Special Meeting
Executive Policy Committee
January 4, 2005
Plan Winnipeg Amendment: Waverly West
Statement by John Woods, P. Eng.

Good Morning Mayor Katz and Council members.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words in support of the Amendment to Plan Winnipeg, to accommodate the Wavery West residential development.

Over the past few months, I have had an opportunity to review the various reports, by both ND Lea and the city's Property Planning and Development department.

I am convinced that these reports are comprehensive and lead to the inescapable conclusion that additional developments, such as Wavery West, are necessary for the continued growth and long term health of the City of Winnipeg – where I choose to live and raise a family.

The reports substantiate that there is a demand for additional housing developments throughout the City – and in particular in the South West quadrant My read of the Plan Winnipeg Vision concept allows for the proposed redesignation of land from rural to residential neighborhoods, where there is a suitable demand.

From the consulting engineering perspective, the following points are important:

- The continued growth of the City is a welcome change to its recent history of slow growth. This leads to significant business for our industry both directly and indirectly – and benefits the vast majority of citizens. Such growth must be encouraged.

- In order to be sustainable and achieve the reported long term benefits, such growth must, be suitably controlled and well planned. I understand that this is also part of the Plan Winnipeg mandate. In my opinion, the reports submitted to date reflect conservative and long-term thinking on behalf of both the City of Winnipeg and the proponents, which include the Province of Manitoba through the MHRC. It is clear that the use of an 80 year investment horizon – including built-in maintenance costs and future re-furbishing of the infrastructure – and which provides a net positive revenue over this time frame – meets the Plan Winnipeg criteria.

- While growth must be well planned and produce sustainable results, timing is also a big factor in any development. The various reports indicate that there is – at most – a two year supply of land for residential use in the south half of the City. Many cities maintain 20 or 30 years of supply.

- Although the studies and reports to date provide a framework for the development, there is much to be done in order to have the necessary lots available by the time they are required to meet the demand. The engineering and design time required can not be compromised – Mr. Mayor, as you have stated previously, and very correctly, things must be done right the first time. Therefore, it is imperative that the City move in a timely fashion and expedite this Amendment, allowing for the Secondary Planning process. This is a crucial phase of the project – and the place where compressing the timeframes will work against the principals of long-term sustainability and energy efficiency – which we believe the citizens of Winnipeg are in favor of.

- One benefit of a new development, particularly one of this size, is the potential for integration of energy efficient systems on a neighborhood scale. We understand that there is more than a little interest, by Manitoba Hydro, and the Province, to investigate demand-side energy reduction and efficiency in the residential sector. Time is of the essence in allowing such initiatives to be considered and – where feasible – integrated into the long term planning of the sub-division.

- As noted, the proposed development will require hundreds of millions of dollars of infrastructure work – which will clearly be beneficial to our industry and the construction industry in general. In addition, the consulting engineering industry, like many professions in the Province, is under great pressure to keep the students graduating from University of Manitoba from leaving the Province – for the perceived greener pastures east and west. One thing that has been in our favor in the past has been the availability of affordable housing. The shortage of housing and the eminent shortage of build-able lots will work against this advantage, as the demand for housing, even entry level housing, will continue to push the prices higher.

- The aspect of affordable and suitable housing also has a potential to allow Winnipeg to attract the necessary workforce for the proposed and already approved 12 billion dollar mega-projects on the books. The professionals and trades-people required in the next ten years will outstrip the local supply, and it is essential that there be suitable housing to attract – and hopefully keep – such people to our community.

- Last, but not least, as engineers, we are well aware of the ongoing and potentially insurmountable infrastructure debt – both in Winnipeg, and throughout the Province. On the surface – perhaps – it may not seem to make sense to extend infrastructure – where the existing requires significant rehabilitation. However, the funding for any infrastructure rehabilitation must come from somewhere. We applaud the Mayor for his part in reclaiming a portion of Federal gas tax for such renewals. However, this does not appear to come close to covering the actual and ongoing cost. The reports under consideration today indicate that over the entire 80 year lifecycle of this development (including complete infrastructure renewal after 50 years) that there is a net present value of between $71 million and $213 million dollars. This represents is the kind of investment dollars that are required to begin to tackle this infrastructure debt and deficit in our lifetimes.

Although Wavery West is clearly a big part of the solution, other areas identified by the City and other developers must also be considered – as this development purports to solve - at most - 35% of the potential shortage.

In closing, I feel that in order to ensure that this development is done right the first time, and meets the needs of Winnipeg's present and future citizens, this development must be allowed to proceed to the Secondary Planning Stage – which requires the proposed Plan Winnipeg Amendment in order to carry forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration

John Woods, P.Eng.
M.Sc. , B. Sc. EE
President, CEM