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FAST FACTS

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How NOT to plan a city

Two issues of concern have recently arisen at City Hall – the twenty-cent transit fare hike — just passed by council — and a new policy to share water and sewer services with exurban municipalities. Both issues are of note for three reasons: there will be significant financial implications for Winnipeggers; they will encourage unsustainable, environmentally damaging behaviour and, the means by which these policies are being implemented lack transparency and thwart any sort of democratic process.

We contrasted these developments with the recommendations by the City’s own citizen consultations in the *Call to Action* report. The report reflected a strong commitment to community; the belief that growing economic inequality is unacceptable; and, the understanding that modern cities must reverse environmentally unsustainable growth patterns. The voices of those who participated in this report were included in the City’s final municipal development plan: *Our Winnipeg* which sets the course for future development. *Our Winnipeg* is premised on commitments to environmental sustainability and complete communities.

The 40,000 Winnipeggers who participated in the *Call to Action* will be disappointed to learn just how far the City is deviating from their desires and

recommendations. Report participants expressed a strong preference for:

- commuting responsibly by expanding rapid transit and human-powered traffic;
- enhancing urban spaces through increased urban density, preservation of agricultural land, development of pocket parks and expanding local businesses;
- switching to “smart” infrastructure to reduce costs and stress on the environment. Natural systems could include storm and waste-water filtration;
- working to bring all Winnipeggers to an acceptable living standard through access to essential services and promotion of strategies like urban gardens.

In what appears to be a return to outdated city planning ideas, the City is thumbing its nose at all of these preferences.

Council’s continued flip-flopping with provincial and federal officials is responsible for the lack of funds to complete rapid transit, making its insistence on passing the cost to low-income earners mean-spirited and counterproductive. The twenty-cent transit fare hike will not only discourage people from taking public transit, it will



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actually prevent many — who cannot afford a car — from being able to move about the city. So in one fell swoop council has managed to undermine any movement towards responsible commuting, and cut marginalized Winnipeggers from access to an essential service: transportation.

In order to ensure that low-income Winnipeggers would have access to reliable transportation to get to school, work, medical appointments, recreational centres — in short, to live their lives — the City should be lowering transit fares for them. The city could sell low-cost tickets to the provincial government so it could then distribute them to Winnipeg social-assistant recipients.

The proposed policy (to be voted on by council on December 14) to grant authority to CAO Phil Sheegl to negotiate with exurban municipalities for the expansion of City water and sewer services represents yet another step away from the kind of development Winnipeggers want. First of all, deals of this sort may have significant impact on Winnipeg's revenues and development patterns, two concerns which should fall under the watchful eye of city councilors who are elected to protect our best interests. By removing their ability to learn the details of future contracts and debate their implications, there will be no transparency or oversight to ensure these deals make financial or environmental sense. Winnipeggers should be worried on both counts.

Many people move from Winnipeg to municipalities like West St. Paul so they can enjoy more luxurious homes while paying lower taxes. Most of these people still work in Winnipeg and so use our infrastructure heavily without contributing to its upkeep by paying taxes to the City. Although we do not yet know what sort of costing will be offered to these municipalities, it is likely that they will be able to “free ride” on Winnipeg's lower costs to provide water and sewer services without contributing a fair portion for its upkeep. So not

only do Winnipeg tax payers end up subsidizing exurbanites, but our tax revenues diminish every time a Winnipegger relocates. Without elected official oversight, we just don't know if these deals will be a win-win situation for exurbanites, and a lose-lose situation for the rest of us.

Modern cities should be increasing density and preserving surrounding farming and wild areas. This proposed policy will make it easier for bedroom communities to flourish and enlarge our environmental footprint. More cars will commute back and forth on more regional roads, and fewer people will use (and contribute to) less-polluting public transit. It is unlikely that these contracts will have a mechanism to encourage conservation of water, thereby allowing the municipalities to drain precious resources even further.

The 40,000 Winnipeggers who participated in the *Call to Action* and *Our Winnipeg* consultations were hopeful that the City would take concrete action towards a more sustainable, democratic, equitable and modern city. If these two policies go through, the City will go a long way to making sure that doesn't happen.

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