

Introduction

Why an Alternative Budget?

In the words of John Loxley who started the exercise back in the 1990s, alternative budgets are “budgeting as if people mattered”. We recognize that budgets are fundamentally about choices. We believe that if different choices are made about where public revenue comes from and how it is spent, we can actually afford to have quality public healthcare, education, childcare and transportation.

We also believe that we can do something about the big problems of our age: climate change and inequality.

We applied the following five principles to our budget:

1. There should be a more equitable distribution of income and wealth in Manitoba
2. The rights of labour must be restored and protected
3. There should be economic equality between groups (gender; newcomers; Indigenous people; minorities; people living with disabilities). We will push policies that incorporate reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

4. Public services and social programs must be protected

5. Environmental and climate change concerns must be top of mind, along with a just transition to a non-fossil-fuel based economy.

Who Put it Together?

Many volunteers worked on this Alternative Provincial Budget (APB). They are all experts in their field: some are academics, others are frontline workers in the non-profit sector. Others are citizens who volunteer their time on environmental non-profit organizations (ENGOS) boards, work in the disability community or run family farms. Labour provided valuable input. Students helped with the consultations and two University of Manitoba students wrote submissions and, we hope, learned a lot about how a budget works.

That so many people would take time from their busy lives to come to meetings, attend consultations, write their submissions and respond to endless questions and edits speaks to their commitment to this exercise.



Consultation at Meet Me At the Bell Tower

Why do they do it? Everyone who worked on this document believes in the five principles noted above. They are anxious to see the change we need, and believe that our collective effort provides a comprehensive strategy to deal with the challenges facing our province.

Consultations

The CCPA held two general consultations in Brandon, one at the Bell Tower in North Winnipeg, and one general consultation in South Winnipeg at Pembina Trails Library. Each consultation was about two hours.

Some chapter authors hosted their own consultations focused on their specific topic. These included: Health (with Manitoba Healthcare Coalition) at the Old Grace Housing Co-op; Housing (with Dr. Sarah Cooper and Kirsten Bernas of Right to Housing) at New Journey Housing; three on Food Security (Food Matters Manitoba), in Brandon, at Winnipeg Harvest, and the Growth North Conference in Nelson House, MB; one with Newcomer and Refugee service workers and one with ethno-cultural community leaders (with Immigration Partnership Winnipeg and the Ethno Cultural Council, respectively), both at the Social Planning Coun-

cil offices; and Agriculture (with the National Farmers' Union) at Harvest Moon Festival in Clearwater, Manitoba.

Notes takers passed on participants' feedback to the relevant authors so it could be incorporated into the chapters.

CCPA also conducted an on-line survey, to which 40 people responded.

Change Starts Here

All too often we can feel trapped and despondent, and can't imagine how to deal with our rapidly deteriorating environment, increasing inequality, precarious work and lack of opportunity. It's difficult to be hopeful about the future.

The APB offers hope. Through a series of well-researched policy papers and recommendations, it shows us how to implement the changes we need. And change is needed now, more than ever.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives last prepared an APB in 2006.¹ Looking back today, life seemed remarkably simpler 14 years ago. The 2008 financial crisis set off seismic shifts we're still reeling from. Climate change has become a recognized existential threat and income inequality² has worsened. Politics has taken an



Southwest Winnipeg consultation

even harder turn to the right, pitting those concerned about climate change with those worried about their jobs. Regional grievances abound in Canada, with Manitoba stuck in the middle — literally and figuratively.

Manitoba’s own political landscape has changed. In our last APB we were dealing with a slightly left of centre NDP government that actually adopted some of our recommendations, particularly on housing (see the Housing chapter in this APB for details). But since the election of the Conservative government in 2016, many of the incremental improvements brought in under the last government are being steadily eroded.^{3,4}

The ruling Conservatives are steadfastly implementing an austerity agenda that is adversely affecting all but the wealthiest Manitobans. As this document explains, whether it be through corporatization of our post-secondary institutions, dramatic cuts in health care, restricting access to crown lands, attacking workers (espe-

cially public sector workers), pulling supports for hardworking community-based organizations, cutting education funding, or making it harder for vulnerable people to access housing, the province is becoming a far more difficult place to live. This is happening on the heels of the Premier’s promise to make Manitoba “the most improved province”.⁵

The APB provides ample evidence that the Premier’s plans are not panning out. In fact, as explained in the Fiscal Framework section, Manitoba’s economic indicators have gone from being amongst Canada’s best, to being average at best relative to national performance. An obsession with debt reduction and tax cuts over a willingness to grow our economy through the sorts of investments in the APB means that our human, capital and natural resources will not realize their potential.

If an austerity agenda is bad news for people, it’s disastrous for the environment. This

government's response to climate change has been woefully inadequate. We outline steps toward a Green New Deal in the Conservation and Climate Change chapter that would dramatically ramp up Manitoba's efforts to transition from a fossil fuel economy. Not only would our recommendations take advantage of our natural resources and local business acumen, they would put thousands of Manitobans to work in decent jobs.

Rural and northern Manitoba are reeling from job losses and cuts to services. The recommendations in our Agriculture and Indigenous and Northern Affairs chapters support Manitoba farmers and those living in the North. The strength of our budget is the way the recommendations in one area complement and reinforce those in others. For example, the training and investment for the North are rooted in Community Economic Development and environmental principles that support our Green New Deal strategy — also tied to our Procurement recommendations. Our Food Security recommendations support the Universal Meals Program in our Education K–12 chapter.

The APB is bold. It invests in people by meaningful investments in childcare, in improving child and family services so that Indigenous

children have the care they need and deserve. We invest in health care, post-secondary education and K–12, in public transportation, housing retrofits to lower energy bills and lower greenhouse gases. These are the sorts of investments that restore the public services that all Manitobans rely on, while beginning to implement a Green New Deal. The APB invests in social housing and programs to help the Newcomer and Disability communities. We *divest* in justice and re-invest funds to help those trapped in the criminal justice system leave, and offer supports to those who struggle with homelessness, poverty and addictions.

We convert the EIA program to a Liveable Basic Needs Benefit. A redistribution of middle and high-income earners' income will make a dramatic difference in marginalized Manitobans' lives, while making our income tax system much more progressive.

Manitobans are frustrated with the lack of action on income inequality, climate change, deteriorating access to health care, lack of quality, affordable childcare, crumbling infrastructure and a stagnant economy. The APB provides a reasonable exit strategy from this paralysis.

We invite all Manitobans who want action to start reading: The change we want starts here.

¹ https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Manitoba_Pubs/2006/2006_Manitoba_Alternative_Budget.pdf

² <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/born-win>

³ <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/pallister-government-shifts-high-gear>

⁴ <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/great-transformation>

⁵ <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/?archive=&item=45335>