SUBMISSION – AMANDA MONDACA

ITEM 1 OF THE REPORT OF THE STANDING POLICY COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL AND PUBLIC WORKS DATED JUNE 9, 2022 REGARDING REGENT AVENUE BUS SHELTERS

I am writing to you today to voice my opposition to the proposed dismantling of the Regent Ave Winnipeg bus shelters and to ask you to vote against said proposal. These types of actions are regressive, punitive approaches to poverty and homelessness that have proven failures.

My husband, Victor Mondaca, works at N'Dinawemak – Our Relatives' Place at 190 Disraeli Freeway and presented as a deligate in front of the executive policy committee in opposition to the proposed dismantling of the Regent ave bus shelters last Wednesday, June 15, 2022.

Victor works on the front line with individuals experiencing homelessness every day that he goes to work. In the past 6 months he has saved 6 lives due to overdose. Through the work that he does getting to know individuals, listening, earning trust, and building relationships, he has impacted countless more lives. These individuals have impacted his life as well. The trauma, addiction, and sadness that he sees at work can be extremely disheartening, but there are stories of community and family, strength and perseverance, and of hope and success as well.

I am so proud of the work that Victor and his colleagues at N'Dinawemak, as well as the other shelters, resource centres, and outreach organizations do every day, but I am disappointed and angry in our city, the city that I love, that this proposal to dismantle the Regent Ave bus shelters would even be suggested.

How can anyone expect a short term immediate solution to an issue that took time to create through generational trauma and oppression? Instead of asking what we can do about people using bus shelters for reasons they weren't intended for, we need to ask why people are using bus shelters for this reason.

The majority of individuals that use bus shelters are Indigenous. Indigenous experiences of homelessness can be directly correlated to the ongoing impacts of colonization, including residential schools, the sixties scoop, displacement from land, culture, and resources through the Indian Act, and intergenerational trauma rooted in the ongoing process of colonization.

In the absence of adequate housing and safe consumption sites, people inevitably use substances in public spaces. Dismantling one or two bus shelters does not address this, as was openly admitted at the June 9 IRPW meeting. Safe consumption sites are an evidence-based best practice for reducing harms of street-level substance use. The only solution to

homelessness is housing; and housing is a human right. To address street-level homelessness and substance use, the City must invest in safe, supportive, Indigenous-led housing, consumption sites and mobile outreach services. In this way, relationships between community outreach teams and unsheltered residents can lead to an even greater number of successful housing placements than local outreach providers are already achieving.

Research indicates that more than two-thirds of those experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg are Indigenous: survivors of legacies of colonization and cultural genocide including Residential Schools and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit people. More than half of people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg have been in the care of Child and Family Services, meaning they are also survivors of family separation, abuse and neglect. More than half of people experiencing homelessness have traumatic brain injuries. Nearly half are living with physical and/or mental health disabilities.

Housing successes in this context still occur, but achieving results takes time, due to siloed and bureaucratic government systems that must be navigated to access housing: income assistance, identification, primary care, disability services, cultural supports, justice services, mental health and/or addictions treatment, all of which must be arranged separately, often with long wait times. This creates barriers to access and trust for people, even with the best-trained, housing-focused, peer-led outreach available.

In the interim, bus shelters can provide refuge from the elements and a sense of safety to community members. They likewise provide a critical amenity to people who have housing and do not use substances in public places. Taking bus shelters away and blaming this action on "homelessness and drug use" only reinforces stigma, fear and hatred toward people without homes and with substance use concerns.

I urge the City to undertake the following:

- Create more low-barrier, transitional housing with supports
- Create safe consumption sites and mobile services connected to housing and treatment options
- Create additional, community-based crisis stabilization spaces and services
- Enhance outreach grants to cover costs of 24-hr services with casework supports
- Provide funding to implement the city's Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Engage the Province of Manitoba to increase income supports and rental benefits

I will continue to advocate for the above with the provincial government, but we need buy in from all levels of government, including the city councillors to make the needed changes.

In closing, I ask you to please take in everything that you are hearing from the individuals and organizations that are speaking up in opposition to the proposed dismantling of the Regent Avenue bus shelters and to please vote against this proposal.

"One doesn't have to operate with great malice to do great harm. The absence of empathy and understanding are sufficient. In fact, a man convinced of his virtue even in the midst of his vice is the worst kind of man."

— Charles M. Blow

Thank you,
Amanda Mondaca
Family and Community Development Coordinator and concerned Winnipegger