To: City of Winnipeg Executive Policy Committee

A vibrant, thriving downtown benefits the entire city and province. While we recognize the significant fiscal pressures the City is facing, we had hoped to see a more visionary and future-focused budget, one that recognizes that investing in downtown means investing in our city. In the meantime, we are putting forward practical, achievable steps that can strengthen momentum and improve the day-to-day experience for everyone who lives, works, studies and spends time downtown.

Why Immediate Action Matters

Although major long-term projects such as the Portage Place redevelopment, Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahogohn transformation and other planned mixed-use developments are underway, they remain several years from completion. In the meantime, downtown continues to face challenges that impact the economic and social health of our community.

According to Probe data 77% of Manitobans believe downtown is struggling or declining. We also know that redevelopment projects will not address larger issues facing downtown. Cleanliness, safety, and the overall look and feel of downtown remain major drivers of negative perception. These issues require targeted investment now to support businesses, the downtown community and the success of these major projects upon completion.

Downtown is identified as a top priority in the City's *Strategic Priorities Action Plan*, which commits to building a vibrant, safe, clean, and welcoming community in the heart of Winnipeg. As Council moves forward it's important that budget and policy choices support downtown's growth, not unintentionally hinder it, and align with the outcomes the City has already committed to achieving.

In Summary: Our 2026 Budget Recommendations

We urge Council to strengthen the downtown components of the 2026 budget by advancing the following recommendations:

- The adoption of Parking Benefit Districts: reinvesting parking revenue back in the neighbourhood it is collected.
- Increased investment in cleanliness: replacing garbage bins, process improvements and commitment to minor infrastructure improvements

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Our downtown is on Treaty No. 1 territory and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis.

- Strategic investment in public spaces: supporting businesses on Graham, commitment to long term vision for public spaces downtown and strong closeout on ongoing public space projects.
- Increased safety in downtown: increasing resources for visible presence.

Additional details

The adoption of Parking Benefit Districts

The BIZ has been advocating for the adoption of Parking Benefit Districts (PBD) for years. PBDs see a portion of parking revenue re-invested back in the area it is collected to fund improvements. Funds can be used for:

- Street and sidewalk improvements
- Cleanliness and maintenance
- Public space enhancements

This approach creates a built-in reinvestment mechanism that directly supports downtown vibrancy. Establishing a PBD would allow downtown parking revenue to be reinvested locally, making initiatives such as installing more garbage cans, adding trees or fixing sidewalks possible. A PBD could improve the things we know Winnipeggers care about and show downtown is cared for, just like any other neighbourhood in the city.

Increased investment in cleanliness

Cleanliness is one of the highest drivers of public confidence and downtown businesses are clear that a clean downtown is one of their top priorities. The City has a key role to play in keeping downtown clean. We appreciate the City and public service's commitment to working with us and recent efforts including the replacement of garbage cans on two downtown streets. We recommend targeted investment in:

- The replacement and installation of all streetside garbage bins, ensuring adequate capacity and tamper resistance
    - Examine and increase pick-up frequency of streetside bins in high-use areas
- Increased riverbank and other hard-to-reach area cleanups
- Enhanced and quicker maintenance for minor infrastructure including sidewalk and curb repair

The BIZ is doing what we can – this year our Wawanesa Enviro team picked up more than 1.7 million litres of litter, removed almost 10,000 graffiti tags and cleaned over 6,700 transit shelters – and will continue to be out there seven days a week, trying to make downtown the cleanest neighbourhood in the city.

Strategic investment in public spaces

The BIZ is committed to creating vibrant public spaces, places that are welcoming, animated, and full of life. But our commitment alone is not enough. We need the City to match that commitment with bold investment in downtown's public spaces and meaningful follow-through on the CentrePlan 2050 vision, including a reimagined Graham Avenue that works for everyone. Businesses have already seen decreased foot traffic and revenue since the pilot project began, so maintaining the status quo is not an option. We want to work with the City to develop a renewed vision for Graham in 2027 and beyond, one that works for businesses, residents, students and visitors.

For 2026 we encourage the City to:

- Increase funding to $250,000 for interim Graham activations and increased maintenance. If additional cleaning or maintenance is required for that area, it must be resourced appropriately.
- Consider quick policy shifts to support businesses on Graham:
    - "Free Fridays" – two-hour complimentary parking to draw visitors and offset reduced transit activity
    - Re-routes of certain transit routes to bring people downtown more efficiently and increase foot traffic on Graham
- Ensure that existing public space projects are adequately resourced and supported to reach their full potential and meet community needs:
    - Odeon Park (site furniture, lighting, plantings, decking)
    - Broadway nodes (funding for additional nodes identified in the Broadway Streetscape Vision)

Increased safety downtown

Safety and perceptions of safety remain among the biggest barriers to a thriving downtown. Our businesses have shared how they respond to these challenges:

- 84% take steps to ensure staff are never working alone
- 63% lock their doors during business hours
- Only 69% of Winnipeggers feel safe downtown during the day, and only 20% do at night

We know there is no single solution to safety—it requires all partners taking coordinated action. We thank the City for their commitment to increasing safety for all Winnipeggers and look forward to continuing the work on the Safe Winnipeg Initiative together.

Key initiatives making a difference that require additional resources:

- **Downtown Community Safety Partnership (DCSP):** Demand for their services remains high, and their work helps relieve pressure on police, fire, and paramedic services.
- **Increased visible presences:** A consistent, predictable presence increases comfort for workers, residents, and visitors alike. Visible presence may include:
    - More DCSP outreach patrols
    - More WPS Cadets
    - More WPS foot patrols

Conclusion

We appreciate the investments outlined in the preliminary budget and the work Council is doing to support downtown. At the same time, it's time to dream bigger. Downtown needs a bold, visionary approach, paired with practical, achievable steps today to ensure momentum continues and the CentrePlan 2050 vision of a vibrant, people-centered downtown becomes reality. Thoughtful decisions now will strengthen downtown, benefiting the entire city and province. We look forward to working with Council to continue to make downtown a vibrant and thriving neighbourhood.