Friday, March 15, 2024 To Winnipeg's Executive Policy Committee From Judy Waytiuk

facebook

I remember as a kid and teenager Crossing at that intersection. OMG! I hated it. I remember so many times we would get stuck in the middle. Cars buzzing in front, behind and to the side of you. Getting splashed from all directions in the spring by cars speeding through puddles. Not to mention the cold.

I remember when I was maybe four or five years old in the late 1960s. The wind lifted me up and my dad grabbed me otherwise I would have been carried away like Mary Poppins! I was afraid to cross there for the longest time. My dad had to carry me which wasn't so good because he had a bad heart.

https://youtu.be/-Yic2zdEZ7o?si=nv9SCjWUiHyrODOq

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youtube.com

That time Winnipeg closed Portage and Main to pedestrians - From the archives 1979

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“As Winnipeg stands at this crossroads, the decisions made will not only determine the fate of a significant piece of art but also reflect the city's values and priorities in balancing progress with preservation.” (Sakchi Khandelwal)

This quote is from an article written on March 4 by an author I do not know and had never heard of, but who nailed it brilliantly. You can read the whole piece—it’s not long-- at the end of this submission. You’ll also find more than a hundred comments from Winnipeggers and ex-Winnipeggers and, if you’re curious, a copy of my bio.
Today, I want to address what, to me, is an utterly puzzling mayoral response to the entire Portage and Main issue.

THE ART... OH NO! THE ART
First, let’s deal with the art issue. It was obvious to me from responses by councillors and indirectly from the lack of response by the mayor’s office, that it initially occurred to exactly no one that there is a big hunk of Bruce Head art down there that’s actually important.
I’m the widow, yes, but I’m not the only one who thinks that art matters; the president of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts has sent this note:
"The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts wholeheartedly endorses all efforts to save the iconic, 415-foot-long sculpted concrete wall work by Bruce Head, RCA. Canadian cultural artifacts add value to our collective quality of life, and those who make decisions to destroy such monuments miss an important opportunity to contribute to Canadian cultural life. We are happy to lend our voice to the campaign to save this important work by Bruce Head.” Robert Tombs MFA RCA
Incidentally, you do not just join this Academy. You are chosen to become a member by virtue of your body of work. It is the most prestigious national arts organization in Canada. When Bruce Head was chosen to join, he was the youngest member ever to be selected for the honour.
And retired senator and author of at least five major books on the subject of Western Canada’s contemporary art, Patricia Bovey, who is indisputably the reigning Canadian expert on those matters, has been eloquent in the media over the past week about the importance of public art in general, and the significance of the Bruce Head Wall in particular. More books are on the way, by the way.
So now you all know it’s there, and it matters.
But even without that, even if you ignore the art completely, closing the concourse makes no sense.

ADVICE FROM YOUR OWN PUBLIC SERVICE
On January 18th of this year, after receiving a report he perhaps considered incomplete, the mayor told his planning department to cost out closing the concourse, something his public service apparently never dreamed he’d even consider. About six weeks later, they came up with a wild-eyed estimate of 20 to 50 million.... subject to further study. That’s awfully approximate, don’t you think?
It took Stantec two years to cost out repairing the concourse. You don’t reasonably ask the public service to come up with a number in a few weeks to close it.
Your public service also noted some 2500 people use the concourse during the two hour midday period alone.

And that same public service advised the Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development very clearly on March 7th: "that the Public Service be directed to engage with the property owners at the four corners regarding a cost-sharing agreement for the renewal of the concourse (including the interior, the membrane, the stairwells and proposed elevators), and that the Proper Officers of the City do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing."
I believe you folks are those Proper Officers of the City, are you not?
And your public service followed up with an additional little nudge: "Given the information now available on the costs of this work, it would be prudent to re-engage with the property owners to confirm their willingness to proceed with such an agreement in order to extend the life of the concourse."
Note: "re-engage" and "to confirm their willingness" tells me your public service is pretty sure the property owners have their chequebooks out.
Yet the mayor wants to close the concourse. In fact, he announced his intention fully six days BEFORE the Public Service report I just quoted was filed with that Committee. Perhaps, had he waited for that report, his position would be different?

WHILE WE'RE AT IT, THOSE PESKY UNDERGROUND SEWER AND WATER LINES

And this isn't just about the art, or how many people use the concourse, or whether people really want to cross 8 lanes over ground in minus 30. Missing in what little there's been of a public debate thus far, there's this statement from the Stantec report (appendix 1 in the full report) presented to the city in late September, 2023:
"Together with the City of Winnipeg, the conceptual working limits of the project were developed to establish the extent of the project scope with the intent to renew or upgrade the underground utilities in accordance with the City of Winnipeg renewal requirements for sewer assets based on pipe condition ratings for watermain and sewer works within and adjacent (to) the extents of the concourse membrane renewal.... It is desired that any investment in streetscape design enhancements, as well as renewals of aged and buried utilities be coordinated with membrane renewal work."
Right. The underground utilities also need to be dealt with, regardless. Maybe let's do it all at the same time?

MONEY MONEY MONEY

Now, let's check our numbers.

- The actual excavation and membrane replacement cost is ...29 million.
- Traffic management during the process, which I'm pondering perhaps might come straight from public works in their normal budget, because isn't that what they do all summer long anyway to Winnipeg streets being repaired or resurfaced?... maybe not, but I don't know how you folks tally up your budget money... 12 million.
- Water mains and sewer work, which needs to be done because the public service's to-do list includes reconfiguring the sewer system around Portage and Main's immediate feeder streets... the Stantec appendix tells you that, if you haven't read it... 13 million.

- New concourse access stairs and elevators—really, these have been needed from the get-go, but let's assign the number to the concourse repair costs because that's really where it belongs... 6 million.
- Then there's paving, lighting, trees, barricades... all making the surface of Portage and Main pretty and repaving after the streets get torn up. If we open the intersection to pedestrians, we won't need the barricades, which is just as well, since the Stantec report said they mess with proper drainage and, along with the planters around the intersection, have actually contributed to the water seepage that has damaged that membrane... that's 13 million. Let's add that to the concourse repairs.

So you might say just the new membrane, access and elevators, and making the street nice again and correcting a serious drainage issue, add up to 48 million.
So that 73 million could very easily be considered a somewhat misleading figure if you just toss it out there and say that's what fixing the concourse will cost. It's what fixing the concourse, dealing with the aged sewer and water and underground utilities structures, and re-shaping the surface for both pedestrian access and proper drainage techniques that will benefit the entire corner will cost.
But let's ignore even that, and say the entire 73 million figure is all on the concourse. Well, sure—73 million dollars is a heckuva lot of money—although there are those property owner chequebooks that might be accessed. For perhaps half the cost? Could be the city might only have to pony up maybe 35 million or so. Except that you've chosen to ignore your own public service's opinion that the property owners are very likely willing to enter into a cost sharing agreement.
Just a reminder here: closing the concourse would cost anywhere from 20 to 50 million, but even that fuzzy number is "subject to further study".

BUT, BUT, THE TRAFFIC
The Stantec report thoughtfully provided a detailed road map for what traffic lanes would be closed, when, and how, and even gave us this useful information:
During the AM Peak there are the following impacts:
•Increased traffic on Broadway
•Slight increase traffic on York Avenue
•Increased traffic on Princess Street
•Increased traffic on Bannatyne Avenue

During the PM Peak there are the following impacts:
•Increased traffic on William Stephenson Avenue
•Increased traffic on Garry Street
•Increased traffic on McDermot Avenue
•Increased traffic on Smith Street north of Portage Avenue
It's not like Winnipeggers aren't used to road closures and detours all over the city every year. Not for nothing are we known as the city with two seasons: winter and road repairs. Pothole season, which we're in now, is, of course, the beginning of road repair season.

TINY DETAILS... LIKE PUBLIC CONSULTATION?

It costs the city a million dollars a year to keep the concourse running. For comparison, it costs the city 1.6 million a year to scrub out graffiti all over the city. Should we cancel that?

Back to that 87 page report now. The sole mention of closing the concourse came on Page 73. "The lowest cost alternative to full membrane replacement is to open the intersection to pedestrian crossings and close the concourse." The report authors dropped that line, then ran from it as fast as they could, hastily moving on to less unpalatable material. They did not estimate the potential decommissioning cost; they did not explore closing the concourse in any way. That wasn't their mission. But somebody clearly grabbed onto that phrase "lowest-cost alternative" and decided to ignore everything else.

But in addition to ignoring the property owners and their highly probable willingness to cost-share, there has been no public consultation whatsoever on this idea.

The public has not been asked about this "lowest cost alernative" suddenly on the table. The public, 2 to 1, didn't want over ground pedestrian access in 2018. A slapdash straw polll by a radio station (where the art wasn't even mentioned in their all day coverage) the other week said, coincidentally again 2 to 1, keep the concourse open. That's all we know about what the public wants.

Should the public not get a voice, with all this "new information' now available that so alarmed the mayor on March 1st he decided to just shut the whole thing down?

The report celebrates the concourse with ideas about how to engage citizens and surrounding property owners to re-energize the whole of Portage and Main. Your public service wants to embrace this vision. It told you that. I can guarantee you that your own engineers will find the art cannot be moved unless you want to spend an insane amount of money doing it.

So the ball's in your court, Officers of the City. Do the right thing.

Or do the cheap thing—which, as it happens, isn't necessarily the cheap thing at all-- and watch the Canadian cultural community quietly shaking their collective heads and thinking, "well, that's just a damn shame. "

Appended below is a series of comments from Winnipeggers and former Winnipeggers regarding closing the concourse and burying the Bruce Head Wall, and an online news article that summarises why a wise decision is critical to the image of this city in the eyes of the rest of Canada.

I feel strongly that this work of art needs to be treasured and enjoyed as it was meant to be.
JoAnne Nelson (Oakbank, 2024-03-08)

This is an important and epic piece of Bruce Head's contribution to Winnipeg, Canada and The Global Art Community and must be preserved and shared for generations to come!!
Tara Head (Oliver, 2024-03-08)

Keep history, tradition and local artists alive.
Kathleen Johnson (Surrey , 2024-03-08)

Art matters. I care deeply about this sculpture. It must be saved.
Ralph Markham (Melbourne , 2024-03-08)

Have some respect for the great art made by our artists. These are historical and important pieces to be enjoyed for generations to come. Make the effort to do the right thing.
Brigitte Dion (Winnipeg, 2024-03-08)

Art should not be destroyed.
Johanna Bates (Vancouver, 2024-03-08)

Art is essential. Crossing Portage and Main is not.
Karen Webb (Brandon, 2024-03-08)

This beautiful sculpture, done by the amazing Bruce Head, needs to be saved! It is priceless and can't just be destroyed.
Luanne Diachun (Winnipeg , 2024-03-08)

Mr. Head was an important Canadian artist!
James Worobec (Winnipeg, 2024-03-08)

Please Save this beautiful and inspirational artwork!
elizabeth Campbell (Sterling, 2024-03-08)

Art for Arts sake
Richard Millar (Winnipeg, 2024-03-08)

This is a heritage site and essential to preserve and a landmark tribute from a notable Manitoba artist plus I have personal family connections with this family
Verona Malmquist (Oliver, 2024-03-08)

The Bruce Head art installation at Portage and Main is an important part of Winnipegs history.
GAIL HARGREAVES (Winnipeg, 2024-03-08)

It's crazy to open the intersection. Keep the concourse!
Darrell Horn (Winnipeg, 2024-03-08)

This work is beautiful and needs to stay where it was designed to be.
Shawna McKenzie (Winnipeg, 2024-03-09)

Bruce Head's work should be preserved.
Barry Horeczy (Stittsville, 2024-03-09)

He was my grandfather, and his work deserves to be seen for generations to come!
Cameron Nasholm (Penticton, 2024-03-09)

This art is an important piece of art by a Manitoban master artist. The concourse also plays an important role for access from Portage and Main to Memorial via indoor spaces. It's a significant corridor, especially in the winter months which is most the year. It ties our downtown together. With more housing being developed and connected to this downtown corridor it becomes even more important. One can live and work along the space. No reason we can't have surface and underground corridors.
David Markham (Winnipeg, 2024-03-09)

EPC Submission March 15th, 2024 from Judy Waytiuk

Much like the grand banker's halls that still line Main Street near the famous intersection with Portage, the Bruce Head wall just below that intersection is an important part of its history and culture. To lose it would deny this and future generations the opportunity to ("appreciate the city's unique history and, in time, (re)discover and reinvent it - much like the city did at The Forks. Let's play the long game. It is what Winning does best.
Paul Taylor (Olympia, 2024-03-09)

Bruce was an amazing artist. I want to see his beautiful art stay a legacy in Winnipeg.
Peaches Glenn (Murillo, 2024-03-09)

Public art matters!
Mary McLaren (Dartmouth, 2024-03-09)

This is my grandfathers legacy.
Austin Head (Grande prairie , 2024-03-09)

Bruce Head was a local artist - right from Winnipeg who created his works of art right in Winnipeg. He had had his art displayed in the MB Hydro building and the University of Manitoba had much of his art. This huge piece needs to continue to be appreciated and displayed. Keep the concourse open - don't fill it in - that would be heart-breaking.
Stephanie Subtelny (Winnipeg , 2024-03-09)

Bruce was a mentor to me in my art. I understand there are costs to keeping the space intact from a facilities point of view. Perhaps there is a better way to utilize the space while keeping the art intact.
Karen Biko (Calgary, 2024-03-10)

Bruce Head is one of Manitoba/Canada's foremost artists of his time. His "Wall" is a unique piece of his work. It deserves to be celebrated in a venue where all people can observe and enjoy. It should not be buried and forgotten.
Diane Bates (Winnipeg , 2024-03-11)

I believe that this iconic piece of work should be saved for future generations to observe and marvel.
Jeff Monk (Gimli, 2024-03-11)

I knew Bruce, and cherish the 2 works by him I'm fortunate to have.... And it's time this City got its shit together re. public art.... S.L
Sig Laser (Winnipeg, 2024-03-11)

Bruce Head was an important artist in Manitoba and his work needs to be reinstalled in an appropriate permanent home.
Lisa Rae Minuk (Winnipeg, 2024-03-11)

I Am a huge Bruce Head fan
Alison Earl (Fort Erie, 2024-03-11)

Bruce Head's artwork on the underground concourse is an iconic piece of this city's artistic and cultural heritage.
Neil Coligan (Winnipeg , 2024-03-11)

I want Bruce Head's Art saved!
Ellen Kruger (Winnipeg, 2024-03-12)

This is an important historical work by the brilliant artist Bruce Head, a significant member of Winnipeg's art community. Also, why do they have to fill in the entire underground mall? Just because people can now cross the street? What is the reason? Couldn't this site be turned in a small art gallery / winter walking track / coffee shop down there, with this piece as its centre?
Catherine Hunter (Winnipeg, 2024-03-12)

We need to preserve public art and maintain accessible means of travel downtown.
Vicki Rempel (Winnipeg, 2024-03-12)

I am a big fan of the Bruce Head artwork in the concourse. It would be a crime to lose it.
Terry Sargeant (Gimli, 2024-03-12)

As a person who walked the concourse daily not that long ago, the artwork always made me feel so at ease every time I looked at it. Just looking at it took me away from whatever was on my mind at the time. On a different vein, as a citizen of this city if anyone had an inkling that our new elected mayor thought he could single-handedly and unilaterally make major decisions on behalf of us without consulting and properly informing our also elected councillors he would never had been elected. Last time I checked we still live in a democracy even at the city level. I am just so angry with this entire situation.
Brenda Rutherford (Winnipeg, 2024-03-08)

His art got me through grad school.
Elizabeth Hamanishi (Winnipeg, 2024-03-07)

Please save the Bruce Head Wall.
Jane Chalmers (Winnipeg, 2024-03-07)

A double-whammy. The draft budget suspends funding to the Winnipeg Arts Council for public art. Within days, the Mayor is announcing a plan to bury a fabulous work of public art.
Cathie Watson (Winnipeg, 2024-03-07)

I am from Winnipeg and remember this mural vividly! It is a work of art and should not be buried EVER!!
Barb Croft (Penticton , 2024-03-13)

Because art history in our city is important.
Jordan Miller (Winnipeg , 2024-03-13)

Whether the decision is to open the intersection at street level, to close the concourse or to retain the concourse, there is no legitimate excuse for failing to preserve an impressive and significant piece of public art from a major Manitoba artist.
Paul Thomas (Winnipeg , 2024-03-13)

Can we not do both-open up the street corner and repair below? Where is all the tax money going from the businesses around that corner? It's ridiculous that this city can't do both so people have options. Not doing the repairs is neglect to all the people who own businesses down below. Not opening the street corner proves we are Neanderthals. Every European city has an even busier corner that is solved by roundabouts.
Paula Havixbeck (Winnipeg, 2024-03-12)

FROM BNN ONLINE NEWS
Winnipeg contemplates reopening Portage and Main to pedestrians, risking the loss of a significant artwork by Bruce Head. A crucial debate on cultural preservation ensues.
(Author Sakchi Khandelwal)
The city of Winnipeg's consideration to reopen the iconic Portage and Main intersection to pedestrian traffic by summer 2025 has sparked a significant cultural concern. Mayor Scott Gillingham's announcement, aiming to circumvent a $73 million repair bill, has inadvertently placed Canada's largest concrete artwork, an installation by the late Winnipeg artist Bruce Head, at risk of being lost to history. This development poses a challenging dilemma between economic rationality and preserving a vital piece of the city's artistic heritage.
Art at the Heart of Urban Development
At the core of the debate is Bruce Head's monumental concrete artwork that encircles the entire concourse at Portage and Main. With a circumference of over 400 feet, it stands as the largest concrete work by an artist in Canada. The piece's uniqueness is further emphasized by its integration into the site, making relocation seemingly impossible. Judy Waytiuk, Bruce Head's widow, has voiced her concerns, highlighting the artwork's significance to Winnipeg's cultural and artistic history. The artwork, described as a 'huge labour of love' by Waytiuk, encapsulates years of dedication and artistic brilliance, making the prospect of its disappearance a heartbreaking possibility.
The Intersection of Culture and Infrastructure
The city's plan to reopen Portage and Main to pedestrians is part of a broader urban development strategy, which includes the launch of a new Winnipeg Transit route network. This initiative, while forward-looking in its approach to urban mobility and infrastructure repair, has inadvertently placed the future of Head's artwork in jeopardy. The challenge lies in balancing the economic benefits of infrastructure development with the preservation of the city's cultural landmarks. The artwork's potential inaccessibility post-concourse closure raises critical questions about the value placed on public art in urban planning decisions.
Finding a Path Forward
As discussions progress, the fate of Head's artwork remains uncertain. The City of Winnipeg has yet to provide a definitive answer regarding the concourse's future and, by extension, the artwork's fate. This

situation underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to urban development that considers the cultural, historical, and economic dimensions of such projects. Stakeholders, including the artist's family, city officials, and the public, are keenly awaiting a resolution that honors both Winnipeg's cultural heritage and its future aspirations.

The potential loss of Bruce Head's artwork at Portage and Main symbolizes a broader debate on the integration of art and public spaces within urban development strategies. As Winnipeg stands at this crossroads, the decisions made will not only determine the fate of a significant piece of art but also reflect the city's values and priorities in balancing progress with preservation. The coming months will be crucial in shaping a legacy that respects both the city's cultural heritage and its economic imperatives, setting a precedent for how art and urban planning can coexist harmoniously.

BIO, JUDY WAYTIUK

Judy Waytiuk is a Canadian freelance journalist based in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

She began her journalism career at the *Winnipeg Free Press*, as agriculture reporter, general reporter and business writer.

After the *Free Press*, she joined CBC Television in Winnipeg as a morning television co-host, then spent two years in Toronto as co-host and producer for the short-lived national business program "MoneyMakers". She returned to Winnipeg in 1978 to host the CBC regional current affairs weekly program "Points West", and moved onto CBWT's *24Hours* as reporter in 1979, then advanced to assignment editing, anchoring, and producing newscasts and documentaries.

In 1987, she joined CKND to "assume responsibility for TV news and current affairs programming" as news director and executive producer, Western Canada, current affairs programming.

After leaving television news in 1994, she became a freelance journalist, writing for several magazines. She specialized in long-form story/photo packages covering aspects of Canadian social geography, history, and culture. Since her move into freelancing, she has won the both the Travel Story of the Year Award and a Northern Lights Award from the Canadian Tourism Commission, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada Globe and Mail Travel Media Award, the Pluma de Plata (Silver Quill) award from the Mexico Tourism Board, a Travel Manitoba Tourism Media Award, and a Travel Media Association of Canada Best Canadian Destination Article Award.

After a brief return to university to study creative writing and long form fiction writing, in 2018 she received the Alice Munro Literary Festival Best Short Story award, and in 2019, an unpublished novel was shortlisted as one of the ten best first, unpublished mystery novels in the Unhanged Arthur Award competition by the Crime Writers of Canada.

She currently splits her time between Canada and Mexico, and continues to play with fiction... and her dogs.