My name is Cindy Elliott and I am a resident of Valley Gardens. I am the Chair of the East Kildonan – Transcona Library Advisory Committee, although I am not speaking on behalf the Library Advisory Committee, these are my personal views. The East Kildonan – Transcona Library Advisory Committee has submitted a letter in support of the reinstatement of funding for Community Connections.

Myself, along with a group of interested individuals, some of whom you have already heard from, have been advocating to obtain continued funding for Millennium Library's Community Connections. I don't confess to be an expert in Community Connections but over the last few months I have been learning. And what I am learning is that this is a very valuable resource to Winnipeggers and has helped many.

Community Connections is an interesting concept and perhaps a best practice model. But it is not necessarily a new concept. Public Libraries have been using similar concepts for many years and it is getting more and more popular and gaining support. We need to celebrate the success of Community Connections – not shut it down.

Community Connections at the Millennium Library is an extension of library services that are provided in a barrier free, welcoming environment. It was conceived in 2019 through consultation. It received funding from the City of Winnipeg and the Federal government to renovate the former Human Bean café site in Millennium. There was no operating funding provided.

Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy included Community Connections in their recommendations, all of which were approved by City Council in November, 2021.

In 2024 the City fully funded Community Connections for the first time but Public Service was advised to continue to advocate and attempt to secure operating funds beyond 2024 to staff Community Connections.

From 2022 when it first opened its doors until now it has been open sporadically and, I believe, was still not open the full hours of the Millennium Library. Now it is closed and we have lost a very valuable resource.

In spite of the ups and downs Community Connections continued to see 100 people a day. It handled 45% of all the reference related questions at Millennium. The majority of services provided by Community Connections are responses to requests for information, access to computers, printers, telephones and faxes; assistance in obtaining a library card. These services encompass approximately 61% of the services.

We have heard Community Connections is a social service agency and this should fall under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government. But Community Connections is not a social service agency in the sense it does not provide long-term social services to individuals. Rather it provides the ability to connect people to social services that may have a long-term impact on their lives. Councilors at the Standing Policy Committee of Community Services seemed unaware that on a regular basis agencies from across Winnipeg came into Community Connections to provide expert advice and help on many topics. These agencies were scheduled by the Librarians and the Community Crisis Workers in Community Connections.

The loss of Community Connections as a physical space is troubling enough as it now becomes another boarded up / vacant space in our downtown. What is even more problematic is the loss of the 4.2 staff

positions from Millennium Library. All the library services that were provided in the Community Connections space will now need to be handled by the already understaffed Millennium Library, inside the security clearance area, without the support of these additional positions.

Councilors Santos and Allard stated, at the Special Meeting of the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services, that they were supportive of Community Connections continuing. Councilor Santos said “I want to commit that this conversation is not over yet. I think there are still opportunities next week at EPC to have further dialogue with EPC members. The discussion does not need to end here.” So here we are, hoping to engage with you and bring an understanding of how important this program is.

We are fully prepared to continue to advocate and work towards other solutions to ensure the continued operation of Community Connections.

I strongly encourage EPC to champion Community Connections work together with those who know it is a valuable resource and ensure it survives.

Thank you.