



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

June 19, 2018

Imagine a Winnipeg... The Alternative Municipal Budget: Winnipeg 2018

Winnipeg cannot control broader macro pressures such as climate change or a stagnant global economy, but it can prepare for the changes that are coming. It can meet climate change with policy to mitigate damage, slow the rate of change, and build resilience. It can stimulate and grow the local economy while making sure that marginalized citizens are included. It can put the brakes on wrong-headed practices like urban sprawl or over-spending on policing, while redirecting resources to deal with the root causes of crime and our infrastructure deficit, and smooth out the inequalities that keep our city from realizing its full potential.

The 2018 Alternative Municipal Budget (AMB) is a community response that dares to imagine a greener and more equitable Winnipeg.

Why an alternative budget?

Government budgets are overwhelmingly complex, inaccessible documents. Our AMB is much simpler; it distills crucial elements of the actual budget into easier to digest sections. It educates, challenges and inspires.

The AMB explains where revenue comes from and how it is spent, and it provides background on expenditures, such as recreation, libraries, food security, procurement, housing, green spaces and Assiniboine Park, to name a few.

On the revenue side, it explains how the previous administration's 14 year tax freeze set our city back decades.

As with past alternative budgets, we break

the mold when looking for ways to raise revenue. We get how difficult it is for municipalities to find the money they need to meet everyone's needs. We look at what other cities around the world are doing and suggest ideas that haven't been considered yet in Winnipeg.

The city's proposed Growth Fee is an example of a recommendation from past AMBs. The current city council took that challenge and now it is close to becoming a reality. We acknowledge that it required courage and resolve to bring the idea forward and applaud the Mayor for standing his ground against a powerful lobby group.

The following examples show how we continue to push the envelope.

Where's the province??

We put pressure on a provincial government that not only is dragging its feet, it's moving backwards. The cancellation of the 50/50 transit operating grant sets back the city's aspirations to improve our outdated transit system. The province's lack of commitment to using the carbon tax to modernize our transit system was a huge disappointment. We understand that the city has no control over this, but we wish to make the point that the provincial government has a shared responsibility with Manitoba municipalities to take decisive action against climate change. The recent announcement about new federal and provincial capital funding should make it easier for the city to

there is an alternative.

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implement some of the recommendations in our Transit, Environment and Recreation sections.

Taking control of the police budget

This AMB reduces the police budget. Our policing chapter explains that crime rates are decreasing at the same time as the police budget continues to balloon. As the police budget swells, other budget lines shrink. Given that poverty and marginalization are root causes of crime, money would be more wisely spent on ensuring that all Winnipeggers are properly housed, fed, educated, employed and that they have the tools they need to live productive lives, such as a modern, reliable public transportation system. Our housing, food security, employment and procurement, and transit sections offer alternative policy ideas to achieve these goals.

Transparency and democracy

Our Planning sections considers several measures to improve transparency at City Hall, including improving reporting of council decisions; encouraging measures to increase councillor transparency; and, paying for a consultant report on much needed electoral reform.

Sustainable Budgeting

The AMB adopts Sustainable Budgeting principals, resulting in a different approach to funding infrastructure. Our entrenched car culture puts unmanageable pressure on our transportation system without making motorists pay directly for it. At the same time, deteriorating transit service and increasing bus fares encourage Winnipeggers to abandon public transit and stay in their polluting cars. Our AMB begins to shift the cost of infrastructure maintenance to motorists, while improving public transit and cutting greenhouse gases.

The AMB also accommodates some of the recommendations in the “*Winnipeg without Poverty – Calling on the City to Lead*” report released on May 2nd.¹ Careful consideration of all our recommendations makes sure that low-income Winnipeggers are not unduly charged with the cost of climate change

policies.

The Capital Budget

Years of neglect, an extreme climate, urban sprawl and the increase in traffic make our \$6.8B infrastructure deficit seem insurmountable. The city itself admits that its “current funding model is unsustainable”.

Our capital budget analysis revealed that other Canadian cities are spending more than Winnipeg on borrowing for capital spending. We raise an additional \$690M to be applied to our \$6.8B infrastructure deficit.

A Tough Love Budget

There’s no doubt that this is a tough love budget. The AMB business and residential property tax increases (5 per cent higher than the city’s 2.33 per cent) will raise an additional \$31.3M. An additional \$102M is raised through Parking Lot fees, a Commuter Charge, an increase in the Impact Fee, and a few other sundry levies. These revenues will be dedicated to dealing with our infrastructure deficit, and for improvements in the North End Waste Water Treatment plant and Transit. We also fund an Organics Diversion facility.

We know that tax increases do not get politicians elected. But neither does crumbling infrastructure that, if left long enough will seriously disrupt our lives and economy. Stopping urban sprawl and using sustainable budgeting principles are two of the best ways to stop our infrastructure deficit from getting even bigger. Fully implementing the mobility pricing strategy outlined in our Environment section will allow us to improve our Transit system and eventually to lower property taxes.

Can the AMB capture the imagination of Winnipeggers? As climate change, our infrastructure deficit and inequality escalate, our collective future depends on it.

Lynne Fernandez holds the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues at the CCPA Mb.

¹<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/winnipeg-without-poverty>

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References available upon request.