DELEGATION PRESENTATION RE: 24/7 SAFE SPACE GRANT PROGRAM

TO: EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING, JUNE 18, 2020

My name is Lissie Rappaport, Manager of Housing Supply with End Homelessness Winnipeg. I'm speaking to the agenda item regarding 24/7 Safe Space Grant Program.

A recommendation from the The Illicit Drug Task Force Report was to explore 24/7 safe spaces in Winnipeg. End Homelessness Winnipeg was asked by City of Winnipeg Community Services department to conduct a brief review of 24/7 Safe Spaces in Winnipeg to help inform decision making – which you can see attached in today's agenda.

So first, I'm so happy to see this work has come this far and I want to commend City Council for approving this funding allocation. Support for 24/7 Safe Spaces answers a call, not only from the Illicit Drug Task Force, but from many community groups in our city, over many years. This funding will support Winnipeggers who have no home and face limited options for accessing basic amenities – a crisis which we have seen to deepen in the context of COVID-19.

Today, I just want to highlight some high-level parts of the report, to support your decision making around the grant structure that is before EPC today. Our review conducted a brief scan of relevant reports and studies, looked at existing services, and engaged local organizations through a survey and follow up calls. The resulting report outlined some barriers to accessing existing spaces, gaps in current services, and potential best steps forward.

24/7 safe spaces can be defined as those that are open every day around the clock, operating free of bias or conflict, and addressing immediate needs for shelter, meals, access to treatment, culturally relevant services, and referrals to health services or other community organizations.

A scan of existing services revealed a need for more culturally-appropriate, Indigenous-led safe spaces. While overnight emergency shelters offer a necessary support, not all people experiencing homelessness access shelters. In particular, Indigenous people, women, youth, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are less likely to access shelters. We also know that women and girls who are experiencing violence or sexual exploitation need a specialized 24/7 safe space with experienced staff who work from a gender-based perspective.

There's also a lack of low-barrier spaces for people who use drugs. People need places to sleep during the day, places where they can come and go at all hours of the day and night, and places where substance use is not a barrier to accessing safe shelter or supports. These issues become even more pressing in the winter.

The 24/7 Safe Spaces report makes the recommendation that granting processes should acknowledge these gaps in local services in funding considerations. The Report also identifies best practices; these are outlined in the proposed grant application, and we would urge funding decisions to be made in support of groups that support up to all of the following, and not just one.

- Provide services 24 hours a day, 7 days/week
    - Many services run on a Monday-Friday 9-5 schedule, *or* overnight 8pm to 7am; which leaves critical gaps for people who may not live and follow this same schedule.
- Identify as an Indigenous organization or provide Indigenous-led services
    - Culturally appropriate services are critical, and Indigenous leadership in our city has been consistently calling for investment in Indigenous-led agencies and services. Indigenous people are also overrepresented in people experiencing homelessness (two-thirds) and even higher in those who are unsheltered (80%) according to the last Street Census (yet only 12% of Winnipeg as whole).
- Offer a harm reduction and trauma-informed approach to the service
    - For more vulnerable and marginalized populations this is critical to keeping them safe and respecting their choices.
- Hire and retain staff who have lived experience
    - People with lived experience know, most intimately, what the needs of this population are and can better inform peer-led services that have been identified as best practices.
- Provide access to on-site skilled mental health and addictions services
    - We know this is a critical gap, and so, as the City considers funding spaces, looking at leveraging this funding with funding from other levels of government or additional funding pots to fill this gap.

In conversations we've had with the Community Services Department as they draft the grant structure, we've emphasized the need to consider funding collective partnerships that include more robust services to address the needs, and therefore grant more funding to applicants working in partnership. We know that one group cannot respond to everyone's needs on its own; and that organizations receiving this City funding will need to access other funding sources to respond more comprehensively to the community's needs. The greater the partnerships and level of collaboration, the stronger the ability will be to leverage assets, expertise, and additional resources as required. This partnered and coordinated approach supports the need for services in our city to work in greater coordination, and the work End Homelessness Winnipeg is doing around coordinated access – helping people move through the full range of services and supports available.

So thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments today, and our support for this new grant program. I look forward to seeing where these resources can go in our community to help respond to the needs.