March 7, 2024

RE: March 12th EPC meeting for consideration of the 2024-27 Budget

Greetings to the Executive Policy Committee,

Thank you for considering our feedback today in regards to the proposed multi-year budget.

First, thank you to the City of Winnipeg for the funding in the budget allocated to Green Action Centre to run programs like the Commuter Challenge, the BEST program, Jack Frost and Bike Everywhere Month. We stretch these dollars as far as we can, bringing information, programming and engagement to Winnipeggers across the city. Green Action Centre sits on many advisory committees with the City of Winnipeg all year long, providing insight and expertise into plans and policy. We thank the City for these opportunities and we will continue to serve.

We want to acknowledge the many good things in this budget for sustainable transportation and beyond. From trees to libraries to investment in our downtown, there are many winners in the budget to be proud of.

Concerns, and recommendations, from our team on the budget include:

- **Increasing Fees vs Increasing Property Taxes:** while leadership can claim to not be increasing property taxes, we do note that essentially every service fee in the city is increasing each year by 2.5-5%. This places a disproportionate burden on those of lower income levels to make up budget shortfalls. We urge the city to reconsider this unsustainable and irrational desire to hold on as “having the lowest property taxes in Canada.” This is not something to be proud of any longer.
- With the 3.5% property tax increase, 2% is dedicated to road spending. While we are “over our heads” with the roads we have, we do need to somehow get out of this car-dependency. And we can’t do that with only a 1.5% increase to fund the many things the city needs to achieve its goals of being a healthy, happy city. If 2% of the tax increase is dedicated to roads, we must ensure more than 2% is going to infrastructure and services to support health, community and sustainability. **3.5% is clearly impossible to sustain.**

- We want to note how siloed city departments and budget processes are. At GAC, we recently gathered with other organizations and individuals active in the city to share how they were engaging with the city on budgets, what our goals were and what we'd like to see change. **We noted how much we all have in common**. If we were able to engage more often with city staff together, we could focus our resources on common goals. For example, closing community pools doesn't seem like a purview of those working on sustainable transportation, but it is. Local, walkable community amenities are vital to mode shift goals. Moving amenities to larger facilities further away simply encourages more driving, and gives less access to those in the community without a personal vehicle, such as kids, teenagers, those with disabilities, the elderly and those of lower incomes, such as new Canadians. Due to our declining financial position, we know that the city will close more facilities over the years. Whether we call it abandoning infrastructure we have failed to maintain, or an "Aquatic Modernization Plan", the results are the same.



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Graph sourced from [Dear Winnipeg: Decoding the City's Budget]

- **We were disappointed in the opinion survey delivered alongside the budget.** This survey asks the taker to indicate if the City has A) a revenue problem or B) an expense problem. There is no option for C) none of the above. This survey will give skewed results and does not allow the consideration of what we believe to be the City of Winnipeg's actual problem: Insolvency. We have too much infrastructure and we cannot possibly pay for it, and we're continuing to add to the burden. We will never be able to cut enough services to make up the gap, and with eight Olympic pools of sewage going into our rivers and lakes this last spring alone, we know the infrastructure will continue to crumble, or just be shut down. And while we have a much more positive relationship with other levels of government currently, there just isn't $600 million a year out there in the taxable ether to tackle our unfunded infrastructure needs. We have to face our problem head on if we want a better city for future generations. **We have too much stuff, we can't pay for it, we need to stop adding more.**
- We want to direct the City towards the two-year [Community Action Lab that the City of Medicine Hat did with Strong Towns]. This was an inaugural project of Strong Towns, and

the results were excellent. We urge the city to consider taking part in a similar process. (see: Strong Towns Thinking, and Escaping the Housing Trap).

Parking

- A specific budget item we'd like to comment on is the increase of parking permit fees. There are two sides to this issue:
    - Even at the increased amount, this is an incredibly cheap amount to store private property on the public right-of-way. So, we do support an increase ….
    - HOWEVER, it is unfair that only those in central neighbourhoods are subject to these fees. Residents in suburban communities can store multiple vehicles on the public right-of-way with no fees or enforcement.
    - This is a disproportionate burden for those in central neighbourhoods.
- We propose: The City of Winnipeg calculates the possible income from Parking Benefit Districts throughout Winnipeg. This income should be reflected in the budget, like the transit subsidy. We need to grasp the subsidy provided to those traveling by personal vehicle so that we can properly allocate equitable funding to support transit, walking and biking infrastructure.

Meeting Our Mobility Goals

The City of Winnipeg must achieve a 50% driving mode share by 2050. This can seem like an unattainable goal, when our current driving mode share is 80%. However, looking at the numbers from transportation surveys we've done with employers throughout Winnipeg, our ASRTS (active and safe routes to school) engagements, surveys done in Winnipeg and similar climate cities, like Edmonton, we believe that the city could easily achieve it's mode shift goals simply by providing comfortable, convenient options to residents. We have crunched the numbers in our post Do We Need Convince Winnipeggers to Drive Less? In short, Winnipeggers would choose to bus, bike and walk more if they had that option. Too often, we hear how folks want to move in other ways, but they have "no choice" but to drive. **We have to provide a comfortable, convenient choice.**

In this budget, and future budgets, we want to stress that Winnipeg has increased the lane kilometers per person to an unsustainable amount. We break these numbers down in the Finance section of the Anatomy of a Pothole website, created with our fellow members of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition.

We don't have a problem with not having enough roads to move goods around the city (for example, we have 20% more lane kilometers per person than the City of Edmonton). We have a problem with too many personal vehicles. We cannot solve this problem by building more roads, as that simply induces demand. We must focus on efficiency.

Whether it's infill development, new local businesses or the demand to build more lanes on more roads, we hope you will note how influential "traffic" is to your decisions today and

throughout your work in your wards. We must reduce our car-dependency. In this budget, and with your work moving forward, we hope a top priority will be making our city more walkable, bikeable and transit friendly. The positive ripples will spread outward and improve all aspects of our city by making it more accessible, healthy and affordable for residents of all ages and abilities.

Sincerely,

Mel Marginet
Green Action Centre
Sustainable Transportation Team