West Broadway Development Corporation submission to Executive Policy Committee, City of Winnipeg, March 14th, 2005.

Thank you to the Committee for hearing our delegation from the West Broadway neighbourhood today.

We would like to address the loss of funding, through the Winnipeg Housing & Homelessness Initiative, for the West Broadway neighbourhood under your current annual budget review.

Up until the City's investment through the WHHI began in 2000 for housing initiatives, West Broadway, like most of the inner-city neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, was in major decline.

Historically, West Broadway was built at the turn of the last century for wealthy socialite and business families. By the Second World War the grandness had worn off for West Broadway. It was no longer seen as a "Crown Jewel" of Winnipeg neighbourhoods. In the 1950s and 60s, the wealthier members of society moved from inner-city communities to the shiny new suburbs.

Over the years, West Broadway had experienced an increasingly transient population, absentee ownership, abandoned and boarded up buildings, crime, building fires and pockets of decline. The transience rate was increasing year by year and by the mid 1980's, saw an incredible 69% of the population count moving every single month. In the 1996 census, only 25% of the population enumerated within our community boundaries actually identified West Broadway as their place of residence. (This number, however, rose to 61% in 2001)

In the 1980's through the 1990's, the housing conditions had become deplorable. West Broadway more than any other inner-city neighbourhood saw its house stock turn into unlicensed rooming

houses. Out of the total of 184 houses, 88 of them had become rooming houses. The apartment buildings were deteriorating so quickly that landlords had to close suites because they had no revenue surplus to make the mandatory repairs. The City had no way to enforce its Bylaws if residents and landlords had no incentive to invest in the neighbourhood in decline.

These problems did not go unnoticed by the City government. Consistent reports from Property Planning & Development and Tax Assessment Departments described the trend of dropping property assessment. The tax base was eroding at an alarming rate for any future recovery. The City found that it was spending more on West Broadway than it was receiving in return.

To make matters worse, the population over the 1970's through to the mid 1980's ballooned to 6500 people exacerbating the decline. But because of the crisis, many people got out of the neighbourhood. By the mid 1990's the population had dropped to 5200 and has been steady ever since. Unfortunately, even with a decrease in population, the neighbourhood had turned into a downtown ghetto.

Over these same decades, West Broadway had come to have more low income families and individuals than any other neighbourhood in Winnipeg. Family and individual average and median incomes were decreasing at an alarming rate. West Broadway's average income in 2001 was $27,824 compared to $63,567 for Winnipeg as a whole. Hundreds of 'working poor' families and individuals on 'social assistance' were making West Broadway their permanent home. Poorer people had come to see that there was no future and no hope. West Broadway had become a neighbourhood that was losing its physical infrastructure and social cohesion. It was a neighbourhood in despair, and even crisis.

Crime statistics had dramatically increased in the community. Langside Street was typically named "Gang Side" and "Murder's Half Acre" by the national media. Drugs, prostitution, break and enter, murder, domestic violence, arson, car theft, house fires and other criminal incidents became huge problems. The neighbourhood was coming apart at the seams and no one at City Hall was paying attention. The media had begun to liken downtown Winnipeg to crime ridden inner city ghettoes in the United States.

The City's own departmental reports were informing City Council, that West Broadway residents were living in some the oldest and most substandard housing in Canada. In the 1990s, there were 16 boarded up buildings in West Broadway and more being abandoned everyday. Boarded up and abandoned houses were being added to the City's demolition list every month. Much of the housing stock had numerous City orders that spoke to health, fire, building and safety violations. Coupled with the lower than average market values, many property owners were forced to abandon or give their properties away during this period. Many boarded and abandoned buildings went into tax arrears and ended up being owned by the City's real estate department. Landlords were not paying their fines and these houses were being demolished or sold by the real estate department for bargain prices.

In 1996, the City assessed that 61% of the housing stock was in need of regular maintenance with over 16% in need of urgent repair. Even in 2001, 58% of housing stock was still in need of regular repairs and 12% in need of urgent repair. The City enforcement branches were using more and more of their limited staff and resources trying to get absentee landlords to fix these houses and apartment buildings. Housing developers and builders shied away from the downtown. Larger City and other government investments such the Core Area Initiative (1980's) and Winnipeg Development Agreement (1990's) focussed less on the crisis that was happening in the shoulder neighbourhoods of downtown.

Groups like the local Sherbrook Street-West Broadway Business Improvement Zone (BIZ) were powerless on their own to affect positive change in the neighbourhood. Local businesses were reporting that their community investments were being lost. Graffiti and break-ins were common daily occurrences. These criminal occurrences were responsible for the decline in business retention and a failure to attract new businesses. Police and Fire 'service calls' to West Broadway were outstripping those departments' ability to respond to the crisis. It was costing the City taxpayers a huge amount in 'real dollars' to manage a crisis that was out of control.

Something had to be done.

In the mid 1990's, this decline caught the attention of an energetic group of individuals who called West Broadway home. This formalized into West Broadway Council. These people began meeting on a regular basis.

They came together to talk about safety, crime, housing, food security and neighbourhood perception. A contingent of local community advocates, business people, community agencies and residents met with the media and government officials. Their goal was to change Winnipeg's attitude towards its downtown communities. In 1995, the West Broadway Council commissioned the "Young Street Project". A report at that time acknowledged and articulated West Broadway's internal capacity to influence change:

"It is the goal and primary focus of the West Broadway initiative to create a vehicle and an atmosphere that recognizes the many assets and the limitations as well, of our neighbourhood; and strive to support and encourage the aspirations and efforts of the residents (both owners and occupants), the businesses, the service providers and all various supporting groups and agencies, to ensure a stable safe and productive environment for all members to enjoy."[1]

People involved in these discussions wanted to highlight that 'we' had 'assets' right here in the neighbourhood. West Broadway residents wanted to add value to the whole of Winnipeg. They were sick and tired of the bad press and the fear that it was causing. They were sick and tired of the fact that most Winnipeggers avoided the downtown, because of the violence and poverty. The West Broadway Council members wanted to communicate that local people had the capacity for creating change. The only drawback for the community was that it needed the resources and the investment by government to make it so.

A renewed hope emerged in the neighbourhood in the late 1990's as new projects came on line. The new Crossways-in-Common building emerged from an arson ravaged Young United Church. Investments in community centred programming such as ART City, the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre and the Employment and Training Centre added to the community development mix. The community Council combined with the BIZ to convince City Hall to invest in 'community policing'. Residents and business people were convinced that a community police office would at least stem much of the criminal element. It was hoped that soon revitalization would take hold, prosperity was on the horizon and West Broadway would again be a safe place to live, work and play.

[1] West Broadway Housing Initiative, Young Street Project, Lamb/Wagner Associates, September, 1996

The renewed hope promoted by the Council created the West Broadway Alliance of various community agencies, organizations and residents. This Alliance, which was made up KLINIC Community Health Centre, Wolseley Family Place, Crossways, Broadway Neighbourhood Centre and local residents, ended up creating the West Broadway Development Corporation.

With its mission and vision, WBDC developed a community development action plan for the community in 1997 and 1998. This plan highlighted the need for a major investment in housing along with other community development deliverables. Along with other inner-city neighbourhood organizations and some limited financial resources from foundations and sponsors, West Broadway lobbied successfully for the City to commission a new report to deal with neighbourhood housing renewal and revitalization.[2]

This report was a snap-shot of West Broadway: its population trends, resident mobility and transience rate, social economic demographics, real estate investments, tax base projections and so on. This same report spoke to the various housing challenges; deteriorating housing stock, declining property tax base, abandoned buildings, outstanding building orders, vacant lots, lack of investment by landlords in apartment buildings. In short, it described the general poor health and well-being of a neighbourhood in decline. It was a marked indictment of the preceding years of neglect and indifference by a variety of City regimes and other levels of government. To the City's credit, the report deemed West Broadway neighbourhood as a Housing Improvement Zone (HIZ), a target for up-and-coming housing reinvestment programs.

Since the creation by the three levels of government with its tri-partite legal agreement for Winnipeg Housing & Homelessness Initiative in 2000, West Broadway neighbourhood has witnessed a Renaissance. Since 2000, West Broadway neighbourhood has received just over $1 Million dollars from the City of Winnipeg's Housing Rehabilitation Investment Reserve (HRIR) fund. For <u>every $1</u> we have received from the City (HRIR), we have <u>leveraged $7 to $10</u> in financial investments and contributions for housing from the two other levels of governments, foundations, private sector, sponsor groups and of course from the local residents and

[2] City of Winnipeg, Neighbourhood Designation Report, June 2000.

property owners. In a short four years, a reinvestment of $12 Million dollar has gone into direct housing activities and programs.

With our local for-profit and not-for-profit housing providers, we have added to the housing stock with 246 newly rehabilitated and infill housing units. We have in fact witnessed in the neighbourhood a heated up real estate market for single family homes and also for apartment buildings. We have attracted a new bank, Assiniboine Credit Union on Langside and Broadway and other new service businesses such as health clinics, doctors and chiropractors, the new Pharma Plus, Tim Hortons and other restaurants and specialized retail businesses.

West Broadway Development Corporation continues to expand its partnerships by encouraging more community-private partnerships for its housing initiatives. CHAM Holdings and ASH Management Financial Group have played an important private sector role in the new housing developments that have recently been envisioned in the neighbourhood.

This Renaissance has caught the eye of many citizens of Winnipeg. People have moved to the neighbourhood because of its proximity to downtown and because of the variety of goods and services available. We find that West Broadway is now destination for families looking for new and rehabilitated homes, students and young people looking for the university and other mutual housing accommodations, and for individuals and families looking for safe, good quality and affordable rental units.

We need to continue this important revitalization work in the community. We need to capitalize on the collective efforts and energy by so many interested parties. We have reached a critical mass, it needs to be sustained over the long term. A sense of community does not happen over night. We need to continue along with our WHHI partners to redevelop housing plans and tackle the housing crisis often described by the media in the City of Winnipeg.

The most recent round of property assessments by the City indicates an overall increase in property values in West Broadway of the order of 15% to 30%. Improved property value increases of 60% are not unusual. Some have whispered the word ‘gentrification’, and our Development Corporation has turned its attention increasingly to affordable and low-income apartment stock. Local programs such as the Tenant-Landlord

Cooperation (TLC) have received accolades for its work with 28 of the 64 apartment owners in the area. Right now other neighbourhoods in Winnipeg are setting up there own TLC program for rooming houses and other privately owned rental stock.

We have a population that includes many people who are 'hard to house'. We need to be diligent to create a vast array of choices in housing for these citizens of West Broadway and for Winnipeg. West Broadway neighbourhood has been called the "Jewel in the Rough in the Heart of City". We want this Jewel to shine. The City housing investment through the WHHI is the key to our success. We want to pull our weight along with all of the neighbourhoods of Winnipeg.

This Committee has a 'civic responsibility' to allocate the funds necessary to continue the housing investment for our neighbourhood and for the other inner-city neighbourhoods as well.

Thank you

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