Tanshi, Aaniin Mayor and Councillors.

As a manager at End Homelessness Winnipeg and co-chair of the Kíkinanaw Óma Strategy to support unsheltered Winnipeggers, I am writing against the motion to dismantle bus shelters along Regent Avenue. There is no evidence this action will have the effect desired by its proponents; and there is considerable evidence it will increase harm to Winnipeggers who are Indigenous, who experience homelessness or who use substances.

This motion came forward from Councillor Nason to the May meeting of the East Kildonan Transcona Community Committee, without advance notification of the Residents Committee or his fellow Committee members, before being brought to a vote and passed to the Infrastructure, Renewal and Public Works Committee for its June 9 meeting. At that meeting, the motion was approved by Councillors Browaty, Chambers and Sharma, after several Councillors and community members spoke to it in delegation. At no point in this extremely tight timeline was there any direct engagement with people who gather in bus shelters, no community consultation and hardly any advance notice to stakeholders of this plan, which should be a red flag to all Councillors.

Throughout the proceedings on this topic, proponents have parroted a straw man argument that living in a bus shack or a tent is not a "right." No one is arguing that living in a bus shack or a tent reflects a fulfilment of their human rights. These circumstances are the visible manifestation of the violation of the right to housing and must not be ignored. At the same time, by all accounts, no one is living in the bus shacks on Regent Avenue, which are used as a part-time gathering place.

What is the current scale of the purported crisis of unsheltered homelessness at transit stops in our city? Outreach workers have participated in or supported a number of efforts in recent years to provide single-day tallies of unsheltered homelessness in encampments and other locations including bus shacks. Just over 200 people were encountered on a single day in the spring of 2018. 3 years later, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, that number had more than doubled. By the fall of 2021, however, a single day tally encountered fewer people than in 2018. Last winter, thanks to the opening of N'Dinawemak as an Indigenous led 24/7 safe space and to robust 24/7 citywide street outreach services, outreach workers reported that unsheltered homelessness had dropped to levels unseen since before the pandemic. While no enumeration of unsheltered homelessness will be exact, numbers gathered in 2021 were collected by multiple teams of outreach workers who together provide 24/7 services across the city, in coordination with information on encampments and unsheltered homelessness called into 311 and first responders. These systems of collaboration and real time information-sharing were not in place prior to 2019.

The City's Crime Map and 911 Calls for Service Map statistics show that, in recent months, 911 calls to the Kildonan Place area are comparable to those around Polo Park, and slightly higher than at St. Vital, with a large number of calls related to property theft and traffic, as might be

expected at any retail hub. Rates of violent crime and calls to 911 made in the Kildonan Place area are far lower than those in the Downtown, Osborne and Point Douglas neighbourhoods.

Last month I received the following message from a CTV reporter hoping to do a story about people sleeping in bus shacks. She wrote, quote "I did some driving around today to some places people have alerted us to…. but I didn't see any bus shelters that looked as though someone was/had been sleeping there. Without any video of this, there really is no television story to do." On June 9, CTV, CBC and CityNews stories on this proposed motion all showed current images of the Regent Avenue bus shelters in question, from different angles and at various times of day, sitting empty. This is not to suggest that no Winnipeggers are any longer using bus shelters for purposes other than waiting for a bus. But the evidence does raise concerns that this issue, in our current context, is overblown compared to other urgent threats to life safety in Winnipeg communities.

1100 people were housed from homelessness in Winnipeg last year through Reaching Home-funded programs administered by End Homelessness Winnipeg. This number does not include anyone housed by St. Boniface Street Links. Since 2019, at least 1860 people have been housed from homelessness through Reaching Home-funded initiatives; meaning our city has exceeded its 5-Year Target for housing people in less than 3 years.

Key to the success of Reaching Home-funded housing placement initiatives is the mix of Housing First and non-Housing First programs, tailored to distinct levels of need and distinct demographics. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to ending homelessness. One of the most effective ways to connect unsheltered people to housing services is by using an autonomy-based approach, researchers in the United Kingdom have found. This means individuals can make their own decisions about the types of supports they receive. Other research on unsheltered rough sleepers and Housing First initiatives has uncovered a range of benefits associated with the Housing First model for addressing unsheltered homelessness, including reducing physical and mental-health issues, less crime and less substance overuse.

Collaboration among a diversity of housing services that include Housing First, Harm Reduction, Indigenous-led and other evidence-based approaches, operating with an adequate housing supply, are the most critical necessities for ending homelessness in any city. Facilitating this collaboration and advancing the creation of supply in Winnipeg, while centring lived experience, the right to adequate housing and the rights of Indigenous peoples, is End Homelessness Winnipeg's role.

The City of Winnipeg is a key partner, alongside End Homelessness Winnipeg, in the Kíkinanaw Óma Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers, through the Winnipeg Police Service, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service, Winnipeg Transit, Public Works and Community Services, alongside lived experts, other levels of government and community organizations. The City's own Encampment Support Process is grounded in the Kíkinanaw Óma strategy, stating that the City of Winnipeg is committed to working with partner agencies to find long-term solutions for

supporting unsheltered Winnipeggers. The City's process also states that, at all times, the City's actions will be guided by a human rights-based approach as outlined in A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada, issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing. Fundamental to this approach is direct engagement with unsheltered people, ensuring rights-based goals and outcomes for this engagement, and upholding the distinct rights of Indigenous peoples.

The motion to dismantle bus shelters undermines each of these commitments. Instead, it blames people experiencing homelessness and using substances for a host of issues - related to safety, housing, health, transit, waste removal and maintenance of public space - that are the direct responsibility of municipal and other levels of government. In this sense, it merely serves to divert attention and time from urgent Council priorities. Safe consumptions sites, other harm reduction strategies, and Indigenous-led low-income housing and services are particularly urgent priorities for addressing street-level substance use and homelessness in Winnipeg. The proposed dismantling of two bus shelters functions as a paper tiger to distract attention from our city's failure to address such urgent needs. Please vote against this motion and lend support to evidence-based solutions for some of our city's greatest challenges.

Maarsii & Miigwetch,

Kris Clemens