March 15th, 2024

Re: **City budget and Poverty Reduction and Housing**

Dear Mayor and members of Council,

Today, Winnipeggers face a dire housing crisis. This crisis hits those in poverty hardest. Eighteen percent of Winnipeg households are living on low or very low incomes, with a maximum affordable rent of $1000. The number of units they can afford is shrinking, with over 27,000 low-rent units lost in the last decade. We need at least 750 units of rent-geared-to-income housing added to our housing stock each year to meet the need.

Unfortunately, this budget does not invest in the City's own strategy to reduce poverty and does little to support deeply affordable housing. We urge Council to amend the budget to help reduce poverty and housing insecurity in our city with the following changes:

1. We urge you to adopt the amendments proposed by Make Poverty History Manitoba to the multi-year budget 2024-27 to accelerate implementation of its Poverty Reduction Strategy, in the areas of services, transit, community-based organizations, safety, and homelessness.

2. To protect and retain our rapidly depleting lower-rent housing stock, we urge you to increase your support of the Housing Rehabilitation and Investment Reserve. This funding can and is used in Housing Improvement Zones to fund neighbourhood grants to fix up buildings and prevent them failing into unhabitability, but the current target of 100 units is much too low.

3. We ask you to increase the number of City Concierge for Affordable Housing staff from two to seven and make these positions permanent. Seven permanent FTE would bring Winnipeg's affordable housing staffing levels to that of other mid-sized Canadian cities, and provide the capacity needed to support a robust housing strategy and leverage support from other levels of government to increase rent-geared-to-income housing stock.

The most-cited reason by unsheltered people surveyed in the 2022 Winnipeg Street Census for their most recent entry into homelessness was insufficient income to afford housing in the city; the fourth was conflict with a landlord, roommate, or the sale or renovation of their apartment. Our city needs more stable, safe, adequate housing that people can afford, regardless of their level of income. Everyone deserves such a place to call home.

The City has a central role to play in reducing poverty and addressing the housing crisis. Importantly, it already has the tools to do it. We ask that you invest in these tools and more crucially, that you invest in the thousands of people with low incomes who call Winnipeg home.

Sincerely,

Yutaka Dirks
Chair, City Working Group