January 21, 2025

Executive Policy Committee
510 Main Street
Winnipeg, MB R3B 3M1

Dear Mayor Gillingham and Standing Policy Committee Chairs,

Re: Winnipeg Public Library – Community Connections (Millennium Library)

My name is Stephen Kennedy and I am writing to you today regarding the Community Connections (CC) located at the Millennium Library. I am part of other organizations but this submission is a private citizen submission and reflective of my own perspective regarding the below.

I would like the Executive Policy Committee (EPC) and Council to consider providing operating funds (including increment funding) to CC.

The approximate operating funding request would enable CC to operate during the same hours of opening as Millennium Library. The funding would provide 4.2 FTE and two contract Community Safety Hosts. The FTE is designated for a Librarian (1.00 FTE), Library Service Assistants (1.2 FTE), and Community Crisis Workers (2.00 FTE).

Please consider the following:

1. **CC is a Library Service**

   CC is a library service providing information sought by customers, in particular vulnerable residents of downtown and newcomers to Winnipeg.

   Public libraries are society's information brokers. Providing information on how to create a resume; what resources are available to access social services for employment, housing, and wellness; providing the next great read; and being a welcoming space for all is what libraries do. The services provided by CC align with the services that WPL already provides. The questions, referrals, and help staff provide with the support of Community Safety Hosts is the same as what is provided at other Millennium Library service desks.

   What CC does differently is that it:

   - reduces barriers to accessing library services for customers who do not feel comfortable going through weapons screening, which they would otherwise face if they can only access library services at the downtown location;

   - gives customers dedicated 1-on-1 customer service, which is important for people with more complex service needs;

   - The trained library staff and Community Safety Hosts can meet directly with customers who seek assistance with any information need, judgment-free, supported and guided by library staff and Community Safety Hosts, who are specially trained assist those with complex social and financial vulnerabilities.

Closing CC will not change the needs of our citizens for the library services that CC provides. Closing CC will simply make it more difficult for the most vulnerable in our community to access those library services.

2. CC Aligns with and Supports Council's Strategic Plans

CC aligns with and supports Council's strategic plans, and closing CC will do the opposite.

Key performance indicators (KPI) for libraries as outlined in Community Trends report (pp. 200-202) include "good health and well-being and social equity". The City's Corporate Strategic plan 2024-2027, strategic direction 2, is to provide "continuous improvement & innovation".

I encourage EPC to consider how closing CC will have a negative impact on each of these goals. CC contributes directly to the good health and well-being and social equity of its customers by providing library services to those who would otherwise be unable to access those services. CC provides its services in a way that has been touted by the City to libraries across the nation as an innovative service model that increases WPL's capacity for social inclusion in the way its services are provided.

Closing CC is also directly contrary to Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation Plan Goal 4.3 (p. 4):

> "Provide ongoing operating funds to support the new Community Connections space at Millennium Library, and the Community Host program being piloted at various library locations. The Community Connections space provides people with culturally- safe supports, resources and referrals, while Community Host program provides opportunities for youth aging out of care to be community hosts and creates welcoming and inclusive libraries."

I acknowledges that the City's goals can change or be discontinued. However, as set out in the Executive Summary of the City's Corporate Strategic plan 2024-2027, Council entrusts the public service to be:

> "[P]rudent and responsible stewards of the City's financial, social, environmental, and human resource assets, and is expected to undertake its work in an apolitical, professional, and efficient manner. The public service is also responsible for managing, implementing, and operationalizing Council decisions and policies, and for delivering services at Council approved service levels.
>
> A public service more resilient and responsive to the needs of Council and residents will better enable the City of Winnipeg to realize its vision of a vibrant, healthy, and inclusive city for all Winnipeg residents."

I urge Council to conclude that WPL is meeting its commitment to Council's strategies and plans by providing services through CC. There is no tangible or measurable indication otherwise, and WPL offering its services through CC aligns with and supports Council's strategic plans.

3. Closing CC will reduce WPL's provincial funding grant

I would like to express my gratitude to Council for its past funding and commitment to WPL, including capital funding for facilities and (increased) operating budgets which helpS WPL achieve its mandate and Council goals.

On November 23, 2023, Council adopted the Review of Library Services Division Services for Improvement and Investment report. The report provided an overview of WPL's current funding and

highlighted how library services in Winnipeg are underfunded, when compared to other similar public library systems. Council recently approved increased FTE to allow WPL to expand library hours.

WPL services are funded in part from the Province of Manitoba. The formula used by the province to calculate the annual grant includes the amount spent on salaries, which is directly correlated to FTE. The ultimate result of closing CC will be an overall decrease in FTE for WPL. This will mean a decrease in provincial funding. This mechanism for provincial funding will be in place until a new funding request can be made in March 2027 for the 2028-2031 budget cycle.

Because of how provincial funding is tied to staffing costs, the savings to the City by reducing funding for FTE earmarked for CC, is not the same as the amount of the funding request.

4. Closing CC will have a negative impact on all citizens and WPL service locations

Closing CC does not only mean one less library service area. Located downtown, CC is a centralized community hub that is accessed by all citizens. CC staff provide time and attention to its customers. CC also serves as a valuable information hub for other WPL service desks who utilize CC staff's specialized training and information when assisting their patrons.

5. CC is important to our City and our community

Many individuals and organizations have given their time and energy to discuss and advocate for continued funding for CC. Not only during budget delegations, but by contacting individual Councillors and others to give their support .

Budget considerations will always be difficult. The City has complex priorities and challenges to address. However, no other City initiative or project has drawn out more people and organizations to defend funding for a division's ability to operate.

Funding for CC is an issue that is important to our community. It warrants re-examination of CC and its role within WPL services in the budget.

To end this letter, I hope that EPC will take the necessary steps to re-examine the budget and find the funding for CC to continue for 2025. Continued City funding will allow the WPL to continue to provide library services to everyone in our community, continue to be a national leader in the provision of library services, and continue to meet Council's goals.

Thank you for your time in reading this letter.

Respectfully,

Stephen Kennedy

cc: Councillor Gilroy, Ward Councillor for Daniel McIntyre
Councillor Rollins, Ward Councillor for Fort Rouge-East Fort Garry
Karin Borland, Manager of Library Services, Community Services Department
Alix-Rae Stefanko, Administrative Coordinator of Central Library Services