Save Our Seine
river environment inc.

March 17, 2020

Executive Policy Committee
City of Winnipeg

Re : Four-Year Budget (2020 to 2023)

Save Our Seine would like to thank the members of the Standing Policy Committee on Water & Waste and Riverbank Management and the Environment, EPC, and the Budget Working Group for reversing the decision to eliminate the grant to SOS in the 2020 budget.

On November 25th Councillors Gilroy (Chair), Chambers, Klein, and Shreyer sat through over five hours of presentations from SOS supporters and other groups affected by the proposed budget cuts. The Committee decided to leave the decision regarding the Save Our Seine grant to the Budget Working Group.

When the budget was tabled, we were very pleased to see Save Our Seine back in the 2020 budget at $27,000. In 2013, Councillor Mayes provided SOS with its very first grant ($28,000) from his ward budget. He made the case to have a $30,000 grant to SOS included in the city's annual operating budget. We have been fortunate to receive this grant from 2014 through 2019. Although the grant being proposed for 2020 is $3,000 less than SOS has received in past years, it is still a very generous grant that is greatly appreciated.

Many of you are unaware that Save Our Seine has provided a 2:1 return on the city's investment over the past six years by raising outside money for projects that benefit the city. These benefits far outweigh the cost to the city. The problem is that the revenue we generate never touches the city coffers so it does not even appear in the budget. It appears as a clean and healthy river that attracts paddlers, school groups, and tourists; as safer trails through beautiful natural spaces; or maybe even Winnipeg's first fully-accessible dock. As comprehensive as this budget is, it only tells half of the story – the expense half.

A 10% reduction in a grant may sound small but it still hurts. Groups facing this reduction will have to spend more time fundraising and less time fulfilling their mission, or they will have to cut staff or programs. You can lessen this pain by providing stability. We were thrilled to see that the grant to SOS, although a bit smaller, appears every year through 2023. But it is still listed as an annual grant rather than a multi-year grant. It could be threatened every year if funding priorities change. We would respectfully ask the city to formalize this commitment by entering into a multi-year agreement with SOS to provide this level of funding through 2023.

We have also heard that the city is looking to develop green infrastructure like rain gardens to lessen combined sewer overflows into rivers. SOS worked with the city on the Niakwa Trail Rain Garden in 2015. We would welcome the opportunity to be a partner on green infrastructure projects that benefit the Seine River and would like to meet with the Water and Waste Department to explore these possibilities.

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