Winnipeg Committee for Safety

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RE: Strategic Priorities Action Plan

Hello Council Members,

The Winnipeg Committee for Safety (WCFS) is pleased to offer feedback and recommendations to Council's **2023-2026 Strategic Priorities Action Plan (SPAP).**

We are encouraged that Council is focused on building a city that is safe, improving the health and wellbeing of all residents by making city services more available, accessible, and affordable. A plan that supports reconciliation, poverty reduction, recreation, and advocating to and partnering with governments on shared goals will help build a stronger community.

Earlier this year Council approved the **WCFS Strategic Plan for 2023 – 2027**. Our committee undertook a process that included looking at many of the items mention in the SPAP. Based on a review and consultation process, we identified five priorities for our work. Over the next four years we will focus on the following priorities:

- Homelessness/Houselessness
- Substance Use Challenges
- Built Environment and Public Transportation
- Lack of Activities/Opportunities
- Mental Health Challenges

For feedback purposes we used these identified priorities to reach alignment with the SPAP action items. The following SPAP points relate to our priorities:

4. Expand access to existing facilities and programming for recreation, library, community gathering, and 24/7 safe spaces, especially downtown.
Outcome: Improve access to safe community spaces.
23. Increase funding to local and regional parks based on the optimal stage in infrastructure
These actions align with the WCFS priority **Lack of** lifecycles.
Outcome: Enhance regional and local parks

Activities/Opportunities. When discussing this topic, the conversation focused on supporting youth. Many community consultation participants discussed issues with youth gang activity and increased petty crimes often committed by youth. These problems were attributed to a lack of

activities and opportunities for youth. Participants discussed needing more inclusive spaces for youth, in particular youth who may experience marginalization such as racialized youth or 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Additionally, extending community programs to the evening and on weekends can also improve access to activities for youth and community members more generally.

Recommendation: That Council place a specific focus on activities and opportunities for youth, especially in higher-need neighbourhoods. Greenspace is lacking in some higher-needs areas, as well – I.E. William Whyte and Dufferin neighbourhoods in the North End. Those areas should receive priority for greenspace creation and improvement of existing spaces.

5. Increase the frequency of garbage collection for litterbins, bulky waste dumping on private property, and attend to mindful cleanup of litter in encampments, especially in the inner city.
Outcome: Increase safety and wellbeing

Aside from the negative health and environmental impacts of litter and garbage dumping, the value of property reduces in places where this becomes "normal." Property that has been turned into a garbage area can serve as a magnet for criminal activities.

Recommendation: That Council consider increased staffing of by-law enforcement officers by 25 per cent during summer months, as well as undertaking community education in neighbourhoods where these conditions are problematic. This could also include education for landlords who own property in those areas.

20. Co-create a city-wide community safety, well-being, and crime prevention action plan in collaboration with community-level partner agencies and stakeholders.
Outcome: Increase safety and wellbeing

We support all efforts to create a community safety and well-being plan for the city.

Recommendation: That Council include the WCFS in such planning, including the use of information and community feedback gleaned through the development of our strategic plan.

21. Accelerate implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy that includes development and implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive plan with all governments and community agencies to address root causes of homelessness.
Outcome: Reduce poverty and homelessness

The relationship between poverty and crime is well-documented. Poverty is the biggest risk factor related to **substance abuse, mental health issues and homelessness** – three areas identified in the WCFS strategic plan. When there is the lack of a safety net, an individual will create their own, and that will usually be through crime. It will even be through violent crime if necessary. While it may not be possible to eliminate poverty, governments at all levels can work together to provide

resources to help people meet their basic needs and narrow socioeconomic gaps. Through education, treatment, and consistency, people will have more opportunity.

Recommendation: We encourage Council to consider the financial burden poverty and its related risk factors causes the City. Directing funds and resources to meet the basic needs of those who require help will eventually lead to lower costs for things like policing, EMS and healthcare services, as well an increase in employment and economic growth.

24. Increase funding to implement the Winnipeg Recreation Strategy taking into consideration: a. Review the role of General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres (GCWCC) and community centre model to ensure financial sustainability and that funding is aligned with service level needs.
b. Increase library and recreation hours in a manner that optimizes public access.
c. Recruit and retain more employees from equity deserving groups and those from the inner city, especially for Parks and Recreation
d. Restore the Community Incentive Grant Program

Recommendation: We urge Council to reinstate funding for the Community Incentive Grant Program, as well as the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Program. These funds are utilized by community organizations that rely on volunteer efforts to operate programs, projects and services that provide the City far more value than just the program fund amount. From a business standpoint, volunteerism builds bridges between government, business, and the community. Volunteerism can improve civic engagement and generate new ideas for the community. These benefits are too significant to be ignored and left without financial resources.

The WCFS thanks Council for the opportunity to provide feedback on the SPAP and looks forward to the chance to play a role in the implementation of the four-year plan.