Mayor Bowman and City Councillors

My name is Shawn Kettner. I am a business owner, a member of the Winnipeg arts community but most importantly a concerned citizen. I wish I could be there today in the council chambers so I could look you in the eye. You probably won't read this but maybe you should because Mayor Bowman wrote most of it.

"Winnipeg's a thriving, diverse, modern city that is well on its way to one million people strong. A key part of supporting a growing city is continuing with investments in Winnipeg's vibrant arts and culture industry and underscoring how integral they are to our quality of life." your words not mine, Mayor Bowman.

"It's important when attracting individuals and businesses to Winnipeg that they can hear the 'voice' of Winnipeg and that they can imagine themselves here in our neighbourhoods, in our downtown arts hub, in intimate and unique music venues throughout the city, in concert auditoriums, in small galleries or being part of major cultural events," your words, not mine Mayor Bowman.

The Mayor said the arts and culture industry not only contributes significantly to our collective voice and how the world sees our city, it also provides significant economic benefits estimated to be about one billion dollars annually. The Mayor highlighted that every dollar of municipal investment into arts and culture is estimated to attract another $18 in support to local non-profit arts and cultural organizations from federal and provincial governments, and private sources.

All of these quotes come from the Mayor's office. Did you not mean what you said? What changed?

The article goes on to say, "Mayor Bowman said both the public and private sectors have an important role to play in supporting arts and culture, citing the recent groundbreaking of the Inuit Art Centre at the Winnipeg Art Gallery as a prime example of governments partnering with the private sector."

How can you cut Winnipeg's already extremely low rate of support to arts and culture, what is it, a mere $5.79 per capita? The cost of a cup of coffee per person, is that all the arts is worth to us? We are already at the very bottom of the list of Canadian cities, we invest less than Saskatoon, Regina, Halifax, Calgary. Everyone else spends 2, 3, 4, some 7 times that!

The Mayor expressed gratitude that as a Council civic funding support to the Winnipeg Arts Council increased by $563,000 since 2014 resulting in significantly greater direct investment into the arts.

"These increases followed many, many years when city grant funding was essentially frozen or increased just marginally," said Mayor Bowman. "It's critical moving forward that the city's support does not become eroded.", again your words Mayor Bowman!

Our city slogan reads - heart of the continent. But today I come here with a heavy heart, a heart full of sorrow and fear as I digest the potential effects of the proposed city budget and the long list of vital programs that will be detrimentally affected if you support the proposed budget. The arts and cultural institutions of our city and the art programs such as Graffiti Art, MAWA, Art City, art related programs at IRCOM and at community groups will be negatively impacted. My heart especially breaks for organizations that provide arts education and opportunity to our youth.

As an arts educator with over 40 years of experience I understand the impact of arts exposure. Access to art for children from all walks of life has a ripple effect throughout their lives and society. Participating in the arts builds a sense of self worth, confidence, ability to engage in creative thinking and problem solving and teaches us to be better people. It's through the arts that we learn to imagine a better future for ourselves, for each other and for our city.

Councillors, each of you has been chosen to represent the people of Winnipeg, all the people of Winnipeg. I wonder what that means to you? I would hope it means a commitment to make Winnipeg the best you can. A commitment to contribute positively to the path of our history, a commitment to making the city of Winnipeg a place where people thrive and celebrate life, a place where we are surrounded by the things we love, a place we all proudly call home.

When I am away from home and I mention where I'm from, people often speak disparagingly of our city and I enthusiastically defend it, by listing off all of the precious things in our community, the things that make me proud to call Winnipeg home - our amazing arts and culture, and our communities. All of these wonderful institutions, the very institutions our Mayor celebrated and boasted about not that long ago, cannot and will not survive if we do not provide support.

So how do we do this? We look at this budget with our eyes wide open and imagine a better way. It's not too late.

We need a fair budget that maintains investment in our arts and social programming. A budget that improves the quality of life for all. A budget that invests in all its communities so we don't need to invest in damage control, so we won't need to invest in more policing. Imagine a budget that nurtures all of the citizens. I implore you to make the right choice - vote with your heart - for the heart of the city.