Good morning Mayor Gillingham and Executive Policy Committee members,

My name is Jaideep Johar and I am the current Winnipeg Public Library Board Chair. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Winnipeg Public Library Board 2023 operating grant application; and to advocate for support of current and future funding for Winnipeg Public Library.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank you for the ongoing financial support provided by City Council. In 2022, the Library Board received $71,384 in an annual operating grant which helped the Board to execute its mandate and provide support to the five Library Advisory Committees. I would like to highlight some of the activities the funding went towards:

1. There is a Millennium Library Community Working group that consists of City staff, Library Board representation, and community members who meet and discuss how to provide safe spaces for all at the Millennium downtown library branch. The Board provided funding support for an external facilitator to guide the formation of this new group. On April 25th, the Millennium Library Community Connections space opened which allows library staff and visiting community agencies to provide information and resources for vulnerable members of the community. The Library Board provides funds for consumable supplies such as coffee, tea, water, granola bars, and feminine hygiene products. We are providing these items as away to establish a welcoming environment which will facilitate conversations with visitors to the Community Connection Space.

2. The Library Board provided funding to Fearless R2W's Community Safety Host program. Specifically, funding went towards training costs for new recruits who complete their practicum in a WPL branch. The Community Safety Hosts have been and continue to be a valued component of the safety and security measures at Millennium Library and other branches.

3. Last year we reported to EPC that the Library Board is committed to truth, healing and reconciliation with the Indigenous and Métis communities. We bring awareness to the 94 Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action by providing our members with training opportunities and updates on relevant library resources. Library Board and Library Advisory Committee meetings begin with a Land and Water Acknowledgement to recognize the relationship we have with Indigenous and Métis communities. With the assistance of Library Services staff, a Sharing Circle event was created to give Library Board, LACs, and library staff an opportunity to have a space to learn about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirits. I would like to thank Clayton Sandy from the Sioux Valley Dakota First Nation and Frances Sinclair-Kaspick for leading the

sharing circle and providing guidance as well as a safe space for attendees to share their personal stories.

4. Another activity the Library Board funded was the World Storytelling series program which was an idea brought forward by one of our past Library Board members. In collaboration with WPL staff, a program series was developed to feature folklore from around the world. Storytellers presented stories from Slovenia, Mexico, Iceland, South-Asia, South Sudan, Philippines, and Brazil. The series also featured an Inuit Storyteller.

5. Lastly, the LACS are busy with supporting activities within their districts which include projects that will help promote Winnipeg Public Library. Of particular note with the Library Board's approval, the Riel LAC requested additional funding for French giveaway materials so that Outreach staff and Riel district library branches can give books to low-income families in order to promote literacy and WPL. This is important to promote French language and literacy to the citizens of Winnipeg and newcomers. The additional funding was required because the French language materials were much more expensive than English language materials.

These are only some of the projects and activities the Library Board and the LACs are undertaking. We will be providing a more fulsome update to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services on April 13th when we present our annual report and audited financial statements.

We hope that Council will provide approval of our requested 2023 operating grant so we can continue to pursue the projects previously mentioned and also look at other ways we can support Winnipeg Public Library and its users.

The next item I would like to bring forward to EPC is the issue of funding for Winnipeg Public Library.

There is an increasing number and seriousness of incidents occurring at libraries across the 20-branch system, primarily at Millennium Library. Safety and security issues worsened during COVID-19, made worse by chronic social issues of homelessness, poverty, addictions, and mental health conditions, which are most evident in the downtown.

The vast majority of library employees are frontline workers who manage and are affected by these incidents. Library staff deliver service with compassion and empathy. They are trained, skilled, and experienced in dealing with challenging interactions.

However, increasingly, staff are confronted with situations that are immediately escalated when members of the public are in a highly agitated state.

Additional safety strategies are required to support vulnerable members of our community and to support library staff in performing their work safely: two successful strategies used by Library Services are included in the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy, under Goal 4 - Action 3, which calls for ongoing operating funds to support:

- **Community Connections**, a space located in the lobby of the Millennium Library where visitors can connect with information and social services to support their basic needs. Downtown Winnipeg experienced a shift during the pandemic. Millennium Library is seeing an increase in people who are living in poverty, people who are unsheltered or who have precarious housing, people in need of food, people with addictions and people in need of mental health supports.

- **Community Safety Host program**, a community- and Indigenous-led initiative of FearlessR2W. Recruitment for the program is focused on youth aging out of care who are Indigenous and who live in Winnipeg's North End. Community Safety Hosts are licensed security officers and also have extensive training in non-violent de-escalation, Indigenous teachings, and empathy-based strategies.

On behalf of the Winnipeg Public Library Board, I would like to thank Councillor Orlikow, Councillor Duncan, Councillor Eadie, and Councillor Wyatt for putting a motion forward to pursue funding for Winnipeg Public Library in the 2024-2027 multi-year budget. This would allow for possibly incremental operating funding for these initiatives.

The Winnipeg Public Library Board would also encourage Council as a whole to look at other ways to provide further investments and funding to Winnipeg Public Library. This would include increased funding for facilities to ensure they are welcoming, accessible, safe spaces for staff and public. Provide funding for training and professional development for staff so that they can deliver programs and services with the tools needed to interact with customers in all situations.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge that our City has many needs and competing priorities. However, as more demands and expectations are specifically placed on WPL, the Library Board encourages the City to support these efforts with sustainable operating funds. Not only will sustainable funding help our library; but will help with efforts the City makes toward poverty reduction, promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, and safety for all. The City has challenges and WPL cannot solve all the problems but they are and can continue to be part of the solution as long as proper supports and funding are provided.

The Winnipeg Public Library Board trusts that proper funding for the Library Board and for Winnipeg Public Library will remain top of mind for Council during the Budget deliberations because libraries are an important and valuable part of our communities.

This concludes my presentation. On behalf of the Library Board and LACs, we thank you for your time and allowing us to speak.