Submission on the City Archives to the Executive Policy Committee, Winnipeg City Council, 8 July 2025

Thank you Chair (Mayor) Gillingham and Councillors Browaty, Duncan, Eadie, Lukes, and Santos for this opportunity to address the City Archives budget item before you today. As you know, our group, led by the Association for Manitoba Archives, has been working hard on this issue for a number of years since the disastrous rainstorm in 2013 that shuttered a heritage building jewel -- the Carnegie Library on William Avenue, which was then under renovation as the home of the Archives.

This calamity banished the Archives' records, staff, and public services to an obscure warehouse in an industrial park on Myrtle Street. It is thoroughly ill-equipped for the home of a major public archives like ours. Despite the extraordinary efforts of the Archives' professional archivists to cope with this handicap for the last long 12 years, the preservation and accessibility of our unique, irreplaceable 3 kilometres of records dating from the 1870s are undermined more and more each day they remain on Myrtle Street.

We are delighted that the 2023 city budget contained funding to return our City Archives to its Carnegie home and bring this Winnipeg architectural treasure to life again. As a result, the renovation project has now reached a new, crucial, and exciting phase. The work can begin as a contractor has been selected. We are also delighted that on 4 July 2025 the SPC Property and Development endorsed the Archives budget item before you today. We thank Chair Duncan and his colleagues on that committee for their key support. We now ask EPC to support this budget item in order to see this important project through to completion.

You are well aware of the Archives plight and indeed most councillors have visited and used the Archives on Myrtle Street and/or visited the Société historique de Saint-Boniface archives at the Centre du patrimoine to see by comparison a state-of-the-art archives facility. We appreciate the time councillors have spent learning about this problem and meeting with us. We must now continue without delay the momentum to move our Archives out of the Myrtle Street warehouse.

As you know, many others share this goal. We are deeply grateful for their support over the years. Nearly 100 of them (from academics to family historians) signed a petition to council a couple of years ago. The Manitoba Historical Society, Charleswood Historical Society, the North East Winnipeg Historical Society, Heritage Winnipeg, and the Headingley Historical Society have communicated their support to council. Seventy-five Winnipeggers attended a public information forum on the City Archives facility problem held by the Association for Manitoba Archives, the history departments of the University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba Faculty of Arts, and the UM Institute for the Humanities. Winnipeggers then attended the city's public consultation on the City Archives. They wrote letters to the media. The media not only gave us voice but editorial endorsement as well, and many individuals wrote personal letters to their councillors.

We have just celebrated the 150th anniversary of our city's incorporation. We are thankful that the City brilliantly made the Archives/Carnegie building renewal central to this anniversary with a launch event hosted by Mayor Gillingham at the Carnegie building that received much favourable media coverage.

A vibrant city archives holds much more of a city's shared recorded memory than any other source of information. Its holdings are used for many purposes: for legal, administrative, and social justice needs; a vast array of publications from the news media to the novels and scholarly works that fill library shelves and bookstores; films, TV, and radio broadcasts; podcasts, websites, plays, artworks, music, and school classroom activities; and museum, historic sites, and gallery exhibits.

And the City Archives is doing important work on reconciliation with Indigenous people, including, for example, through use of its records by Indigenous filmmakers Jesse Green and Vanda Fleury-Green on the grievous impact on the Shoal Lake 40 community of Winnipeg's access to its water.

Archives do their wide-ranging work by constant renewal through additional records and new uses of older ones. But to do that, an archives must be properly equipped for the work that goes on behind the scenes to make it accessible, inviting, able to reach out to include new users, and to inform, delight, amaze, move us to joy, and even tears -- to help us understand ourselves and each other as part of a greater city community.

That is what your support for the move back to Carnegie is really all about – making possible our personal experience with the past that nourishes our local democracy, accountability, pursuit of social justice, and community well being today.

We ask you to make this possible by endorsing the City Archives budget item before you today.

Sincerely,

Tom Nesmith

Association for Manitoba Archives