Submission to EPC, November 25, 2004
re: 112/2004

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It is difficult for the ordinary citizen to follow the procedures of City Hall, despite its website and even though the city staff members with whom I have been in contact have been unfailingly professional and helpful. I would like to thank them.

I apologise for not filing this submission earlier for your convenience. I hoped not to appear completely uninformed. The public notice appeared on November 10, giving a period of two weeks in which to prepare, over a public holiday. For anyone not conversant with the correct questions to ask of whom, the task is not easy, and demands a great deal of time. No wonder many citizens just give up - but then, public confidence in the system is further undermined.

One would expect the steps in the procedures of a public body to be logical. Yet, the timing of some actions related to today's hearing are, for me, very hard to understand. Why did a hearing to amend Plan Winnipeg appropriately not precede the rezoning hearing that was held on July 13? There is clearly an interdependence, a fact that is in your report.

Other dates confuse me. The first development application (on the website) is dated January 29. It is reported as March 25 in the list of exhibits filed. In either case, the question is, why was this delayed? This amendment differs from the other three on today's agenda in two vital respects: 1. it was requested by a developer to facilitate one specific project. (The others come from a City department, and are being brought forward speedily.) 2. it includes a bridge over the second of Winnipeg's rivers.

It is interesting to note that the January 29 document lists the owner of the property as CN Railway; in the History section, we read "CN has subsequently sold the subject lands to a private development interest". Does the transfer of lands in fact include the right of way that was granted to the railway to cross the river?

I am concerned at the apparent piecemeal tinkering with Plan Winnipeg. I had understood that there is a requirement for a full review of Plan Winnipeg, and that such a review is overdue to be scheduled.

Another Plan Winnipeg requirement is holding public hearings. While I appreciate that it may be very difficult to please everyone with a schedule, I suggest that 9 a.m. on a working day for an issue of such importance is hardly convenient for working people, and diminishes public faith in the process.

Given the amount of paperwork that must cross the desks of councillors, I cannot quite accept that a written submission carries the same weight as a personal appearance. The City should strive to facilitate public participation rather than impede it.

Another reason for defeating or at the very least delaying this amendment is that you, Mr. Mayor, have established a committee to review public transit. Is it not possible that the bridge structure might turn out to be useful? Perhaps it would be wiser to wait for the committee to report.

The report summary in your information package states that the amendment is required "... (to) allow consideration of non-transportation-related development." On page 3, it is made clear that "the City is presently considering an application to develop a 30-unit multi-family complex... on the existing railway bridge." So let's not pretend we don't know what is under discussion here. That genie just won't go back into her bottle!

In closing, let me give you the definition of the word "bridge" from Webster's dictionary: a structure carrying a road, railroad or path over a road, railroad, river or ravine. The medieval practice of building housing over bridges in Europe lapsed for safety reasons; it was expressly forbidden in London after the Great Fire, and I suggest it should not be contemplated here.

I urge you to defeat the amendment at the very least until the order in which elements of the process were brought forward is explained, until the many, many unanswered questions and concerns about what is proposed for the bridge are addressed satisfactorily, and until Plan Winnipeg is addressed as a whole.