URBAN Garage
HONDA & ACURA SPECIALISTS

May 13, 2022

Re: St. Boniface Street Links funding shortfall

To: Executive Policy Committee – City of Winnipeg

Greetings committee members,

I am a business owner in St. Vital and a proud member of the Old St. Vital Biz board. We have been in our location on the river side of St. Mary's since 2014.

During the summer of 2020 we experienced the set up of an encampment on the riverbank. At first it was merely a tent or two and were located near the bridge. After only a few weeks the situation escalated to produce the following:

- Extreme amounts of trash
- Discarded needles
- Several fires lit with emergency responses – one almost shut down the bridge
- Theft of service – hooking up water and electrical to neighbouring businesses after hours
- Breaking into Hydro boxes to access power
- Drug overdose with emergency response
- Domestic abuse arrest
- Neighbourhood theft as bicycles were coming and coming several times per day

These events created another layer of concern for business owners. This was in addition to the uncertainty of Covid already heavy on our minds.

The issue was brought to the Old St Vital Biz Board, which struck a Community Safety committee to communicate with Winnipeg police and Winnipeg Fire Paramedic services to address our concerns. The issues were addressed on an emergency basis in response to calls for help and we did not feel that there was a coordinated or proactive approach available.

We were helpless to watch the encampment grow larger in size, and the occupants become more emboldened with their behaviour.

All this changed when we met Marion Willis of St. Boniface Street Links. The St. Boniface Street Links team began reaching out to the encampment residents and striking up a dialogue. Through understanding and offering solutions, the team was able to remove several of the residents over the last two summers. They also removed all trash, bicycle parts and encampment shelters. They even raked the greenspace to further beautify the riverbank.

Marion and her team were the only solution to the encampment afflictions. More importantly the solution benefitted all involved. The encampment residents were housed and introduced to social services they could genuinely use. The businesses were relieved of the concern such an encampment poses. Finally, the City of Winnipeg had a solution that worked.

I am shocked and disappointed at the reduction of support for Marion and her team. Especially with the track record of her ability to offer solutions for encampment take down, housing the homeless and helping them to succeed and move on with their lives. It is my understanding that most if not all the Street Links team has one time, or another lived on the streets. What better way to ensure the efficacy and continued success of a program?

I implore you to reconsider the shorted funds to St. Boniface Street Links. I am already nervous for the upcoming summer and the likelihood of another encampment. I cannot imagine what will happen if Marion and her team are not there to help.

Kind regards,

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