Société de la francophonie manitobaine
147, boulevard Provencher, unité 106 | 204-233-4915 | sfm@sfm.mb.ca
Saint-Boniface (Manitoba) R2H 0G2 | 1-800-665-4443 | www.sfm.mb.ca

Strategic Priorities Action Plan Engagement Submission

Context

Following the approval of the *OurWinnipeg 2045* development plan by City Council in May 2022, the City of Winnipeg is currently focusing on the establishment and implementation of its new *Strategic Priorities Action Plan* (SPAP) for 2023-2026.

To that end, a draft was created and shared with the city's residents and communities in order to get their reactions and comments. The plan, for which a lot of work was done to reach consensus while following a Council-approved process, focuses on five key themes:

1. The Downtown
2. A Strong Economy
3. A Livable, Safe, Healthy, Happy City
4. A Green and Growing City with Sustainable Renewable Infrastructure
5. A City that Works for Residents Through Improved Customer Service

After its adoption, the Public Service will establish a framework that will allow progress to be measured and reported on in the context of the action plan. Furthermore, the SPAP can be modified according to the needs and situation of the community. The Public Service will propose a process that will allow members of Council to proceed to an annual review of the plan. The lessons learned will be integrated into future strategic planning cycles.

Who We Are

Founded in 1968, the Société de la francophonie manitobaine (SFM) is the official advocate for the French-speaking community throughout the province, including in the City of Winnipeg. Therefore, it represents the members of the Francophone minority and the members of the Anglophone majority who can speak French, regardless of language proficiency.

The SFM's mission is composed of 3 parts:

1. Promote the full recognition and use of French in Manitoba
2. Advocate to all levels of government the right to communicate and flourish in French
3. Ensure the availability of a full range of services in French

It is therefore in a spirit of collaboration and support toward government bodies, including the Public Service, that we are hereby submitting our recommendations to the Winnipeg City Council. The SFM is always willing to work hand-in-hand with the City in order to emphasize the role of the francophonie as an unwavering partner of the Anglophone majority for centuries. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Boucher, Executive Director of the SFM: DanielB@sfm.mb.ca.

General Comments

The SFM is thrilled to see the rigour with which the City of Winnipeg is proceeding in order to establish its next strategic plan. Like you, we are convinced that consensus is the most constructive and efficient way to

map out the future of our beloved Manitoban capital. The approach that was taken and the priority actions that were chosen are very logical and are worthy of praise.

With this in mind, we believe that a few small additions could be made to further improve the plan's content. Notably, while the City recognizes from the outset that all actions taken must respect *The City of Winnipeg Charter*, we notice that it doesn't explicitly mention its obligations regarding French language services, nor the five-year plan that was and is supposed to be developed to support the City in meeting these obligations.

We are also sorry to see that no mention is made of the need for equity for French-speaking residents, given the prominent position Francophones occupied in the founding of the province of Manitoba, as well as their historic role in the evolution of the city of Winnipeg, including after the amalgamation of the city in 1971. French is a founding language of our city, our province and our country, and we believe it would be a shame to not see this fact mentioned somewhere in the plan.

Therefore, here are a few comments regarding one or more of the priority actions covered by the SPAP 2023-2026.

SPAP 2023-2026 Priorities

1. Revitalizing Provencher Boulevard and Francophone tourism

The SFM supports the goal of revitalizing the downtown as well as of creating a city that's more livable and vibrant – which can help attract more tourists and workers. Incidentally, we are happy to see that the City is aiming to improve connectivity above waterways as a priority action in the area of downtown development.

To this end, we suggest that the City consider the role that can be played by Provencher Boulevard and its revitalization in order to attract more pedestrians to Winnipeg's central district. This includes many flagship projects, such as the development and maintenance of the old St. Boniface City Hall under the control of the Francophone community, as well as the construction of the *Atrium de la francophonie* (Francophonie atrium) at the Centre culturel franco-manitobain (CCFM), which will serve as a gateway in the discovery of the Manitoban francophonie and Western Canada.

By developing a conceptual corridor – Corridor Riel – from the CCFM to the Manitoba Legislative Building, passing through Esplanade Riel, The Forks, Union Station and Broadway, we could highlight the history and vibrancy of Winnipeg's central district, as well as the close relationship that has existed between Francophones and Anglophones since the establishment of the Red River Colony, while improving connectivity between downtown and the bordering neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, by providing the French-speaking community with the means to attract the thousands of Francophone tourists who bypass our city every year on their way to Western Canada, it would be possible not only to increase tourist revenues, but also to create a word-of-mouth effect that can lead to a stronger reputation for our city as a premiere destination.

Winnipeg stands out nationally as a bilingual, multicultural city. It is the incarnation of the Canadian identity and of the official languages system. We must bank on the francophonie to make our city shine economically, socially and culturally.

2. Implementing a multi-year strategic plan on French language services

The SFM is thrilled to see that improving municipal services is one of the five key themes of the action plan. This highlights the importance the City gives to the delivery of municipal services that meet the various needs of its residents.

That being said, it seems like a missed opportunity not to include an explicit comment regarding the work the City has been doing for multiple years to improve its delivery of French language services, as required by *The City of Winnipeg Charter*. Indeed, a study conducted by the City in 2019 highlighted that it was only meeting less than 50% of its obligations under the *Charter* and the associated by-law.

This omission is even more unfortunate when we consider that Key Theme 3 aims to "make high quality services more available, accessible and affordable," recognizing that "Winnipeggers' diverse backgrounds are a strength." We must do better, and the action plan should reflect the efforts and investments that have already been made to improve on this front.

Therefore, we recommend the following point be added under Key Theme 3 or 5:

Develop and implement a five-year strategic plan regarding French language services to ensure that the City:

a) offers the quality French language services required by The City of Winnipeg Charter*;*
b) starts the work required to modernize and broaden these services so that all Francophone residents have an equal right to access these services, regardless of the ward in which they reside.

Under the outcome column, we propose the following:

- *Improve the level of service*
- *Acknowledge the role that the Winnipeg francophonie has played and plays in the founding and evolution of the city*

Conclusion

The French-speaking community of Manitoba is proud of the work that has been done in collaboration with its English-speaking partners over the last centuries to develop our beloved capital city. Thanks to the collaborative approach that City Council and the Public Service advocate through this strategic planning exercise, we are confident that the future will be very promising for all Winnipeggers, including Francophones, regardless of language spoken.

By banking on the francophonie as an integral part of the city's competitive edge on a regional, national and international basis, Winnipeg can continue to stand out, thanks to a vibrant and safe downtown, a strong and diversified economy, the happiness, comfort and health of its residents, its environmental friendliness and sustainable infrastructure, as well as the quality of its services for all residents, including Francophones.

The SFM remains a key partner in helping the City turn this vision into a reality.