THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

SPENCE STREET

Request to the Standing Policy Committee on Downtown Development

Chair: Councillor Peter De Smedt
Councillor Jenny Gerbasi
Councillor Jae Edie
Councillor Gord Steeves

Vision

The University of Winnipeg proposes to create a pedestrian-friendly mall in the heart of downtown Winnipeg and the centre of the University of Winnipeg's campus. To this end, significant reductions will need to be made to vehicular traffic on Spence Street between Portage Avenue and Ellice Avenue.

Presently the University of Winnipeg is the largest institutional concentration of population in the downtown, with over ten thousand students, faculty and staff generating major traffic flows and contributing over $25 million annually in consumer spending in the core area. A pattern of future growth will see a university population in the downtown of between 12,000 and 14,000 in the next eight to ten years. The current and predicted growth brings the issue of safety to the forefront, and concerns about the dangerous combination of vehicular and pedestrian traffic on Spence Street.

A restriction of traffic on Spence Street will improve safety while allowing for the creation of a unique university-community mall utilizing green and wireless technology and combining university activities, housing, community and commercial uses. This increased activity will also have a significant effect in promoting public transit use and convenience.

A pedestrian-friendly mall will re-create Spence Street as an exciting new development in the downtown area and help stimulate growth, development and social improvement in the City.

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Benefits – City of Winnipeg

- generates economic growth
- grow student population for more educated workforce
- increase disposable income supporting Portage Avenue retail
- stronger terminus, destination / entry to the downtown
- more pedestrians add safety/security and increase vibrancy
- grow the City's tax base on campus- more private business and investment
- increase transit use
- additional green space in an area with the lowest level of green space in the City
- increase community facilities such as community computer centre
- increase community services such as medical clinic, post office

Benefits - University of Winnipeg

- increased safety/security
- larger campus to allow the student population to expand
- more walkable community (east/west campus access)
- additional green space
- sustainable campus
- more services available
- new student housing

Steps Taken

- Engaged community / neighbourhood organizations through surveys/forums to garner 83% support
- Utilized Institute of Urban Studies, students and community members to conduct surveys
- Worked with stakeholders – 3 levels of government, community anchors, community groups, schools and others
- Met with key City staff / departments to understand issues, opportunities, constraints
- Developed a concept in partnership with City Administration (notably Transit)
- Met with Councillors (EPC / Information Sessions)
- Met with head of new Parking SOA (Dave Hill) about parking solutions within Campus Precinct and surrounding district
- Consulted with students/faculty/staff - 2 open houses / Steering Committee and Working Group
- Dialogued / negotiated with two property owners that have property within defined Campus Zone and gained support
- Contracted a Traffic Engineering Consultant to analyze current drop off / pick up and loading / delivery patterns, the impact of closing Spence to passenger vehicles on the surrounding streets, and to propose measures to mitigate negative impacts
- Held similar meetings with Officials with regard to potential funding sources (Urban Partnership Agreement, Western Diversification, etc.)

Discussion

In June 2001, a Campus Development Plan was developed by consultants for the University where it was realized that there would be a significant benefit to the University in the areas of safety, active programming with its community, encouragement of a vibrant streetscape and green space if the traffic on Spence Street could be significantly reduced.

In June 2004, Dr. Axworthy, the President of the University, felt that the Campus Development Plan should be revisited on the grounds that its new direction was to be more Community-focused. To that end, Senior Administration from the University met with the Senior Administration from all departments of the City that might be affected by revisiting the Spence Street Project to create a working group and begin discussions.

This working group has determined that a "Transit-Friendly Pedestrian Mall" concept could work. This would require limiting vehicular use on Spence Street by By-Law (similar to portions of Graham Avenue), allowing for "through design" (taking into account Transit, Emergency vehicles, snow clearing, construction and maintenance, land draining, as well as access to utilities).

The intent would be to reduce the width of the existing 4 lanes of pavement on Spence Street and bring the street down in scale to allow for increased pedestrian use, green space, community and University-based public access programs (bookstore, café and other student services) and programmed recreational use.

It has been determined by City Administration that this can be accomplished through long term leave and license agreements allowing the University access, or portions of, the former Spence Street Public Right of Way to accommodate the above referenced uses (at no cost), in return for potential maintenance sharing, active programming, encouragement of a vibrant streetscape and green space.

The University has retained a Traffic Engineer whose preliminary report indicates that the pick up and drop off traffic currently on Spence Street can easily be accommodated on Balmoral Street. Discussions have taken place with the Winnipeg Parking Authority where-by an agreement has been reached to test this by way of removing several parking meters mid block on Balmoral Street so that the University could create a major student entry, which currently does not exist.

Discussions are on going with Transit in order to improve Transit facilities and to strengthen student and staff rider ship, which is already at a remarkably high level now.

Request

That the City of Winnipeg endorse the University of Winnipeg Spence Street "Transit Friendly Pedestrian Mall" concept in principle.