SEED Winnipeg Submission to the City of Winnipeg's
Executive Policy Committee – March 18, 2020

SEED Winnipeg offers the following submission regarding the City of Winnipeg's Preliminary 2020-2023 Multi-Year Operating and Capital Budget.

SEED Winnipeg's mission is to build strong communities and increase opportunities for people through financial empowerment programs and services. We work to address poverty through these programs and services.

We would first like to begin by expressing extreme disappointment that the budget deliberations have not been postponed. The Government of Manitoba, consistent with the announcement by the federal government, is recommending the cancellation of gatherings of more than 50 people. Knowing in advance how many people could potentially show up for delegation and continuing with the meeting anyway is deeply irresponsible. Community members want to be able to face the members of city council and tell them their serious concerns about this budget.

In terms of the budget, what we are looking at are regressive cuts. These regressive cuts will hurt community-based organizations who work with the most marginalized people in Winnipeg.

COVID 19 is a rapidly-evolving crisis that will likely bring a recession, job losses, and overall community instability. Community-based organizations that are funded by the City are on the front lines and need more financial support to deal with this uncertainty, not less. Community-based groups will be looked to for more support during this crisis. The City should not cut funding to community groups while people are depending on them.

One in ten residents of Winnipeg and surrounding communities lives below Canada's Official Poverty Line, and children are at a higher risk of poverty. Single individuals who do not have spouses or children are at an even higher risk, with over one in five below Canada's Official Poverty Line.

Many residents of Winnipeg may assume that the City is responsible for only core services like transit and roads, but if we look at the City of Winnipeg Charter, it spells out the City's responsibility "to develop and maintain safe, orderly, viable and sustainable communities; and to promote and maintain the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants". The City's community grants program is key to the City meeting these obligations spelled out in this Charter.

The city is looking at cutting budgets for transit, which is heavily subscribed by folks on low incomes. The city also recently passed a Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy. 28% of Winnipeg's populations is comprised of first generation immigrants. 30% of our immigrants have arrived since 2011, and 32.7% of recent immigrants live on low

income. By cutting vital community services, we are not allowing newcomers to be connected to important services.

There are opportunities to change the budget to make up the $9.5 million the City is saving through these cuts. The City could look at a modest increase to the property tax and business tax. SEED believes there are other actions the City could take, such as a staged reduction in the entertainment tax rebate or completely phasing it out, advocating for increase provincial / federal transfers to cities, borrowing money since we currently have low debt servicing costs, taking money from other budget lines like roads or police, establishing paid parking zones in Osborne/Corydon in addition to downtown, or a more gradual increase in the roads budget.

SEED appreciates the opportunity to put forward these suggestions during challenging times but as noted earlier, would have preferred the city postpone the budget process given the current pandemic situation. The cuts proposed in this budget will potentially have long-lasting effects on the health and well-being of the community.

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