



November 19, 2023

Dear Mayor Gillingham and Councillors

As a citizen of Winnipeg and the current executive director of Westminster Housing Society, thank you for the chance to offer my perspective on the extraordinary opportunity posed by the Housing Accelerator Fund. This is undoubtedly a once-in-a-half-century opportunity to build a city housing system that truly reflects the needs of all people.

For 25 years, Westminster Housing Society (WHS) has built community by building housing in Winnipeg's urban core. We currently own and operate 103 deeply affordable housing units in the West Broadway and Spence neighbourhoods.

Westminster Housing works near the end of the housing continuum, but we also work at the beginning. Our work to prevent future homelessness starts with the fundamental understanding that when families, especially single parent households, are supported with stable, good quality, safe housing we are interrupting the cycle of homelessness.

We believe the HAF will do several things to help Westminster Housing and other non-profits develop more units, and faster.

From an operational point of view, any low-income housing development with less than four units costs more in maintenance, capital repairs and utilities than the yearly rental revenue generated. This is one of the reasons that HAF's re-zoning criteria related to four-plexes as-of-right makes sense.

This change will also help fast-forward the development process and clear the way for additional density, which makes building new low-income projects faster, clearer, cheaper, less risky and, frankly, less aggravating for non-profits already working to full capacity. I believe the last count published in the *Winnipeg Free Press* a couple weeks ago was roughly 700 abandoned or derelict properties in the inner city. While this is a staggering number, it is also an extraordinary opportunity to revitalize and re-build housing, and four-plex zoning is critical to this.

Thinking bigger, this change will also help build community. Indeed, there is much data, both anecdotal and quantitative, that shows how housing, education, employment, equitable access to health and safety coupled with deep social ties and accountability to a community interrupts cycles of poverty and addiction. The HAF's re-zoning criteria will support exactly this, especially in mature neighbourhoods.

When we began, WHS provided modest affordable housing to poor working people. We still do. But, in the last 10 years, social conditions have changed, and so too have our tenancies. Increasingly, tenants need more intense supports. Poor people are becoming poorer and there is increasing pressure on our

portfolio to accommodate overflow from all areas of the housing market. This has caused us to think deeply about the root of the problems.

For us, it has become clear that community housing partnerships must be our next phase of planning and development. The HAF re-zoning criteria presents a significant opportunity to accelerate this shift, for non-profits to work together to develop partnerships for small scale housing projects in inner city neighbourhoods. We can focus efforts on developing the meaningful, supported living conditions which truly transform neighbourhoods. The most successful of Westminster Housing's developments are those homes in which neighbour's become accountable to each other and have supports built in. Tenancies are long-term, people are stable and connected to community. The HAF represents an extraordinary opportunity for community organizations to develop genuine *social* housing scaled to meet the human need for deep and meaningful community connections.

I urge city council to support the re-zoning criteria set out by Minister Fraser and see this opportunity as a once-in-a-generation chance to bring life back to mature communities and seriously rebuild a municipal housing system that truly reflects everyone's human social needs.

With gratitude,

Krista Pilz

Westminster Housing Society.