Presentation re City Archives to Executive Policy Committee, Winnipeg City Council, 16 March 2023

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Thank you Mayor Gillingham and councillors for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Association for Manitoba Archives on the City Archives matter before you today. I also speak for the wider group you have come to know that has been working hard on this issue for several years: Michel Lagacé and la Société historique de Saint-Boniface; Dan Furlan and the Manitoba Historical Society; Prof. Greg Bak and the Archival Studies MA Program at the University of Manitoba; Indigenous filmmakers Jesse Green and Vanda Fleury-Green; and University of Manitoba Archivist Emerita Shelley Sweeney. I am also pleased to be on the speakers list today with two other members of our group – Carmen Miedema and Sabrina Janke.

We are delighted that the preliminary 2023 budget contains funding to return our City Archives to its former home in the Carnegie building, and that the SPC Property and Development has unanimously endorsed that. Mayor Gillingham, you deserve added thanks for making the return to Carnegie a part of your election platform. You may well be the first political candidate in history to have been elected on a pro-archives policy proposal. I trust political figures everywhere (and all Winnipeg city councillors) now see that as the surefire winning issue that archivists have always known it to be!

Special thanks also go to Deputy Mayor Lukes, one of the earliest supporters of the Archives proposal and a former member of the SPC that shepherded it to this point under the leadership of past Chair Councillor Cindy Gilroy and current Chair Councillor Rollins. And now we ask for EPC support to see this project through this next key step on its way to implementation.

I know that you are well aware of the Archives plight and indeed most councillors have visited and used the Archives on Myrtle Street and/or visited the Centre du patrimoine Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface to see by comparison a state-of-the-art archives facility. We appreciate the time councillors have spent learning about this problem and meeting with us. Now, we must move our Archives out of Myrtle without delay.

As you know, many others share this goal. We are deeply grateful for their support over the years. Nearly 100 of them (from academics to family historians) signed a petition to council a couple of years ago. The Charleswood Historical Society, the North East Winnipeg Historical Society, and the Headingly Historical Society have written to you in support. Cindy Tugwell of Heritage Winnipeg has expressed support today again. Seventy-five Winnipeggers attended a public information forum on the City Archives facility problem held by the Association for Manitoba Archives, the history departments of the University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba Faculty of Arts, and the UM Institute for the Humanities. Winnipeggers then attended the city's public consultation on the City Archives. They wrote letters to the media. The media not only gave us voice but editorial endorsement as well, and many individuals wrote personal letters to their councillors.

And then there is the staff of the Archives, who have not had a proper home for well over a decade – as Carnegie itself was under renovation in 2013 to become their home when the rainstorm disaster forced the evacuation of the records, staff, and services. We all find moving day a challenging one in our personal lives. But imagine salvaging soaked records and then moving them with the rest of a massive archive of often fragile records, without losing a single document, to a warehouse that virtually overnight the archivists had to turn into a makeshift archives, and despite all the hurdles, never missing a beat in fulfilling their still ongoing regular

duties. And they *have* carried on, as you know, because you have seen their superb services. We thank them and the wider City public service for working to bring the budget proposal this far.

I hope a new awareness and appreciation among Winnipeggers of archivists' complex work, knowledge, professionalism, and dedication to public service result from this experience. There is a vibrant archival profession in Manitoba that is still too little known. We have one of the most important archives in the world in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives at the top-flight Archives of Manitoba. We have a major regional office of our national archives, Library and Archives Canada, on Inkster Blvd. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, which is built around the archives of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and countless other residential school records, is on the U of Manitoba campus and about to begin work on a new $68 million dollar building. It is making Winnipeg the centre of reconciliation work in Canada, as befits the large presence of Indigenous people in our province, and to which our City Archives is already contributing. Hiring the first Indigenous archivist staff member of the City Archives would advance that goal. We urge you to support that.

Our universities, cultural organizations such as the Société historique de Saint-Boniface, the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, and Mennonite, Roman Catholic, and Anglican religious institutions have major archives as well. But as Michel Lagacé reminded us last week at the Property and Development committee meeting, most historical records about Winnipeg are still outside archives in the storage places of organizations and individuals who simply cannot archive them for the long term. Winnipeg's story has been written through these records too and there needs to be a larger place in archives such as our City Archives for these community records before they are lost to our history. It follows that if archives should open their doors to all people, they should be open to their records too. And these records, like all others, are

increasingly created only in digital form. One of the great challenges facing public archives today is to build them around preservation and access to digital records.

And so, even if council approves the return to Carnegie, the Archives must always remain among our city's priorities. Why? We will rightly soon celebrate the 150th anniversary of our city's incorporation and we are thankful that the budget proposal brilliantly makes the Archives/Carnegie building renewal central to this anniversary. We have much to celebrate. And coming out of the pandemic that has sorely tested us, we need a time to celebrate. But we know Winnipeg has not been a perfect place in the past or present. An archives can be a key to addressing our challenges, to learning about them, how we have or have not met them, and to be inspired to try new things today to build a better city. Amnesia is a personal disaster -- should it afflict any of us. Collective amnesia is even worse. A vibrant city archives is the best preventive measure for that, as it holds much more of our shared recorded memory than any other source of information. Its holdings are used for legal, administrative, and social justice purposes, a vast array of publications from the news media to the novels and scholarly works that fill library shelves, TV and radio broadcasts, podcasts, websites, plays, artworks, music, school classroom activities, and museum, historic site, and gallery exhibits. It serves this memory formation by constant renewal through additional records and new uses of older ones. But to do that, an archives must be well-equipped for the work that goes on behind the scenes to make it accessible, inviting, able to reach out to include new users, and to inform, delight, amaze, move us to joy, and even tears -- to help us see and understand ourselves and each other as part of a greater city community.

That is what the move back to Carnegie is really all about – making possible our personal experience with the past that then nourishes our local democracy, accountability, pursuit of social justice, and community well being today. Thank You.