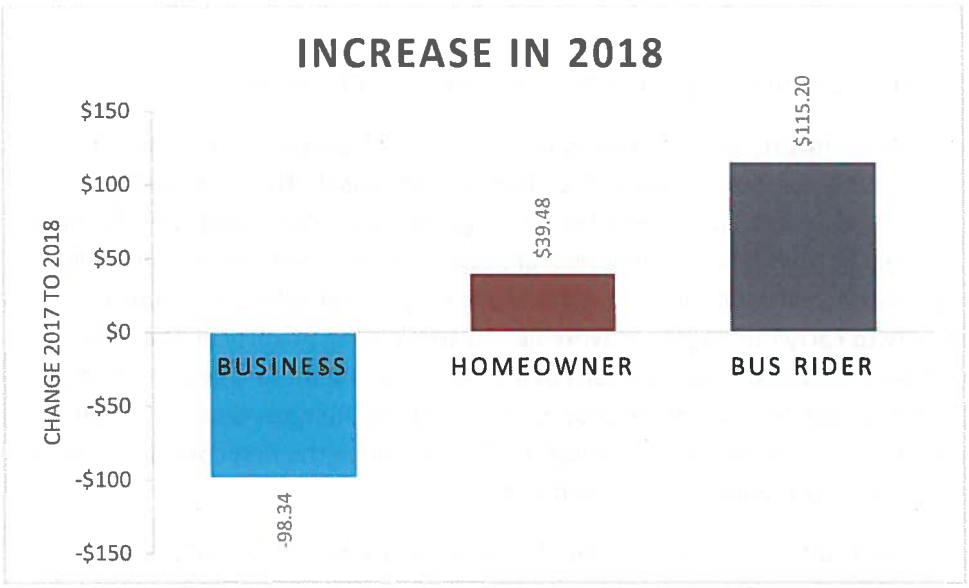
I am here today representing Make Poverty History Manitoba, a coalition of groups and individuals working to end poverty in Manitoba. We have recently been conducting consultations across city concerning the need for a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and working towards developing a community based plan for Winnipeg. The details of that plan are still being finalized, and we will look forward to sharing it with you in the new year. For now, I would like only to highlight one of it primary conclusions: in order for the city to carry out its part in working towards ending poverty in Manitoba, all city policies and actions must be analyzed through the lens of asking, "how will these changes affect people living in poverty? How will they improve the economic conditions of the most disadvantaged citizens, and how will they act to promote their social inclusion. This should be the first consideration of a city government that seeks to build a Winnipeg for all Winnipegers.

The proposed budget unfortunately offers a stark example of what happens when a poverty reduction lens is not applied in budget making. The proposal to increase fares by 25 cents will put this fundamental transportation service out of reach of many low income residents. This fare increase will force many residents to choose between transportation and buying food. It is already all too common for low wage workers to miss shifts because they didn't have the bus fare to get to there. Some will think twice about attending job interviews; many will need to reconsider about needed medical appointments because they simply do not have $5.90 to get there and back. Low income residents will become more socially excluded, with long term costs on their health and on the health of our society.

This budget not only proposes to increase fares, it contemplates cutting back on services on some routes. Winnipeg residents who depend on the bus system, as most low income people do, will find it harder and harder to access the whole city. Industrial and construction areas where many jobs available to people entering the workforce are found are already poorly served, and some of these will be cut back further. Routes on which some low income seniors depend are also scheduled to be cut back. A bus system needs to be seen as a whole and not simply as an aggregate of routes to be effective.

I share with the Mayor and members of this council a frustration with the decision by the Province to end the 50 50 funding arrangement. This decision has put difficult pressure on council. But I would also remind the council that despite this constraint they are not without choices. The bus fare increase is essentially a fee hike that will disproportionately impact predominantly low income Winnipegers, while other groups will see taxes rise close to inflation or, even in the case of business taxes, decline.

I would like to draw your attention to a chart that shows how disproportionate this increase is. Bus fares will go up $115 per month under this plan, while homeowners property taxes will go up by $39. At the same time, business will receive a tax cut according to the figures provided in the budget of an average of $98. This is not a budget balanced in fairness.



Council before it choices that will set the stage for what we want our city to look like and how we want it to grow. If we want to build an inclusive city for all Winnipegers, you must reverse the plan to cut transit and increase fares.

Thank you.

Submitted by
Josh Brandon