Social Planning Council *of Winnipeg*
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January 28th, 2025

Re.: Community Connections

Dear Mayor and Members of Council:

The closure of Community Connections has cost Millennium Library 4 FTE positions. Cuts to library services, especially at the flagship branch, are unacceptable. Community Connections must be reopened to ensure all downtown residents have equitable access to library services.

City Council should not entertain the Downtown Community Safety Partnership's (DCSP) proposal to replace Community Connections in the lobby of Millennium Library for these reasons:

DCSP does not provide library services, and library services are the core of Community Connections' work.

All the research demonstrates that proper staffing is the number one factor that makes libraries safer, so cutting library staff makes the library less safe for both workers and patrons.

The proposed pilot would only begin in April. Cutting an essential City service in the depth of winter should be avoided at all cost. Community Connections needs to be reopened as soon as possible.

Meeting people's needs where they are at is proven to be the most effective way to deliver services. The DCSP proposal not only maintains the security checkpoint that is a barrier to library services for too many, it also proposes to be open just a few hours a day on weekdays only.

The new proposal does not include funding for Community Safety Hosts, who are an essential part of what makes Community Connections work. Community Safety Hosts are trained in de-escalation and trauma-informed skills in addition to standard security guard training. They have saved the City money by reducing the need for emergency services to be called to Millennium Library. While DCSP also takes this approach, the Community Safety Host program is Indigenous-led and should also be championed by the City.

This proposal was made without any consultation with the community working group that has been behind Community Connections since it was dreamed up after the initial introduction of the security checkpoint in 2019. Equipped with lived experience, cultural knowledge, and big ideas, this group has donated their time and expertise, working alongside library staff to build this successful and innovative space called Community Connections. Their voices ought to have been the first to be heard in this decision-making process.

There is still time to save what has been a proven effective City resource. Please trust your library, the larger Community Services department, the research, and the community committee's expertise, and reverse this cut before voting on the budget.

Sincerely,



Executive Director