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State of the INNER CITY

PLACING COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF THE RECOVERY FROM COVID

Lila Asher, Sarah Cooper, Shauna MacKinnon, Owen Toews & Kayla Villebrun-Normand

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Cover Image

Artwork by Jackie Traverse created for Red River College Polytechnic's Exchange District Campus Manitou a bi Bii daziigae building at 319 Elgin Ave. Collection of RRC Polytech. Jackie Traverse is a multi-disciplined Indigenous artist who works in several mediums from oil and acrylic paintings to mixed media, stop-motion animation and sculpture.

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State of the Inner City Reports 2005 – 2020

Date	Reports	Topics
2005	The Promise of Investment in Community-Led Renewal	1) Policy Considerations: • Describing inner-city • Statistical overview • Housing, employment development and education 2) A View from the Neighbourhoods: • Comparative analysis of Spence, Centennial and Lord Selkirk Park
2006	Inner City Voices: Community-Based Solutions	• A portrait of West Broadway and North Point Douglas • Inner-City Refugee Women: Lessons for public policy • Bridging the Community-Police Divide: Safety and security in Wpg's inner city
2007	Step by Step: Stories of Change in Winnipeg's Inner City	• Building a Community of Opportunity and Hope: Lord Selkirk Park housing developments • Costing an Ounce of Prevention: The fiscal benefits of investing in inner city preventive strategies (Cost to themselves and society of young women entering the street sex trade.) • Is Participation Having an Impact? (How do we measure progress in Wpg's inner city? A participatory approach to understanding outcomes.)
2008	Putting Our Housing in Order	• Policy, people and Wpg's inner city • Voicing housing experiences in inner city Wpg • From revitalization to revaluation in the Spence neighbourhood Homeownership for low-income households: Outcomes for families and communities
2009	It Takes All Day to be Poor	• Seven individuals document their experiences living on a low income budget • Tracking poverty in Wpg's inner city 1996 – 2006 (analysis of census data) • Lord Selkirk Park: Rebuilding from Within (How community and government can work together to make change for the better.)
2010	We're in it for the Long Haul	• Together we have CLOUT: Model of service delivery and analysis of "The Just City" • Early Childhood Education and Care in the Inner City and Beyond: Addressing the inequalities facing Wpg's Aboriginal children • Squeezed Out: The impact of rising rents and condo conversions on inner city neighbourhoods
2011	Neo-Liberalism: What a Difference a Theory Makes	• Manitoba's Employment and Income Assistance Program: Exploring the policy impacts on Wpg's inner city • Housing for People, Not Markets: Neoliberalism and housing in Wpg's inner city • Policy and the Unique Needs of Aboriginal Second-Chance Learners
2012	Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges	• Who's Accountable to the Community? (Two way accountability government to community-based organizations) • Fixing Our Divided City: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, inner city and non-inner city and Aboriginal Elders' dialogue on breaking down barriers
2013	A Youth Lens on Poverty	• Literature of Youth & Poverty: Safety, housing and education • Youth photovoice
2014	Community, Research & Social Change	• Its More than a Collection of Stories (Look back on community-led development and State of the Inner City research) • It takes a Community to Support a Family: Community-based supports and the child welfare system
2015	Drawing on our Strengths	• High and Rising Revisited: Changes in poverty and related inner city characteristics 1996 – 2011 • Indigenous and Newcomer Young People's Experiences of Employment and Unemployment • Beneath the Surface and Beyond the Present: Gains in fighting poverty in Wpg's inner city
2016	Reconciliation Lives Here	• Introduction by Dr. Niigaan Sinclair • A Marathon Not a Sprint: Reconciliation and organizations in Wpg's inner city • Bringing our Community Back: Grassroots and reconciliation in Wpg's inner city
2017	Finding Her Home: A Gender-based Analysis of the Homelessness Crisis in Winnipeg	(second part of 2016 report, released on March 8th, 2017 due to time needed to complete research) • Women and Homelessness: Winnipeg Street Census 2015 • Finding Her Home: A gender-based analysis of the homelessness crisis in Wpg • Women & Homelessness a Review of the Literature
2017	Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Challenges of Measuring Value and Impact in Community-based Organizations	
2018	Green Light Go: Improving Transportation Equity	
2019	Harm Reduction in the Inner City: Community-based Responses & Role of Government	
2020	COVID-19: The Changing State of the Inner City – Strengthening Community in a Time of Isolation	• Bridging the Gap: CBOs, Governmental Systems and Basic Needs • Never to Leave the Ground: How Indigenous communities cure pandemics • "We work in crisis all day long": Rethinking emergency planning in Wpg's inner city • Crisis, Interdependence, and Solidarity in the Inner City and Beyond

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Introduction

SINCE THE 2020 *State of the Inner City* report, which looked at the impact of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic on the inner city, we've had second, third and fourth waves. Both the sense of government urgency and the emergency funding available after the first wave have dried up. The pre-existing, everyday crises of poverty, precarious housing, food security, and ongoing racism and colonialism continue, some worsened by losses of income. A return to "normal" or "business as usual" is not an option. Daily challenges of meeting basic needs are a reality for thousands in our city — the visibility of those experiencing homelessness last year was a reminder of this. Government policy, resources and approaches must stop manufacturing vulnerability in Winnipeg's core neighbourhoods through lack of investment and resources. They must draw on strengths that exist and centre community priorities in their work. The three chapters in this year's *State of the Inner City* report ask what a just recovery would look like for the people and communities of the inner city.

The first chapter, written by Lila Asher, Kayla Villebrun-Normand and Sarah Cooper, asks how the work of community-based organizations can inform a just recovery for the future of the inner city. The chapter considers a wide variety of plans and documents that have been created by inner-city organizations over the past five or so years, to identify key themes, concerns, and solutions. The three overarching priorities that emerge from this analysis are Indigenous self-determination, intersectional equity, and the social determinants of health, including housing, food security, education

and employment, healthcare, justice and safety, the built environment, and supports and connection. As well, this chapter examines the history of government investment in the inner city to understand the challenges and opportunities of such investments. The chapter concludes that what is needed is strong government investment in the inner city, coupled with supportive policy changes and keeping the concerns and priorities of inner-city communities at its heart.

The second chapter, written by Shauna MacKinnon and published previously in June 2021, examines the Province of Manitoba's Building Sustainable Communities program. It combined several previous programs including Neighbourhoods Alive!, a fund previously dedicated to specific neighbourhoods, into a single fund. Anticipating that this change would have an impact on community-based organizations, this research was undertaken to understand the full scope of changes to funding programs, including the types and geographic distribution of successful projects. Dozens of CBO leaders were surveyed and interviewed and analysis was conducted on the projects funded by the Building Sustainable Communities program in its first two years. It highlights the importance of focused funding in areas of concentrated poverty.

The third chapter, written by Owen Toews, is a deep dive into Portage Place, the mall in the middle of downtown Winnipeg. Through a community history, gathered through archival research and interviews with community members, this chapter identifies the importance of Portage Place as a gathering place for the communities surrounding the mall and charts community activism surrounding the near-final sale of the mall to a Toronto developer. The discussion over how the mall might be redeveloped highlights many of the same threats that arise in the inner city more broadly: gentrification, dispossession, and ongoing colonial extraction of wealth. It also provides the chance to imagine what the Portage Place of the community's dreams might look like, and early steps to take to achieve that vision.

These three chapters offer opportunities for action and make suggestions, many directly from those interviewed and from guiding community priorities. Individuals, organizations, communities and governments can pick up the best ideas and dream up new ones together with the goal of creating a thriving inner city, bolstered by years of hard-learnt lessons and a constant battle to reclaim space, both in government budgets and in physical places.

First Steps Towards a Just Recovery

Lila Asher, Kayla Villebrun-Normand and Sarah Cooper

IN SPRING 2021, the first waves of the pandemic were still fresh in people's minds. With the vaccine rollout, it seemed possible that Canada would soon be entering a post-pandemic recovery period. At that time, two meetings were held with leaders of community-based organizations (CBOs) from Winnipeg's inner city to decide on a focus for this year's *State of the Inner City* report. These leaders raised concerns about the impact of the pandemic on people who were already struggling, the injustices in pre-pandemic government systems, and the likelihood that a recovery would focus primarily on getting middle-class people back to "normal." They discussed ideas for a just recovery: making sure that funding goes to people and organizations who need it most, that investments go to community health rather than just physical infrastructure, and that visions and plans for the inner city centre reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. These conversations provided the jumping off point for this report.

During the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, CBOs in Winnipeg's inner city responded to urgent needs that had intensified due to the pandemic and resulting health regulations. Last year's *State of the Inner City* report described how CBOs were filling gaps relating to shelter, food, harm reduction, basic needs, internet access, social connection, and safety from violence.[1] Much

of the inner city's vulnerability to these crises has been created through policies and practices that marginalize some while privileging others.[2] The federal government's emergency infusion of cash and resources to address the pandemic was greatly needed, but also highlighted how government systems have long failed individuals and communities living in poverty.[3]

The 2020 *State of the Inner City* report concluded that reducing vulnerability to crisis requires attention to the social determinants of health. It also noted that "within CBOs there is an incredible amount of knowledge and expertise that should be centred in the political decision making that shapes the conditions they are operating in."[4] CBOs in the inner city have long identified the inclusion of the needs and priorities of inner-city residents and communities as central to the social and economic recovery from the pandemic and to building resilience for the future.

The next few years offer a critical opportunity to increase community resilience in Winnipeg's inner city for at least three reasons. First, at the beginning of the pandemic, governments found all kinds of money to address the crisis. This reminds us that when there's political will, anything is possible. Second, momentum is building to address worsening inequality, climate change, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism. There is increasing awareness of these issues among the general public, and recognition that we cannot solve one problem without also addressing the others. Third, governments are developing plans to move towards a recovery phase from the pandemic.

As public debates shift from emergency responses to safe re-opening, the widespread economic impacts caused by the pandemic have sparked conversations about the role of government-sponsored supports and programs aimed at recovering from this profound disruption. Across Canada, advocates have called for a just recovery that addresses the crises created by the pandemic, as well as pre-existing socio-economic inequities and the increasing impacts of climate change.[5] A just recovery will require funding from all levels of government, but it will also require the leadership of local communities who have the knowledge and expertise needed to create truly just outcomes.

This chapter of the *State of the Inner City* report explores possibilities for a "just recovery" for Winnipeg's inner city. It identifies and analyses themes and focus areas from CBOs' published plans and reports for a collective visioning process about community recovery priorities. Primary themes that emerge include Indigenous self-determination, intersectional equity, and the social determinants of health. It also examines past funding models in the inner city to identify learnings for future investment. This chapter argues

Access to Basic Needs

It is clear from the work that CBOs were doing before and during the pandemic that returning to a pre-pandemic normal would not address the gap in access to basic needs.

- In 2015, 30 percent of the 126,000 people living in the inner city fell below the after-tax low-income poverty measure, compared with 12.6 percent in the rest of Winnipeg.[1]
- Twenty-three percent of non-senior households in the inner city lived in housing that was in poor condition, too small for the household, or that cost more than 30 percent of household income. This number jumps to 39 percent of non-senior renter households.[2]
- Perhaps most shockingly, from 2012 to 2016, there was an 11-year difference in female life expectancy between the inner-city Point Douglas South neighbourhood cluster (the lowest in the city, at 72.5 years) and the Winnipeg Region as a whole (at 83.4 years).[3]

1 City of Winnipeg and Statistics Canada, "2016 Census Data Inner City"; City of Winnipeg and Statistics Canada, "2016 Census Data Non-Inner City."
2 Manitoba Collaborative Data Portal and Statistics Canada, "% Households in Core Housing Need."
3 Cui et al., "Winnipeg Health Region Community Health Assessment 2019."

that any plans for the inner city must keep the concerns and priorities of inner-city communities at its heart.

This year's *State of the Inner City* report should be considered as part one in addressing the question of what a just recovery should look like in the inner city once the pandemic finally calms. Part two will require community engagement to develop a vision and a process to implement that vision.

What is a Just Recovery?

A just recovery is about moving beyond the pandemic through a transformation towards a more equitable and inclusive society. The concept is gaining attention both globally and locally. 350.org, an international climate justice organization, articulated five principles for a "just recovery and transition to a better future."[6] The Council of Canadians published a list of six principles to guide a just recovery. This list builds on 350.org's five principles by adding a focus on Indigenous rights. The Council of Canadians principles have been endorsed by over 500 organizations from across Canada.[7]

Other organizations have expanded on the collective vision published by the Council of Canadians: for example, Just Recovery Ontario has its own list

TABLE 1 Elements of a Just Recovery as Defined by Three Canadian Organizations

Council of Canadians (2021)	Just Recovery Ontario (2020)	David Suzuki Foundation (2021)
1. Put people's health and well-being first, no exceptions.	1. Create adequate and accessible income supports.	The David Suzuki foundation endorses the six principles listed by the Council of Canadians and adds these three pillars to ensure that the just recovery is also a green recovery:
2. Strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people.	2. Ensure decent work with fair pay and benefits in safe workplaces with stronger employee protections.	1. Protect and restore nature.
3. Prioritize the needs of workers and communities.	3. Expand and preserve safe, adequate and affordable housing.	2. Act on climate.
4. Build resilience to prevent future crises.	4. Invest in access to basic services like childcare, transportation, digital access and eldercare.	3. Transform the economy.
5. Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations and borders.	5. Establish tax policies that make sure people pay their fair share.	
6. Uphold Indigenous rights and work in partnership with Indigenous Peoples.		

that makes the principles more tangible, and the David Suzuki Foundation adds three additional principles to ensure that a just recovery is also a green recovery. The principles from these three groups can be seen in *Table 1*.

These three sets of principles have a common focus on meeting people's basic needs and increasing resilience. The movement for a just recovery recognizes that the crisis of poverty existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The recovery is a once-in-a-generation chance to make our societies stronger and more just to protect against future shocks. Within this common framing, these three sets of principles take different approaches to defining the details. The Council of Canadians offers high-level principles to guide a just recovery,[8] while Just Recovery Ontario focuses on more specific policy suggestions.[9] The David Suzuki Foundation adds consideration for climate and environmental factors which are important for mitigating the severity of future climate disasters and reducing the risks to humans and the natural world.[10] While the list from the Council of Canadians is widely recognized and endorsed, the additions from these other organizations show that the concept of a just recovery is broad enough to respond to different contexts.

It is important to note that any kind of just recovery will be a long process, not a quick, short-term action. As such, the concept of a just recovery can be understood as both process and goal: it addresses both the end goal of a change, and the question of "how" a change might take place. Likewise, the principles of a just recovery are enacted in both processes and end goals. For example, "prioritize the needs of workers and communities"[11] can be taken as both a guiding principle for the initial stages of policy design and as a statement about desired

social values. "Expand and preserve safe, adequate and affordable housing"[12] references both immediate actions that need to be taken and an overarching goal for everyone to be housed. This dual nature of a just recovery aligns with the idea of prefiguration as strategy: the idea that *how* we work towards justice is as important as the goal.[13] Conceptualizing a just recovery as a prefigurative process frees it from rigid time constraints and ideas of success or failure: it is a continual process of striving towards equity and resilience.

> "*How* we work towards justice is as important as the goal."

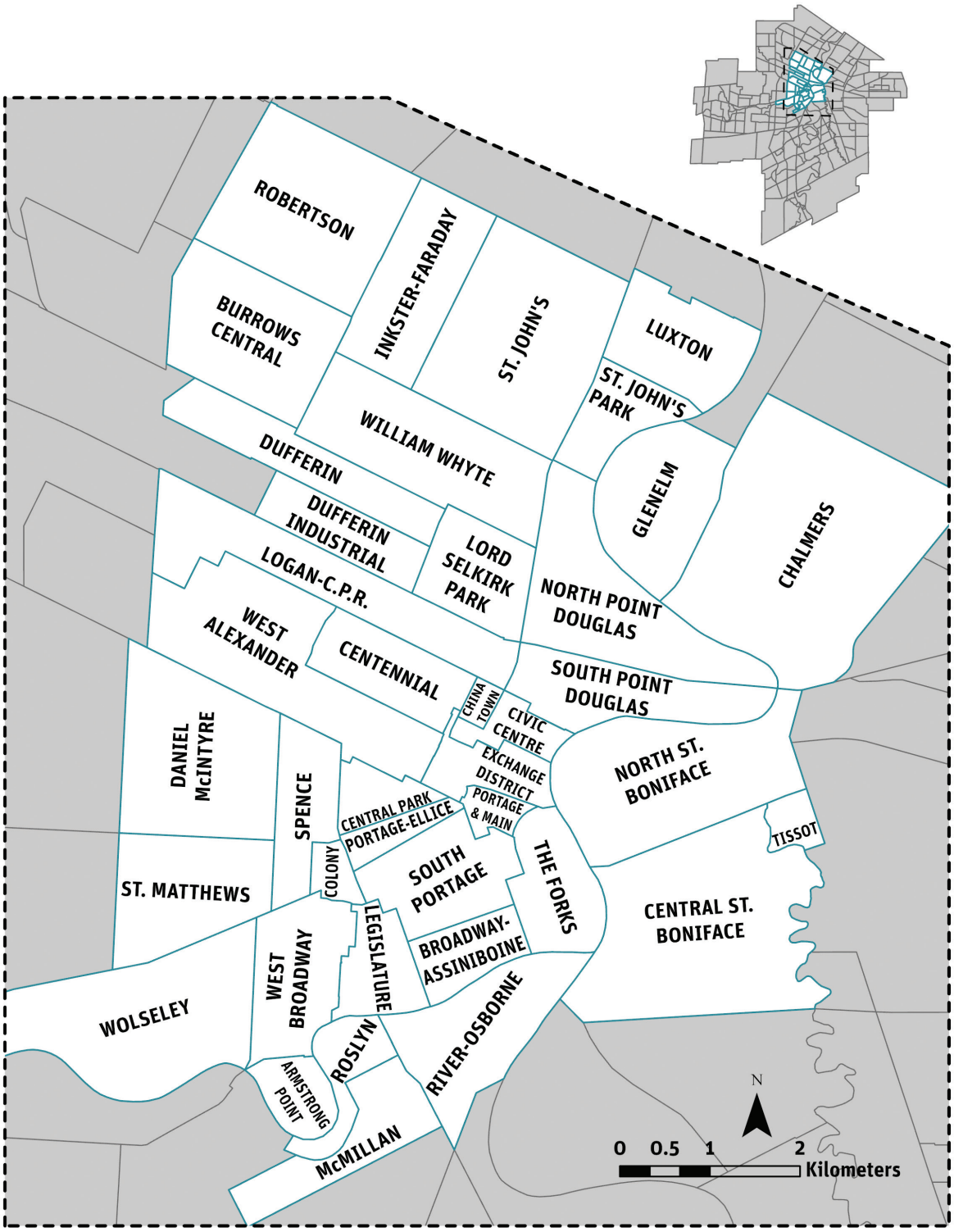
In Winnipeg's inner city, the leadership of CBOs is an important element of both the process and the goal of a just recovery. CBOs have substantial knowledge and expertise about their work and about what is needed to address the issues that arise in their work. Their staff and volunteers are often from, and accountable to, the communities they serve. The priorities that are evident from CBOs' work speak to a goal of meeting everyone's basic needs, even in times of crisis. The leadership offered by CBOs emphasizes the importance of localized, community-based power structures as in leading a just recovery.

What are Inner-city CBOs?

Community-based organizations, or CBOs, are non-profit organizations with a primarily local focus to their programs. Though some social enterprises qualify, CBOs generally are not businesses or companies. CBOs are not institutions that are part of municipal, provincial, or federal governments. In contrast to national or international non-profit organizations, CBOs deliver programs to a specific geographic area, such as a city or a particular neighbourhood within a city. CBOs provide services to address basic needs of area residents and are often staffed by people who live within or close to their service area. This ongoing interaction with community members gives CBOs a uniquely nuanced understanding of the needs within their community.[14]

Inner-city CBOs serve Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhoods, shown in *Figure 1*. While there are neighbourhoods outside the inner city that also experience significant poverty,[15] the inner city is characterised by "a particularly intense concentration of poverty-induced social and economic problems, and also a myriad of innovative, community-based, anti-poverty strategies" to address these problems.[16] CBOs working in the inner city have long-established programs and networks, as well as close relationships with the communities they serve.

FIGURE 1 Map of Inner City Neighbourhoods within Winnipeg*



* Created in ArcGIS with neighbourhood boundaries from City of Winnipeg data.
Source Dietz, "NeighbourhoodsWpgMB"; City of Winnipeg, "Inner City & Non-Inner City Boundaries."

CBOs' Priorities in the Inner City

This year's *State of the Inner City* report draws on publicly-available published documents from 79 CBOs[17] in inner-city Winnipeg to identify important themes and common areas of work. The findings from this document analysis form a foundation rooted in the ongoing work of CBOs that can be used to develop a robust vision of a just recovery. The final list of documents included 14 strategic plans, 35 annual reports, and 30 websites (in cases where no strategic or annual report was available). Publication dates range from 2018 to 2021, including both pre-pandemic and current documents. For a detailed overview of the methods used in this research, see Appendix 1.

Three major themes emerged from CBOs' published documents: Indigenous self-determination, intersectional equity, and the social determinants of health. Under the umbrella of social determinants of health, CBOs' work can be further grouped into seven focus areas reflecting basic needs: housing, food security, education and employment, healthcare, justice and safety, the built environment, and supports and connection.

As many inner-city CBOs acknowledge, accessing basic needs is substantially more difficult for individuals and households facing poverty and racism. CBOs are often instrumental in meeting inner-city residents' immediate needs. However, capitalism and settler colonialism result in long-standing, multi-generational experiences of exclusion. These socio-economic structures create systemic injustice where even the most robust network of services will still fall short of meeting everyone's needs. For this reason, many CBOs advocate for change to the systemic and political conditions that create and exacerbate the problems they work to address.

The following three sections detail the work that CBOs have been doing before and during the pandemic in relation to these three themes. They are not meant to be a comprehensive list of everything that all CBOs are doing, merely to provide some examples of how each of these themes and priorities are actualized. It is important to note that while there are numerous programs that fall under each theme, they each address the distinct needs of different populations and communities.

Theme 1: Indigenous Self-determination

Many inner-city CBOs are Indigenous-led and grounded in Indigenous values and Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led organizing has a long history in Winnipeg: Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene and Métis peoples

fought hard to keep their territories from falling to Canadian expansion in the late 1800s and have continued resisting ever since.[18] Inuit and people from other First Nations have also come to Winnipeg and joined the Indigenous communities in the inner city. Notable developments in Indigenous inner-city organizing in the twentieth century include the establishment of the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre in the mid-1950s[19] and the Neeginan Vision of the 1970s, a community-led planning effort for an Indigenous neighbourhood in Winnipeg. This vision had a community centre as its hub, with space for educational programs, temporary housing, and other community activities close by.[20]

Indigenous-led CBOs in the inner city today build on this legacy of self-determination and community-building. Thunderbird House,[21] which opened in 2000, is a community centre drawn directly from the plans in the Neeginan Vision.[22] Many of the other goals in the Neeginan Vision are carried on by Indigenous-led organizations as well: Eagle Urban Transition Centre provides housing and supports for Indigenous people moving to the city;[23] Ikwe Widdjiitiwin and the Indigenous Women's Healing Centre provide shelter and support for Indigenous women and their children escaping situations of domestic violence;[24] CAHRD and Urban Circle Training Centre provide job training;[25] and Wahbung Abinoonjiiag, Ndinawe, and the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre host community programming and provide housing supports.[26] Additionally, Indigenous-led CBOs address issues of health and safety that are important to the community, with the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre providing healthcare based in Indigenous teachings,[27] Bear Clan Patrol and Mama Bear Clan leading non-violent street safety patrols as an alternative to the police,[28] and Manitoba Moon Voices and Ka Ni Kanichihk advocating for the safety of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people and providing support services to relatives and friends.[29]

Self-determination is not only expressed by individual organizations, but also through collaboration and partnership. The leaders of Indigenous-led CBOs come together through organizations like the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle and Indigenous Vision for the North End. The Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle facilitates collaboration among 21 Indigenous-led organizations in Winnipeg. Its goals include the furtherance of self-determination and restoring Indigenous governance and lifeways to achieve systemic changes such as the return of land and true reconciliation.[30] Indigenous Vision for the North End has a steering committee of 11 CBOs. Together, they work to promote leadership from Indigenous residents of the North End in community development projects and further the principles from United

Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.[31] This explicit framing from the Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle and Indigenous Vision for the North End illuminates the ethic of self-determination that runs through the work of many Indigenous-led CBOs.

Many CBOs that are not Indigenous-led have a focus on respecting Indigenous rights and providing tailored services for Indigenous communities. For example, Food Matters Manitoba compiles a map of where to find traditional foods in Winnipeg.[32] The North Point Douglas Women's Centre runs a Women's Warrior Program for healing based on traditional teachings and drumming and hosts the Mama Bear Clan, a community safety patrol.[33] The Spence Neighbourhood Association and the Gang Action Interagency Network (GAIN) both discuss the impacts of colonialism on the populations they serve and the importance of reconciliation and respecting self-determination.[34] Immigration Partnership Winnipeg lists building connections between Indigenous and newcomer communities as a top priority.[35] These examples point to growing respect and support for Indigenous self-determination.

Theme 2: Intersectional Equity

CBOs serve a variety of demographic groups along lines of Indigeneity, race and immigration history, age, disability, and gender. The impacts that people face from settler colonialism, racism, ableism, and patriarchy depend on the variety of identities that each person holds. These impacts are further complicated by the intersections of these systems of oppression with capitalism and poverty.[36] Some CBOs discuss these structural conditions explicitly in the background sections of their reports. For example, Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY) describes how colonialism and mental illness contribute to homelessness experienced by youth aging out of care from Child and Family Services.[37] West Central Women's Resource Centre describes how housing and shelter needs differ by gender, including women needing housing options that provide safety from intimate partner violence, and trans, two-spirit, and gender non-conforming people needing shelter spaces that are explicitly welcoming so that they can be assured of their safety.[38]

Intersectional equity is implicitly built into many CBOs' programs. Their poverty reduction programs and initiatives are not one-size-fits-all: they cater to the specific situations and challenges faced by their clients and participants. For example, SEED Winnipeg operates a helpline to offer

support and guidance for applying for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and Employment and Income Assistance benefits, and teamed up with IRCOM (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba) to ensure that support workers would be able to answer questions specific to newcomers.[39] CBOs providing housing are keenly aware of how housing needs vary for different age groups. Three examples include Rossbrook House, which has a 24/7 safe space where children can sleep overnight,[40] the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, which provides housing for youth aging out of care,[41] and Main St Project, which offers shelter and transitional housing for adults.[42] Further examples of targeted programming include employment opportunities designed for people with disabilities, such as those run by Inclusion Winnipeg[43] and New Directions.[44]

Approaches to improving health and wellbeing also focus on the specific needs of different demographics. Many CBOs offer supports specific to Indigenous communities, informed by Elders and traditional healing practices. These include the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre,[45] Eagle Urban Transition Centre,[46] and the John Howard Society's Healing Program for Indigenous Men,[47] among many others. Primary care providers including Mt. Carmel Clinic and Klinic design for inclusivity, particularly for Indigenous, newcomer, and trans communities.[48] Responses to gender-based violence prioritize safety and healing for women and children at the North End Women's Centre,[49] the Indigenous Women's Healing Centre,[50] and many other CBOs. Additionally, mental health programs designed for newcomers are offered by Aurora Family Therapy Centre[51] and ACOMI.[52]

Moreover, the demographics that CBOs target for their programs can be quite specific. Focusing on specific groups means that fewer people will fall through the cracks of broader-scope programs with barriers to entry. For example, ACOMI's job skills training for visible minority newcomer women addresses multiple barriers to employment including racism, sexism, immigration status, and adjusting to language and culture in Canada.[53] The Deaf Home Services provided by New Directions are designed to provide support to children who are Deaf or hard of hearing and who are involved with CFS.[54] Ka Ni Kanichihk, Nine Circles, and other partner organizations collaborate to provide care for people with sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections through an Indigenous lens and specifically for Indigenous communities.[55] These are just a few examples of how CBOs provide programming for specific demographic groups in the inner city and address intersectional equity in their work.

Theme 3: Social Determinants of Health

CBOs' programming provides supports that inner city residents need to be healthy and safe. CBOs generally recognize that health depends on far more than healthcare. Factors such as housing, food, and safety have significant impacts on health, and employment and education influence people's income and ability to access basic needs. Social connection is also a key element of mental health and well-being. These issues are interrelated; for example, kids need nutritious lunches to focus at school,[56] which can impact educational attainment and employment opportunities, and then unemployment and low income limit people's ability to access food.[57] Over time, the cumulative impacts of marginalization result in measurable differences in health outcomes and mortality.[58]

Our analysis identified seven focus areas for CBO programming relating to the social determinants of health. These are: housing, food, education and employment, healthcare, justice and safety, the built environment, and supports and connections. *Table 2* shows how many of the 79 organizations in our sample had programs in each of the seven focus areas, though most CBOs have programs spanning multiple areas as these social determinants of health overlap and interact with each other.[59] The rest of this section provides examples of programs and best practices from CBOs in each focus area. These examples are not exhaustive; they simply illustrate the variety and complexity of programs and resources offered by CBOs. See Appendix 2 for the full list of organizations counted in each focus area.

TABLE 2 Number* of CBOs Providing Services Within the Seven Focus Areas of Social Determinants of Health

Focus Area	Number of Organizations
Housing	33
Food	19
Education and Employment	43
Healthcare	25
Justice and Safety	18
Built Environment	7
Supports and Connection	57

* The numbers add to more than 79 because many organizations have programs in multiple categories.

Housing

Stable, safe housing is a key social determinant of health. Housing must be affordable to low-income households, including those receiving Employment and Income Assistance, and should accommodate diverse family sizes.[60] CBOs advocate for more affordable housing, including West Broadway Community Organization at the neighbourhood level,[61] and End Homelessness Winnipeg at the city-wide level.[62] Many, including RaY[63] and Accueil Francophone,[64] help people connect to housing options. CBOs also make clear that wrap-around supports should accompany housing for people exiting homelessness or those at high risk of experiencing homelessness, such as youth aging out of care.[65] They provide both transitional housing, such as the John Howard Society's Four Healing Roads Lodge,[66] and permanent supportive housing, such as the Main St. Project's Bell Hotel.[67] Housing solutions also address the specific needs of different demographics, such as emergency shelters with trauma-informed care for people who have experienced gender-based violence,[68] support for newcomers[69] and people moving to Winnipeg from First Nations and smaller communities.[70]

Food Security

Having sufficient, nutritious food is vital for health. CBOs approach this issue from a variety of angles. Harvest Manitoba coordinates supplies for food banks and distributors across the province, including many organizations in the inner city.[71] Food is part of the support provided by many housing programs, including RaY[72] and Main St Project.[73] West Broadway Community Organization's Good Food Club,[74] community gardens run by Spence Neighbourhood Association,[75] and cooking classes from Food Matters Manitoba[76] contribute to meeting immediate need for food. During the pandemic, many organizations including IRCOM, A&O Support Services for Older Adults, and ACOMI provided emergency food hampers, even though that is not their usual focus.[77] CBOs also have an understanding that food options need to be culturally appropriate[78] and that good quality grocery stores need to be accessible within inner-city neighbourhoods.[79]

Education and Employment

Financial stress can be detrimental to health in addition to making it harder to access housing, food, and other basic needs. CBOs help people find income by providing employment opportunities, job training, assistance accessing benefits, and support for people throughout their education from early childhood through adulthood. Having a strong educational foundation

is important to succeed under current economic conditions; CBOs provide specialized schools and afterschool programs to reach kids who are struggling[80] and advocate for early childhood education.[81] The Community Education Development Association (CEDA) provides support through high school graduation,[82] and Spence Neighbourhood Association[83] and Youth Agencies Alliance,[84] among others, host internships and job-training programs for youth. Adults can also find educational programs through CBOs, ranging from literacy programs at the John Howard Society[85] and the Elizabeth Fry Society[86] to job certification programs at Urban Circle Training Centre.[87] Job readiness programs include broader life skills, such as SEED's financial education and support,[88] and CAHRD's wellness programs.[89] Another key set of educational programs are language classes for newcomers, such as those provided by Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network and IRCOM.[90] CBOs also provide opportunities for employment, such as at North End Women's Centre's UpShoppe[91] or with social enterprises including BUILD Inc[92] and Sscope.[93]

Healthcare

Access to healthcare is another key social determinant of health. This category includes all forms of healthcare and health-related services, from primary care and counselling to harm reduction programs and health education. There are several community health clinics in the inner city that provide this wide range of services, including Mount Carmel,[94] Klinic,[95] and the Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre.[96] Many CBOs including Ka Ni Kanichihk, West Central Women's Resource Centre, Ikwe Widdjiitiwin, and New Directions provide trauma-informed counselling and group sessions.[97] Indigenous organizations in particular often focus on holistic methods of healing.[98] CBOs also emphasize the importance of healthcare for issues that are often stigmatized or deprioritized, such as the programs at Nine Circles for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections,[99] and Manitoba Harm Reduction Network's peer responders and needle exchanges for people who use drugs.[100]

Justice and Safety

Many CBOs acknowledge that the carceral system needs reform and that in the meantime, there are localized ways to reduce its harms in the inner city. Being incarcerated or experiencing police violence can take a serious toll on physical and mental health, and past incarceration can make it harder to access basic needs. GAIN focuses on providing alternatives to youth who

are involved in gangs or at risk of becoming involved.[101] The John Howard and Elizabeth Fry Societies provide supports to people who are incarcerated and help them as they transition back into society.[102] The Bear Clan Patrol and Mama Bear Clan are dedicated to ensuring safety and security on city streets through community patrols that prioritise non-violence and provide support rather than punishment.[103] As noted in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the justice system adds to the violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.[104] Manitoba Moon Voices advocates for greater safety for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people[105] and Ka Ni Kanichihk provides counselling and support for impacted relatives.[106] Additionally, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and ACOMI advocate for reforms to policing and the carceral system.[107]

Built Environment

The built environment, including the buildings, streets, green spaces, and infrastructure of the city, can have impacts on health. The six inner-city Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations advocate for safer, greener, and more accessible spaces as part of their mandates[108] and Make Poverty History Manitoba also makes key recommendations on these topics.[109] The clearest impacts relate to physical safety. The West Broadway Community Organization and Daniel McIntyre-St. Matthews Community Association advocate for better bike lanes and pedestrian infrastructure to reduce the risk of traffic collisions.[110] The North End Community Renewal Corporation advocates for safety through design and better lighting to discourage violent crime.[111] Access to green space can improve mental health, and Spence Neighbourhood Association, Central Neighbourhoods, and Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation advocate for more parks and community gardens.[112] Make Poverty History promotes accessible transportation, both in terms of cost and ability, which is important so that people can get to their jobs, to the grocery store, and to other services.[113]

Supports and Connection

As the pandemic harshly illustrated, social isolation is detrimental to mental health. The ways in which this is felt vary by person and across age categories. Before the pandemic, CBOs provided a wide variety of programs for all ages, ranging from recreation to parenting classes to 1:1 mentorship, and they have continued to do so during the pandemic as much as possible. To give just a few examples, the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre provides recreation

and arts programs for kids and youth,[114] the North End Women's Centre has sharing circles and drumming groups for adults,[115] and A & O Support Services has programming and classes for seniors.[116] Individual supports include mentorship and case work such as GAIN's youth mentorship programs,[117] Main St. Project's 1:1 case work for people in transitional housing,[118] and New Directions' in-home support services for people with disabilities living independently.[119] There are also supports for parents and families such as childminding from Wolseley Family Place,[120] daycare from Ka Ni Kanichihk and CAHRD,[121] and parent and tot programs from Wahbung Abinoonjiiag.[122] The resources offered by CBOs provide a place for community members to come together and build connections and mutual support.

Beyond the Inner City

The three themes that emerged from the analysis of CBOs' documents are not only present in Winnipeg's inner city. The work being done by CBOs is reflected in theories and practices of community organizers, advocates and scholars across Canada and elsewhere. Indigenous self-determination, intersectional equity, and the social determinants of health are systemic, cross-cutting concepts that offer important insights into equitable community development and resilience. Connecting to these broader movements emphasizes the importance of the work being done by inner-city CBOs at not just a local, but also regional and national scales.

Indigenous Self-determination

Self-determination is defined by the United Nations as the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."[123] Indigenous scholars and activists emphasize that Indigenous peoples have self-determination whether or not they are acknowledged by settler governance structures.[124] Throughout centuries of colonialism by Canadian governments, Indigenous people and Nations have continued to care for their communities and lands.[125] Indigenous peoples have exercised their right to self-determination through the recovery of culture and teachings and assertion of claims to land and resources through resurgence movements.[126] Resurgence and self-determination are directly antithetical to settler-colonial power structures.

Nevertheless, settler colonialism still shapes many aspects of life for Indigenous people, including experiences of homelessness and housing

need,[127] education and employment opportunities,[128] interaction with the justice system[129] and experiences of violence and safety.[130] Inadequate funding for health services and the marginalization of traditional healing methods significantly worsen health outcomes for First Nations people.[131] Because of these persistent impacts, self-determination for First Nations, Métis and Inuit is a key element of a just recovery. Any recovery plan that is designed based on settler colonial assumptions and structures rather than honouring Indigenous self-determination will continue to replicate these harms to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and will therefore be fundamentally unjust.

In Winnipeg, self-determination takes many forms. Indigenous residents of Winnipeg have long exercised their self-determination through organizing and planning, such as with the formulation of the Neeginan Vision for a self-determining area of Winnipeg in the 1970s.[132] Indigenous-led CBOs provide culturally appropriate supports and resources, and often work in collaboration with each other and with non-Indigenous organizations to advance community goals. Many use traditional governance practices, including leadership from Elders, women and residential school survivors.[133] Perhaps most importantly, Indigenous-led CBOs, along with First Nation, Métis and Inuit community members, create visible, vibrant, active and supportive spaces and communities in Winnipeg: collectively they offer what Heather Dorries called "a vision for Indigenous flourishing."[134]

"Indigenous-led CBOs, along with First Nation, Métis and Inuit community members, create visible, vibrant, active and supportive spaces and communities in Winnipeg: collectively they offer what Heather Dorries called "a vision for Indigenous flourishing."

Intersectional Equity

The intersections of racism, sexism, ableism and other forms of systemic discrimination and oppression with capitalism mean that poverty impacts people differently and unequally based on their identities.[135] These inequalities are often manifested through spatialized, racialized concentrated poverty.[136] No single-issue lens is enough to fully address these systemic challenges. The concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the double burden of racism and sexism that Black women navigate,[137] is useful for understanding the unique challenges that people face depending on their identities. People who are marginalized along more than one axis face not only the impacts of each axis added together, but specific oppressions unique to their subgroup.[138]

Equity in health means "the absence of systemic disparities in health… between social groups who have different levels of underlying social advantage/

disadvantage."[139] In other words, equity means that all people, regardless of race, gender, ability, class, or other category of identity, can equally live full and healthy lives. Globally, inequities in health result in thousands of lives prematurely lost.[140] Equity matters in areas beyond health too, such as education, employment, and housing. For equity to be intersectional, it must address the overlapping impacts of different systems of oppression. This means that even people who are currently marginalized along several axes would not suffer any disadvantage.[141]

In Winnipeg's inner city, CBOs have developed programs, policies and plans to use resources for the benefit of the local community.[142] These programs, plans and policies are grounded in the complexities of the specific neighbourhoods and communities that make up the inner city. They seek to address ongoing inequality and structural vulnerability by meeting basic needs for people facing multiple forms of oppression and by advancing a vision for a more equitable city than decades of government retrenchment have afforded.[143] The intersectional equity approach embraced by CBOs ensures that no one is left behind.

Social Determinants of Health

There is widespread recognition of the negative impact that poverty, racism, colonialism, and the resulting social inequality have on health outcomes.[144] There is also a long list of tangible, material factors including and beyond medical care that shape health outcomes. These factors include access to good quality housing, healthy food, and green space, as well as safety from violence, pollution exposure, poverty and resulting stress, and community connectedness.[145] The social determinants of health are mutually reinforcing rather than independent: poverty shapes access to basic needs; the stability of having those needs met influences employment and education; in turn, this affects income and poverty.[146]

Social determinants of health are not neutral; having basic needs left unmet is the result of political choices and deliberate underfunding.[147] Poverty and racial injustice have harmful impacts on health[148] and are the product of racial capitalism.[149] Throughout its development, Winnipeg has been shaped by these same systems of racial capitalism and settler colonialism.[150]

Improving the social determinants of health has long been identified as a concern in the inner city. Past *State of the Inner City* reports have examined housing,[151] poverty,[152] education and employment,[153] safety,[154] and transporta-

tion equity.[155] Housing needs, homelessness, hunger, and poverty are forms of manufactured vulnerability and they have intensified the impact of the pandemic.[156]

Toward a Power Shift

The three themes of Indigenous self-determination, intersectional equity, and the social determinants of health have direct impacts on community resilience. They are specific to the local context of inner-city Winnipeg and relevant more broadly as they connect with the work of practitioners and scholars across Canada and beyond. Furthermore, they align well with the elements of a just recovery identified by Canadian organizations and advocates.[157]

> "A truly just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic would both rely on the leadership of CBOs and provide them with sufficient funding to carry out their programs."

As this section has shown, CBOs are already working on these three themes. A truly just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic would both rely on the leadership of CBOs and provide them with sufficient funding to carry out their programs. The next section will look at the history of funding for inner city development to identify possibilities for future funding.

A History of Government Funding in the Inner City

Winnipeg's inner city has long faced challenges. After the second World War, many of the middle- and upper-income households living in Winnipeg's city centre and the North End moved to the suburbs, followed by businesses and employment opportunities. The City of Winnipeg's focus on suburban development reduced investment in the inner city, especially in the North End. As a result, the households in the inner city were generally poorer, and the relative affordability of housing — despite often being in need of repair and owned by absentee landlords extracting as much income as possible — resulted in a spatial concentration of poverty.[158]

First Nation and Métis people moving into Winnipeg in the 1950s and 1960s often moved into the inner city, because of the affordable housing and the growing community of Indigenous people there. In the 1990s and early 2000s, newcomers and refugees arrived and also settled in the inner city because of the low cost of housing. The result, from the 1950s to today, is that "globalization, suburbanization, internal migration, and immigration" combined to create a "concentration in Winnipeg's inner city of poverty and,

> “As University of Winnipeg Professor Emeritus Jim Silver noted in 2003, “one way of looking at the issue is to say that the past 20 years have been a practical experiment in determining what works and what doesn’t in re-vitalizing inner cities.”

to a considerable extent, racialized poverty.”[159] Although CBOs have worked hard to address the challenges resulting from such spatially concentrated and racialized poverty, much work remains.

Beginning with urban renewal in the 1960s, a variety of strategies have been used to address the complex poverty and related issues in the inner city. As University of Winnipeg Professor Emeritus Jim Silver noted in 2003, “one way of looking at the issue is to say that the past 20 years have been a practical experiment in determining what works and what doesn’t in re-vitalizing inner cities”[160] and the experiment has continued since then. This section provides a timeline of funding in the inner city and identifies benefits and limitations of each approach.

A Timeline of Significant Funding Initiatives

1960s

After the Second World War, many cities in Canada had dire shortages of good quality, low-cost housing. Urban renewal, a federal program cost-shared with municipalities and sometimes provincial governments to address “slum housing,” resulted in entire neighbourhoods being demolished and replaced with public housing.[161] In Winnipeg, the Salter-Jarvis neighbourhood in the North End was bulldozed and replaced by Lord Selkirk Park.[162] Although it responded to a bricks-and-mortar need for low-cost housing, the urban renewal program did not address resident concerns or provide social supports. As a result, it did little to address poverty in the inner city. It did, however, highlight the impact of federal funding in programs to address poverty and low-cost housing.[163]

1970s

In 1973, the National Housing Act was amended to create the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP), which focused on federal, provincial and municipal short-term investments for the rehabilitation and conservation of existing neighbourhoods.[164] In Winnipeg, six neighbourhoods — North Point Douglas, North St. Boniface, Centennial, Brooklands, William Whyte, and West Alexander — received about $22 million of NIP funding between them.[165] Although the NIP’s focus was rehabilitation rather than demolition, it still focused primarily on changes to the built environment. In the end, evaluations concluded that it “essentially was a single-dimensional approach to

what were multi-dimensional problems."[166] As such, it had limited success in addressing complex poverty.

1980s

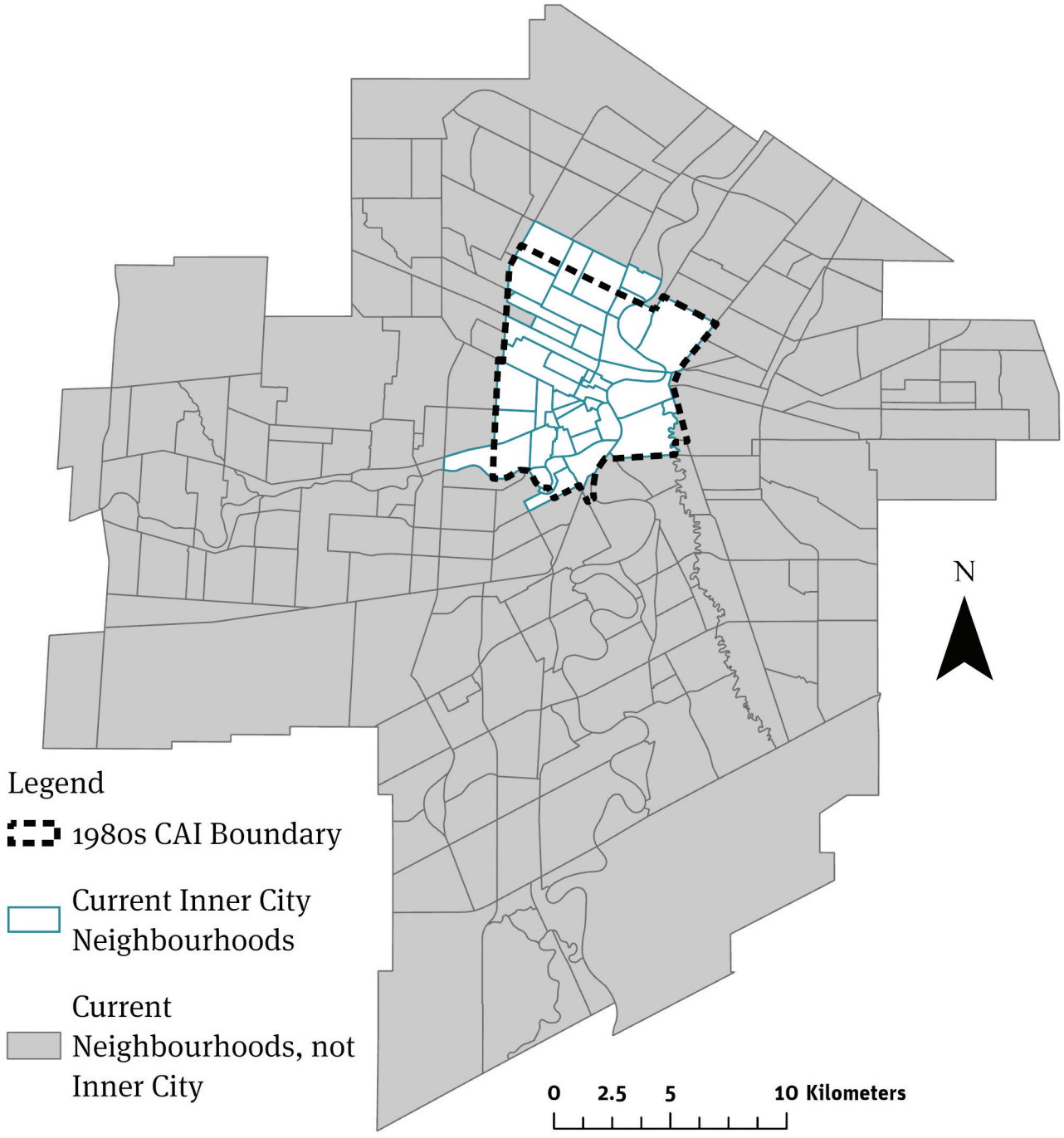
In the 1980s, a new model, termed an Urban Development Agreement, was launched as a way to tackle long-standing, deep-seated, complex, and intersecting social and economic problems in Winnipeg's inner city.[167] The Urban Development Agreement model was developed in response to the growing recognition of the role that cities play in a country's economic growth and the inadequacy of previous pan-Canadian policies in addressing site-specific urban issues.[168] Its multi-level governance structure challenged "established decision-making routines,"[169] and enabled coordination between federal, provincial, and municipal governments in setting urban policy and providing funding.

Winnipeg's Core Area Initiative (CAI) was established in 1981 with a mandate to revitalize the inner city's physical, social, and economic conditions through programs related to "housing, neighbourhood improvement, community services, education, training, employment, business development, heritage building recycling, and large scale mixed-use commercial development."[170] It showed promise as an ambitious and comprehensive response to the deteriorating social, economic, and physical conditions of Winnipeg's inner city. Signed by a Liberal federal government, a New Democratic (NDP) provincial government, and Winnipeg mayor William Norrie, this five-year urban regeneration initiative brought $96 million into Winnipeg's core area, with each level of government contributing $32 million.[171] The area covered by the initiative spanned 25 square kilometres in the inner city (see *Figure 2*) and was home to 100,000 people at the time.[172] It covered roughly the same area as Winnipeg's inner city does today.

In 1986, the agreement was renewed for another five years with a total investment of $100 million.[173] This time, the agreement was signed between a Conservative federal government, an NDP provincial government, and Winnipeg mayor Norrie. However, halfway through, a Conservative provincial government was elected and when the renewal period ended, it was allowed to expire.[174]

The two CAIs offered some innovative solutions to some of the inner-city's issues. These primarily arose through the funding and support of grassroots community movements. Silver and Toews suggested that "this network of CBOs and grassroots leaders emerged as a creative, empowering source of inner-city revitalization."[175] As they have grown and developed their expertise,

FIGURE 2 Winnipeg's Core Area as Delineated in the 1981 CAI Map,[i] and Winnipeg's Inner City Today[ii]



i Stewart, "The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative: A Case Study in Urban Revitalization," 88.
ii City of Winnipeg, "Inner City & Non-Inner City Boundaries."

these organizations have developed innovative and effective strategies to address the complexities of poverty in the inner city.

These successes are somewhat overshadowed by the CAIs' failings. The CAIs aimed to balance poverty relief efforts with commercially-oriented development projects, including Portage Place and The Forks[176] (for more on Portage Place, see Toews chapter on page XX of this report). However, large bricks-and-mortar development projects took precedence over social spending as the CAI grew to be more heavily influenced by corporate business, crowding out community participation. Despite having a Core Area Initiative Office as a public access point, later evaluations showed limited interactions with the community.[177] The business influence was so significant that in community inquiry hearings, it was said that the corporations "essentially created a fourth level of decision-making and bureaucracy."[178]

1990s

After a three-year break, a new agreement was created in 1995 as the Winnipeg Development Agreement under a Liberal federal government, a Conservative provincial government, and Winnipeg mayor Glen Murray. This $75 million new agreement no longer focused on poverty reduction in the inner city; instead it focused on the city as a whole and emphasized the labour market and the private sector.[179] While the inner city and downtown were not forgotten, they were no longer the main priority.

2000s

In 2000, one of the newly-elected NDP provincial government's first action items was to bring an influx of investment into the inner city through the Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA!) initiative.[180] Administered solely by the province, NA! was a long-term community-led strategy to support the physical, social, and economic revitalization in designated older neighbourhoods in Manitoba.[181] NA! recognized the unique needs and priorities of each neighbourhood and that often the best solutions and ideas come directly from communities themselves.[182]

The first neighbourhoods in Winnipeg to receive NA! funding were Spence, West Broadway, William Whyte, Point Douglas, and Lord Selkirk Park; later St. Matthews, Daniel McIntyre, Centennial, West Alexander, North Portage, Dufferin, St. John's, Central Park and Chalmers were added. At first, NA! provided planning and project funding for community-led projects, but quickly expanded to providing multi-year core funding for neighbourhood renewal corporations through the Neighbourhood Development Assistance

Program.[183] Neighbourhood renewal corporations continue to provide resources and services to their local areas, and often undertake neighbourhood planning processes to ensure that their work is led by community priorities.

Also in 2000, the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI) was established. A tri-level, "one-stop shop for community organizations to access information on government-funded housing and homelessness programs," it focused on housing and revitalization in the inner city.[184] Between 2000 and 2012, almost $185 million was committed from the federal, provincial and municipal governments to improve housing quality, build new housing and address homelessness.[185]

In 2004, under the leadership of a Liberal federal government, NDP provincial government, and Winnipeg mayors Glen Murray and then Sam Katz, a final five-year tripartite agreement was signed and named the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement.[186] This time, the focus on community-led projects and inner-city development was brought back by the provincial NDP government. This agreement invested $75 million through four key programs: Aboriginal Participation, Building Sustainable Neighbourhoods, Downtown Renewal, and Supporting Technology and Innovation.[187] In keeping with principles of community-led practices and decision making, each component had an advisory committee led by community representatives to oversee and make recommendations on funding allocation.[188]

The provincial NA! initiative, tri-level WHHI and Winnipeg Partnership Agreement addressed many gaps left by the earlier Urban Development Agreements. They provided secure long-term funding, and increased citizen participation. Through the neighbourhood renewal corporations, NA! provided local expertise and coordination of programs. Although it was a relatively small program, it signalled a renewed interest in inner-city revitalization, which had been lost under the previous provincial government.

2010s to Today

In 2010, unable to create a successive tripartite agreement, the NDP provincial government established a five-year Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy. The Strategy concentrated on three focus areas: Indigenous capacity building, downtown renewal, and inner-city resiliency.[189] The federal and municipal governments signed memoranda of understanding and collaboration with the Province to support the Strategy, but their financial contributions were limited.[190] NA! continued to be supported by the provincial government, and its funding to neighbourhood renewal corporations and other CBOs was able to build greater capacity for resilience and advocacy. Along with the

Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy, NA! continued the work of the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement by funding community-based organizations and creating a policy environment that supported CBOs' work.[191]

However, in 2016, a Conservative provincial government was elected and immediately began implementing an austerity agenda. It cut funds for infrastructure, social housing and Rent Assist, education, and social assistance.[192] In 2019, NA! was folded with other programs into the Building Sustainable Communities program, which is not targeted to high-need communities.[193] It also limits what funding can be used for and requires that grants requested be matched with funding from other sources (more on the Building Sustainable Communities program in Chapter 2 on page 57).[194] These changes have resulted in uncertainty for CBOs and increased vulnerability for inner-city communities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic as there is little government attention being paid to the concentration of social and economic challenges facing the inner city.

Future Investments

The many agreements, projects and investments over the past 60 years in the inner city illustrate several important lessons for future investment in the inner city. First, the tri-level agreements allowed senior governments to spend their money more efficiently and with greater impact, and for municipal governments, they provided resources that were desperately needed to programs where the impact could be "eight to ten times larger than anything remotely attainable unilaterally."[195] And while there has been significant criticism of the tri-level agreements, they showed that when the federal, provincial, and municipal governments work together, substantial change is possible.

Second, particularly in the early agreements, an emphasis on brick-and-mortar development projects overshadowed social spending. While partnerships with corporations leveraged millions of additional dollars for the physical revitalization and business development in the downtown, they did little to stimulate and address the actual socio-economic problems of inner-city residents.[196] Perhaps most importantly, the overwhelming business influence crowded out community participation. Even Lloyd Axworthy, champion of the CAI, noted in 2003 that Winnipeg's inner city tri-level agreements had missed the opportunity to "leap forward by extending to these inner-city groups the right to share in the decisions that will help shape their lives."[197]

Third, the tri-level funding agreements from the CAI onward provided funding and support for grassroots community movements which turned into the networks of CBOs operating in the inner city today.[198] Later tri-level agreements and provincial funding through NA! and the Winnipeg Regeneration Strategy strengthened inner-city organizations and provided policy support to address social and economic issues. The focus on the inner city and partnerships with CBOs made it possible to develop locally-relevant programs, resources, and strategies to address complex spatialized poverty.

These three lessons suggest that future investment in the inner city should have funding and support from all three levels of government; they should balance bricks-and-mortar and social spending, based on the priorities of inner-city residents; and they should build on the expertise and experience of CBOs in the inner city. In short, what is needed is a large-scale, geographically targeted investment developed with and guided by inner-city communities.

Next Steps for a Fully-Funded Just Recovery

As shown in this report, the work that CBOs do every day in the inner city suggests that a just recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic must uphold Indigenous self-determination, address intersectional equity, and focus on providing for the basic needs of inner-city residents in line with the social determinants of health. These priorities align with the principles for a just recovery put forward by the Council of Canadians[199] as they focus on health and well-being, upholding Indigenous rights, and building resilience, solidarity, and equity. They also overlap with the focuses of Just Recovery Ontario[200] such as housing, employment, and services for people of all ages. However, since the priorities discussed in this report stem directly from the work of CBOs, they are also specific to the local context of inner-city Winnipeg.

> “Since responsibility for these systemic inequalities lies with governments rather than with CBOs, change will have to come from governments to address the systemic issues that continue to create inequality.”

Addressing the fractures and inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic will require significant investment and policy changes. Addressing the impact of the pandemic also requires action to address the inequalities present before the pandemic. Since responsibility for these systemic inequalities lies with governments rather than with CBOs, change will have to come from governments to address the systemic issues that continue to create inequality. The Council of Canadians’ call for a just recovery explicitly includes strengthening the social safety net and

providing relief directly to people.[201] CBOs also highlight the harm done by government institutions such as the carceral system[202] and Child and Family Services.[203] These are government responsibilities and will require substantial systemic policy change.

This moment is ripe to finally gain large-scale government support: the pandemic spurred governments to think big in terms of the funds mobilized for crisis response and, more recently, about economy-wide recovery planning. Activists and a growing proportion of the general public are pushing for responses that address inequality, colonialism, and climate change through the movement for a just recovery.[204] But this moment also contains tremendous risk for "shock doctrine"[205] policies, where austerity policies are pushed through while the public is distracted by crisis. These factors suggest that there is an opportunity to advocate for funding and investment in the inner city through community-based leadership and that doing so is crucial to counter the forces of neoliberalism.

To take advantage of this opportunity and move towards a just recovery, CBOs would benefit from explicitly coordinating their efforts and stating their priorities collectively. There are already many collaborative networks and connections between inner-city CBOs to activate; given their enduring work to provide and expand services during the pandemic in addition to the challenges presented to gathering and organizing during a pandemic, a collective vision and proposal for a just recovery has not yet been articulated. This chapter provides a summary of the themes from CBOs' work and a history of funding initiatives to inform new possibilities; it concludes with three next steps to develop a collective vision for a just recovery in the inner city.

Step 1: Community Engagement

Any plan for the inner city must keep the community's priorities at its heart. This can only be achieved through substantial community leadership in the creation and implementation of the plan. As Sherry Arnstein argued, "It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future."[206] Ensuring that those who have been marginalized through social, economic and colonial processes have the power to create new strategies and structures to improve their living conditions is essential.

When CBO leaders first discussed the idea of a just recovery as a focus for the *State of the Inner City* report, it was envisioned as a two-year process. This year's 2021 *State of the Inner City* is the first instalment, providing

a foundation for future community discussions. The second part will be based in community engagement about a just recovery and the themes identified here. Are these priorities accurate and current? What else might the community want to include? This process could start with a meeting of the CBO leaders who originally met back in Spring 2021 and new additions to that group. They could decide how to involve community members in the process and what resources they might need to educate and influence government decision-makers to support a just recovery.

Step 2: Government Funding

While communities and CBOs should lead the development and implementation of a process for a just recovery in the inner city, substantial investment and cooperation is needed to make such work possible. Federal, provincial and municipal governments have financial and other resources, including expertise in making and coordinating policy, navigating complex bureaucracy, and making connections across various policy and finance programs. Bringing these resources to the table would create a new playing field for the inner city and would greatly support the work already underway.

> "There should be community representation at all levels of decision-making in relation to funding, and funding must be provided to compensate CBO staff and community members for this higher-level planning and advocacy work."

Past experience has shown that tri-level agreements can work as a way to leverage resources. Intergovernmental collaboration would allow federal and provincial governments to have a greater impact through more efficient investments and would enable the municipal government to achieve a much larger impact than could be achieved unilaterally.[207] Each level of government provides programs and services in different areas; where there is overlap, or where the intersectional nature of an issue requires more than one intervention, coordination between departments and levels of government is essential. It would reduce duplication and enhance efficiency and, when combined with leadership from CBOs, result in more effective solutions to complex poverty.

However, a new federal, provincial and municipal funding agreement for the inner city must be more than a tri-level agreement: it must have a fourth level of community leadership and accountability. This can be achieved by ensuring that the community leads the planning process for a just recovery. There should be community representation at all levels of decision-making in relation to funding, and funding must be provided to compensate CBO staff and community members for this higher-level planning and advocacy work. In particular, the leadership of Indigenous

CBOs must be highlighted and supported. Reconciliation requires resources and funding at the community level to ensure that First Nation, Métis and Inuit priorities and self-determination are elevated and addressed. A just recovery therefore requires participation and accountability from all levels of government, following the lead of First Nations, Métis people and Inuit as well as Indigenous CBOs.

Step 3: Supportive Policy Changes

It is important to note that there are limits to what CBOs or funding alone can achieve. Too often, government policies exacerbate poverty and inequality. The broad failures and withdrawal of the social welfare state (including inadequate social assistance, healthcare, education and social housing), the child welfare system and the carceral system cannot be addressed at a local level; they must be dealt with through public policy at a government program level. Barriers also arise from colonial and capitalist structures that shape the opportunities available to different groups in society.[208]

Changes to these policies and structures from all levels of government, as well as from civil society, are needed to make a truly just recovery possible. These are complex challenges and will require complex, long-term solutions. Substantial research has been completed on the issues and potential solutions; inner-city CBOs and communities can develop principles to guide government policymaking and provide input and advice to ensure that changes in policy will address the root causes of structural inequity.

Conclusion

CBOs in the inner city are building community resilience through their work on Indigenous self-determination, intersectional equity, and the seven focus areas aligned with the social determinants of health: housing, food security, education and employment, healthcare, justice and safety, the built environment, and supports and connection. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed, complicated, and worsened many pre-existing issues in the inner city. Any plan for a recovery from COVID must consider not only recovery from the current pandemic, but also resilience for future pandemics or crises resulting from the ongoing climate emergency, the impacts of which are already being felt. As the impacts of climate change intensify, equitable

climate adaptation and consideration of best practices for mitigation must be integrated into all plans for recovery from the pandemic.

Change in policies and practices is needed to create equitable social and health outcomes for inner city residents and communities now and into the future. Funding and support provided through an agreement between federal, provincial, and municipal governments, guided by community priorities and leadership offers one way to leverage significant targeted funding to address manufactured vulnerability in a substantive way. This report was written as waves of COVID-19 continue to affect residents of Winnipeg's inner city. The idea of recovery, let alone a just recovery, is still elusive and changing. While this may be daunting, it is also a reminder of a new reality: future pandemics, climate change and other potential crises are inevitable. Planning for the long-term wellbeing of inner-city communities by their members is key to the work ahead. It's time to do this work together with all the wisdom, skills, and gifts that exist in the inner city.

Appendix 1:

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

THIS REPORT ANALYZED published information from 79 CBOs in inner-city Winnipeg. Community-based organizations are defined as non-profit, non-governmental, advocacy or charitable organizations that have a mandate to address and represent community needs. Organizations were selected using purposive sampling techniques.[209] Twenty-eight organizations were included because of pre-existing relationships with the State of the Inner City report process and CCPA-MB. From there, the list was expanded using snowball sampling to capture organizations that partner with those already on the list and those who had endorsed the same policy measures. This list was refined according to the following criteria:

- Organizations based within the geographic boundaries of the inner city and serving the inner city community;
- Organizations with sufficient information available online to review.

This list is not comprehensive as to all organizations working within the inner city and on issues facing the inner city. Notably, grassroots groups such as Justice4BlackLives Winnipeg and Budget for All did not surface in

the snowball sample. These groups are doing important advocacy work in the inner city, and their contributions and those of others not included in this report are not discounted by their omission.

Once the list of organizations was established, documents were selected for each organization. The final list of documents included 14 strategic plans, and 35 annual reports, and 28 websites in cases where no strategic or annual report was available. Publication dates range from 2018 to 2021, including both pre-pandemic and current documents.

The documents were analysed using a multi-step coding process.[210] First, the documents were sorted by the organizations' main focus area. Then, the documents were reviewed again to further refine the high-level categories, identify areas of overlap or intersection, and gather more details on the specific programs of each organization. Each document was reviewed at least three times to ensure that the analysis was consistent.

While this approach provides a high-level overview of the work of inner-city CBOs, its reliance on textual analysis rather than interviews or other forms of data collection means that the relationships and dynamics on the ground in the inner city are not visible. Practices of day-to-day decision-making in CBOs may be different from the written documents. For this reason, future research and work to advance a just recovery for the inner city must engage more directly with local communities and organizations.

Appendix 2:

Table of Organizations and Focus Areas

AS NOTED IN Appendix 1, this data is based on analysis of publicly available documents from CBOs. This table is not meant to serve as a directory or a comprehensive list of who is providing what programs. Some organizations may have programs that are not included here if those programs are not mentioned in their published materials; some organizations may have discontinued programs since their most recent report and those changes would not be reflected in this data. It is intended to provide more detail about the counts shown in *Table 2*.

TABLE 3 Table of Organizations and Focus Areas

CBO Name	Housing	Food	Education / Employ-ment	Health-care	Safety / Justice	Built Env.	Supports / Connection
1JustCity	yes	yes					yes
A & O Support Services							yes
Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre		yes	yes	yes			yes
Aboriginal Senior Resource Centre							yes
Accueil Francophone	yes		yes				yes
African Communities of Manitoba		yes	yes	yes	yes		yes
Andrews St Family Centre							yes
Aurora Family Therapy Centre				yes			yes
Bear Clan Patrol					yes		
Boys & Girls Club of Winnipeg			yes				yes
Broadway Neighbourhood Centre			yes				yes
Build Inc [social enterprise]			yes		yes		
CAHRD			yes	yes			yes
CCEDNet	yes	yes	yes				
Central Neighbourhoods	yes		yes		yes	yes	yes
Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation	yes		yes		yes	yes	yes
Community Education Development Association			yes				
Daniel McIntyre / St. Matthews Community Association	yes	yes			yes	yes	yes
Eagle Urban Transition Centre	yes		yes	yes			yes
Elizabeth Fry	yes		yes		yes		yes
End Homelessness Winnipeg	yes						
Ethnocultural Council of Manitoba			yes				
Fearless R2W	yes						yes
Food Matters Manitoba		yes					
Gain			yes	yes	yes		yes
Harvest Manitoba		yes					
Ikwe Widdjiitiwin	yes			yes			yes
Immigration Partnership Winnipeg			yes				yes
Inclusion Winnipeg							yes
Indigenous Family Centre							yes
Indigenous Vision for the North End							yes
Indigenous Women's Healing Centre	yes		yes	yes			yes
Innovative LIFE Options							yes
IRCOM	yes	yes					yes
John Howard	yes				yes		yes
Ka Ni Kanichihk	yes		yes	yes	yes		yes
Klinic				yes			
Knox United Church		yes	yes				yes
Local Investment Toward Employment			yes				
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre	yes	yes		yes			yes

TABLE 3 Table of Organizations and Focus Areas (con't)

CBO Name	Housing	Food	Education / Employ-ment	Health-care	Safety / Justice	Built Env.	Supports / Connection
Main St Project	yes	yes		yes			yes
Make Poverty History Manitoba	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Orgs	yes		yes	yes			
Manitoba Harm Reduction Network				yes			
Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities			yes				yes
Manitoba Moon Voices Inc			yes		yes		yes
Mawa							yes
Mosaic			yes				yes
Mount Carmel Clinic (including Sage House)				yes			yes
Native Addictions Council of Manitoba				yes			
Ndinawe	yes		yes				yes
New Directions	yes		yes	yes			yes
New Journey Housing	yes						
Nine Circles				yes			
North End Community Renewal Corporation	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
North End Women's Centre			yes	yes			yes
North Point Douglas Women's Centre				yes	yes		yes
Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinimatwin					yes		yes
Oshki-Giizhig	yes			yes			yes
Peaceful Village (MSIP)			yes				
Rainbow Resource Centre			yes				yes
RaY	yes	yes	yes	yes			yes
Right to Housing	yes						
Rossbrook House	yes	yes	yes				yes
SEED			yes				
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg			yes		yes		yes
Spence Neighbourhood Association	yes	yes	yes			yes	yes
SScope Inc			yes				
The Winnipeg Boldness Project			yes				
ThunderWing (Block by Block)							yes
Urban Circle Training Centre Inc			yes				
Wahbung Abinoonjiiag	yes	yes					yes
WASAC							yes
West Broadway Community Organization	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
West Central Women's Resource Centre	yes	yes	yes	yes			yes
Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation	yes						
Winnipeg Indigenous Executive Circle	yes		yes	yes	yes		yes
Wolseley Family Place							yes
Youth Agencies Alliance			yes				yes

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The Building Sustainable Communities Program After Two Years: Where Did the Money Go?

Shauna MacKinnon

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IN APRIL 2019, the Manitoba government announced a new program called Building Sustainable Communities (BSC). It was described as a program that would "streamline and modernize support for non-profit organizations" by amalgamating a number of programs into one fund. These included the previous Community Places capital grant program, Neighbourhoods Alive! Community Initiatives program and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund; Hometown Manitoba, the Community Planning Assistance Program; Community Support Small Grants Program and Partner 4 Growth.

No new funding was made available for the BSC Program but a very different set of rules were established. At least $2 million that previously flowed annually through Neighbourhoods Alive! (NA!) to neighbourhood revitalization in low-income, urban neighbourhoods and strategically targeted Northern and rural communities would now be part of the new

program (MacKinnon 2019). BSC fundamentally changes NA!, an initiative informed by research demonstrating the impact of targeted revitalization (Tatian et al 2012). NA! was initially inspired by the City of Minneapolis Neighbourhood Revitalization Program (NRP), which targeted funding to neighbourhoods in decline using a community-led approach. The NRP engaged neighbourhood residents "designing and implementing their own multiyear strategies aimed at combating blight and boosting neighborhood livability" (Nathanson 2014). In a 2010 evaluation, EKOS Research described NA! as a "best-practice example of a comprehensive, community-led revitalization program." It embraced a holistic approach toward improving a number of social, environmental, cultural, physical and economic conditions.

Funds previously allocated to NA!, which mainly supported program delivery including staffing (rather than capital projects), were rolled into the BSC Program and made available to all communities across the province. Unlike Neighbourhoods Alive!, BSC does not fund existing initiatives nor does it cover the cost of salaries. Additionally, the BSC program requires 50% of project costs to be leveraged from other sources, 10% of which must be non-government funding. Another important difference with the BSC is that it isn't solely available to community-based non-profit organizations. Municipalities and local authorities, including planning districts across Manitoba, are eligible to apply. This means that there is more competition for a relatively small pot of money.

Inner-city community-based organizations were sceptical of the program early on.

Through 34 surveys and 17 Interviews, the Manitoba Research Alliance learned that community-based organizations both within and outside of Winnipeg receiving funding through NA! in past years were 'blindsided' by and concerned about the new amalgamated program. They noted that although the change would have a serious impact on their work in the community, they had not been consulted. One Executive Director (E.D.) of an inner-city community-based organization (CBO) said the BSC criteria "… essentially means that BSC is out of reach for our organization." In response to the government's claims that the BSC Program would "streamline and reduce red tape," another E.D. noted, "there may be less red tape for the government, but BSC creates more difficulties for the sector." Concerned with the emphasis on capital projects and ineligibility of costs to operate programs, another E.D. summarized it this way: "BSC seems to fund things and not people. CBOs need stable, long-term core funding for staffing but the BSC has made staffing an ineligible expense."

Those interviewed observed that the new rules favoured rural municipalities with greater capacity to leverage matching funds. One E.D. pointed out a number of concerns with this new approach that gives municipalities the edge:

1. The BSC caps administration fees at 2.5 percent. This creates a barrier for non-profit organizations and works to the advantage of municipalities that have greater administrative capacity.

2. Unlike municipalities, non-profit organizations rely on charitable donations. The new rules stipulate that "donations of materials, equipment and labour are encouraged and will be recognized as part of the assessment of the project… however donations will not be considered part of the matching contributions." This E.D. further noted that "they want non-profit organizations (NPOs) to include volunteerism and donations for the project and to track these contributions, [yet] we are not able to use this as part of the budget approval process. This forces NPOs to work even harder and use even more of our limited resources to meet the fund criteria."

3. The evaluation and consultation process for the program has fundamentally changed. BSC replaces community organizations with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) in the consultation and evaluation process. This has been particularly concerning for urban CBOs because "rural municipalities dominate the AMM, which gives them a stronger voice."

Building Sustainable Communities and COVID-19

Less than one year after BSC was implemented, CBOs, especially those in the inner-city, were hit particularly hard by the pandemic. They scrambled to find new ways to support the most vulnerable in our communities. Funding agencies including the Winnipeg Foundation and United Way responded quickly, stepping up their support. Federal funding agencies also responded with more support for CBOs. The provincial government response was slow and inadequate. In May 2020, they announced a 25% increase to the BSC Program as part of its response to Covid-19, stating its "commitment to supporting projects that will help build thriving, sustainable communities and a better future for Manitobans." These grants, said the government, "will help give community organizations a much-needed boost during this unprecedented time and this investment is another way our government is

helping rebuild Manitoba's economy." However, the criteria that CBOs say makes the BSC Program inaccessible remained firmly intact. An analysis of funding allocations suggests their concerns were warranted.

Two Years Of BSC: Where Did the Money Go?

The Building Sustainable Communities Program has now been in place for two provincial budget cycles. Where did the money go? A list of projects supported through BSC has been made available through various press releases. While it is sometimes difficult to decipher exactly what is being funded, the following analysis and account is as accurate as possible.

Since it was first announced, more than 500 projects have been funded through the BSC. In the 2019–20 fiscal year, the Manitoba government's annual report shows BSC allocated $7.9[1] million for 227 projects. In the 2020–21 fiscal year, the annual report shows BSC allocated $10.6 million for 353 projects.

The 2019–20 annual report for the Manitoba Department of Municipal Relations shows regional distribution of BSC funds (*Table 1*). The annual report further describes distribution going to 191 capital, equipment and related projects; 22 community and regional initiatives and planning projects; and

TABLE 1 BSC by Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) District

AMM District	Number of Approved Projects	Total Funding Approved ($) 2019–2020
Central	22	740,401
Eastern	39	1,632,029
Interlake	28	795,059
Midwestern	24	513,248
Northern	9	407,680
Parkland	17	392,471
Western	36	1,159,933
Winnipeg	52	2,151,210
Total	**227**	**7,792,031**

Source 2019–20 Annual Report for the Manitoba Department of Municipal Relations. Available: https://www.gov.mb.ca/mr/annualreports/pubs/annual_report_2019_20.pdf

1 Although the annual report states $7.9 allocated, distribution as shown in Table 1 is $7,792,031.00. Author's calculations align with the latter.

CHART 1 BSC Funding Distribution 2019–20

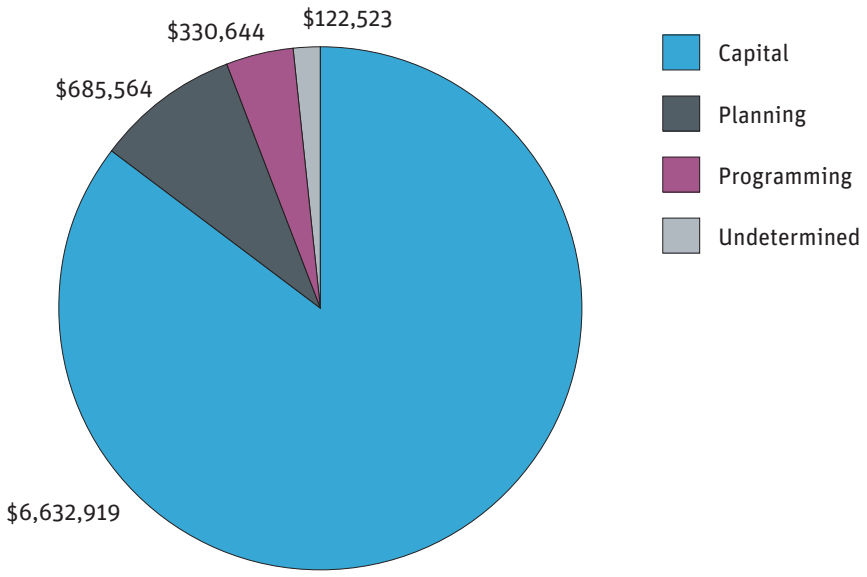
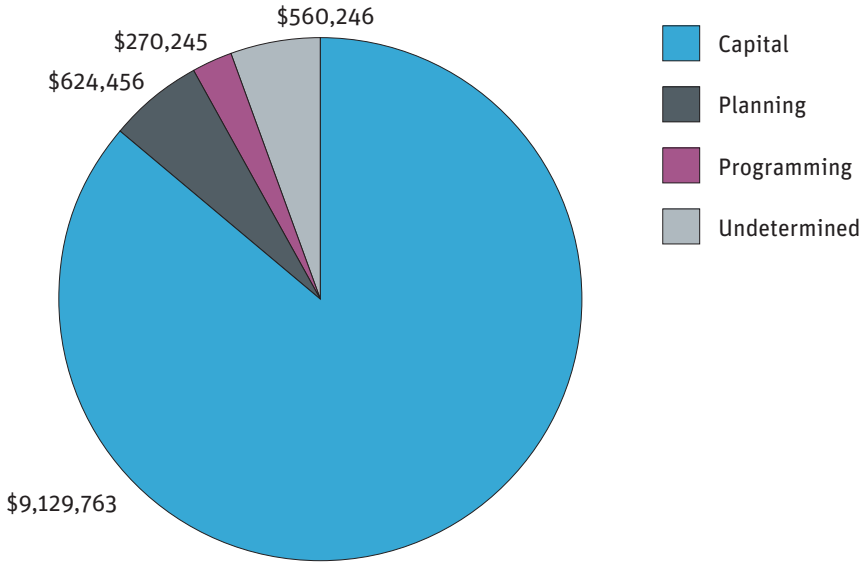


CHART 2 BSC Funding Distribution 2020–21



14 capacity-building projects (community programs). Notably, the amount of funding allocated to the entire city of Winnipeg is comparable to the amount that was previously allocated to low-income inner-city neighbourhoods through Neighbourhoods Alive!.

The government's annual report shows that approximately 84% of all BSC-supported projects in 2019/20 were capital projects. Our analysis shows that approximately $6.6 million (85%) of BSC funding went to capital projects across the province, with a relatively small amount ($330,644 – 4%) directed to programming (*Chart 1*).

Further analysis shows that of the $7.79 million allocated in 2019/20, $4.8 million went to rural communities, $2.2 million to projects in Winnipeg with approximately $907,000 allocated to inner-city neighbourhoods. Approximately $301,000 went to projects in Brandon and another $408,000 to projects in northern Manitoba communities. Of the projects funded in Winnipeg's inner-city, $684,750 (8.8%) supported capital projects, 131,250 (1.7%) went to planning projects and $91,088 (1.17%) went to support programming. Analysis of funding in 2019/20 shows a clear shift away from funding inner-city projects (*Chart 3*).

The picture is quite similar when looking at 2020/21 (*Chart 2*). As of March 1, 2021, fully 86% ($9.13M) of BSC funding went to capital projects across the province. A mere 2.5% ($270,245) went to programming and 6% ($624,456) for planning related projects. The remaining 5% of funding went to undetermined projects.[2]

Analysis of the BSC after two-years very clearly shows that inner-city organizations were correct to be concerned. Rural communities are getting the lion's share of Building Sustainable Communities funding.

Rural Municipalities

The analysis of funding distribution demonstrates that almost all of the funds previously allocated to inner-city neighbourhoods is now going elsewhere. Another notable difference is the amount of funding allocated to municipal governments and local authorities like planning districts. Despite the claims that the BSC aims to support non-profit organizations, it is notable that in 2019/20, approximately $1.6 million of BSC funds went to municipal governments and related agencies. In 2020/21, more than $2 million went to these agencies. With the exception of a small amount for

2 These appear to be capital projects however descriptions make it difficult to determine definitively.

CHART 3 BSC Geographic Distribution 2019–20

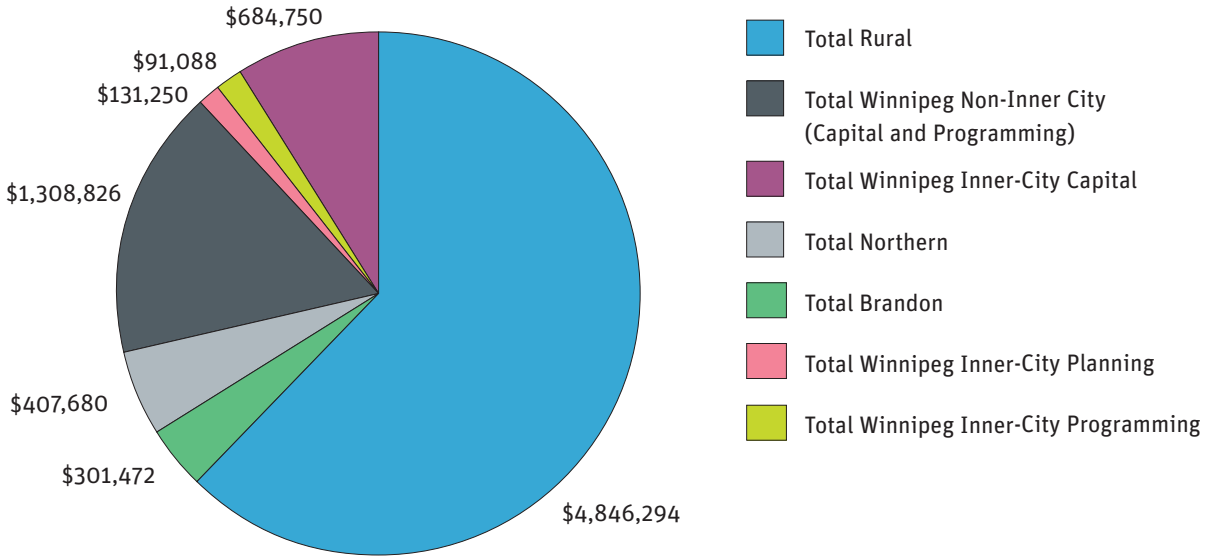
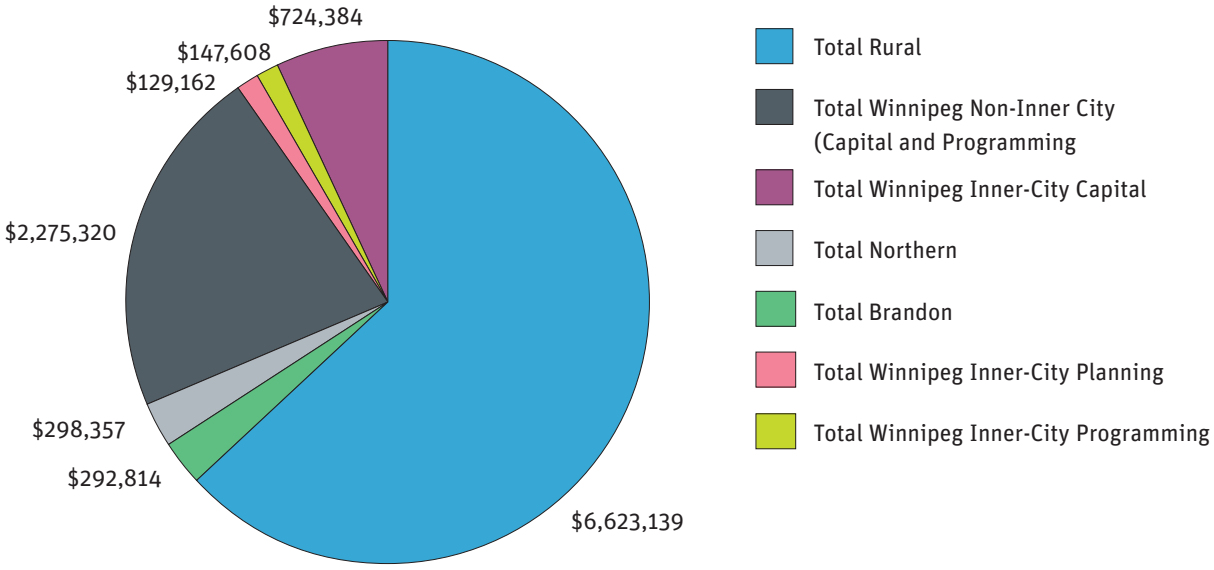


CHART 4 BSC Geographic Distribution 2020



planning activities, this funding supported capital projects ranging from various "equipment upgrades " to "blackout motorized shades" awarded to the rural municipality of West St. Paul and "heating system upgrades" awarded to the W.B. Lewis Business Centre in Lac du Bonnet. As noted, community-based organizations expressed concerns early on that municipalities would have an edge because they have greater access to matching funds and administrative capacity. It is also not a surprising outcome given the active role that the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) has in the application approval process. The BSC guidelines note that applications are reviewed within government, however they also state that the AMM is involved in reviewing and providing feedback on project applications. It is also the case that municipal governments and regional development agencies have greater capacity to raise matching funds and identify other means to operate programs to meet the BSC criteria. These are all issues of concern raised by inner-city community based organizations.

Chart 4 shows that fully 63% of BSC funds distributed in 2020/21 went to rural communities (excluding Brandon and northern communities which received 6% of total funding). Just 22% was allocated to initiatives in Winnipeg (non-inner city) and only 3% of that was allocated to programming in the inner-city.

Inner-City of Winnipeg and Low-Income Communities

The Province is likely to say that projects awarded funding reflect the applications received. While that may be the case, inner-city CBOs have

TABLE 2 BSC Allocation by Census Subdivision and Low-Income Measure

Census Subdivision	BSC 2019–2021	Percentage living below the LICO – AT*
Lac Du Bonnet	$1,341,733	7.2
Riding Mountain	$1,039,824	4
Turtle Mountain	$979,456	3.5
Gimli-Interlake	$872,658	4.6
Dauphin	$721,102	7
Winnipeg Centre	$415,000	24.6

Source Statistics Canada Census Profile 2016
* Low Income Cut-Off After-Tax
** Low Income Measure After-Tax

been very clear that the criteria of the BSC has made it near impossible to access funding, and many tell us they have chosen not to apply. As shown in *Table 2*, the inequity is quite stark. The inner-city of Winnipeg has been awarded approximately $361,000 over two years to support programming in the lowest-income communities in our province compared to the previous NA! funding, which allocated the majority of its $4 million to programming over a similar two-year span. Beyond NA!, inner-city organizations were also able to apply to the various other pools of funding amalgamated into BSC. BSC thus represents a significant drop in investments in low-income, urban neighbourhoods. Additionally, almost $5 million out of the BSC's two-year total of $18.3 million has gone to support projects in just five communities with a relatively small percentage of low-income households.

Building Sustainable Communities Looking Forward

In a January 2021 press release, the Manitoba Government announced that it has "expanded the BSC to include support for larger-scale capital projects." Municipalities, non-profit and community-led organizations across Manitoba are now eligible for up to $300,000 for capital projects. Budget 2021 confirmed "$5.6 million more for the Building Sustainable Communities Program to fund more than 10 larger-scale community capital projects" with an additional $5M announced in June 2021. Given that the 50% leveraging requirement continued to apply, it is unlikely that large-scale capital projects will take place in the inner-city.

Funding for other categories (planning and capacity building) remains unchanged with a maximum of $75,000 available, again with a required matching contribution. That means we are likely to see very limited funding in the inner-city to support much needed programs and services.

What is clear about the BSC, and what differentiates it from the now extinct Neighbourhoods Alive! initiative, is that BSC criteria does not consider inequity and disparity across the province. The BSC Program works best for communities with the most capacity to leverage matching funds and operate programs through other means.

The BSC appears to be working best for rural communities, especially those in the southern part of the province. That should come as no surprise — the Progressive Conservatives have strong support in these communities. While these communities should have access to support for projects such as those

funded through the BSC, it should not come at the expense of low-income, racialized urban neighbourhoods in greatest need.

Manitoba continues to need a program tailored and targeted at low-income urban neighbourhoods. If the provincial government wants to demonstrate that it is not a government that favours its rural strongholds — that it recognizes the unique and urgent needs of low-income, racialized, inner-city neighbourhoods — it must create a comprehensive funding mechanism that responds to the needs and realities of these neighbourhoods and remove requirements that exclude community organizations from accessing much-needed funding.

What's Going on With Portage Place?

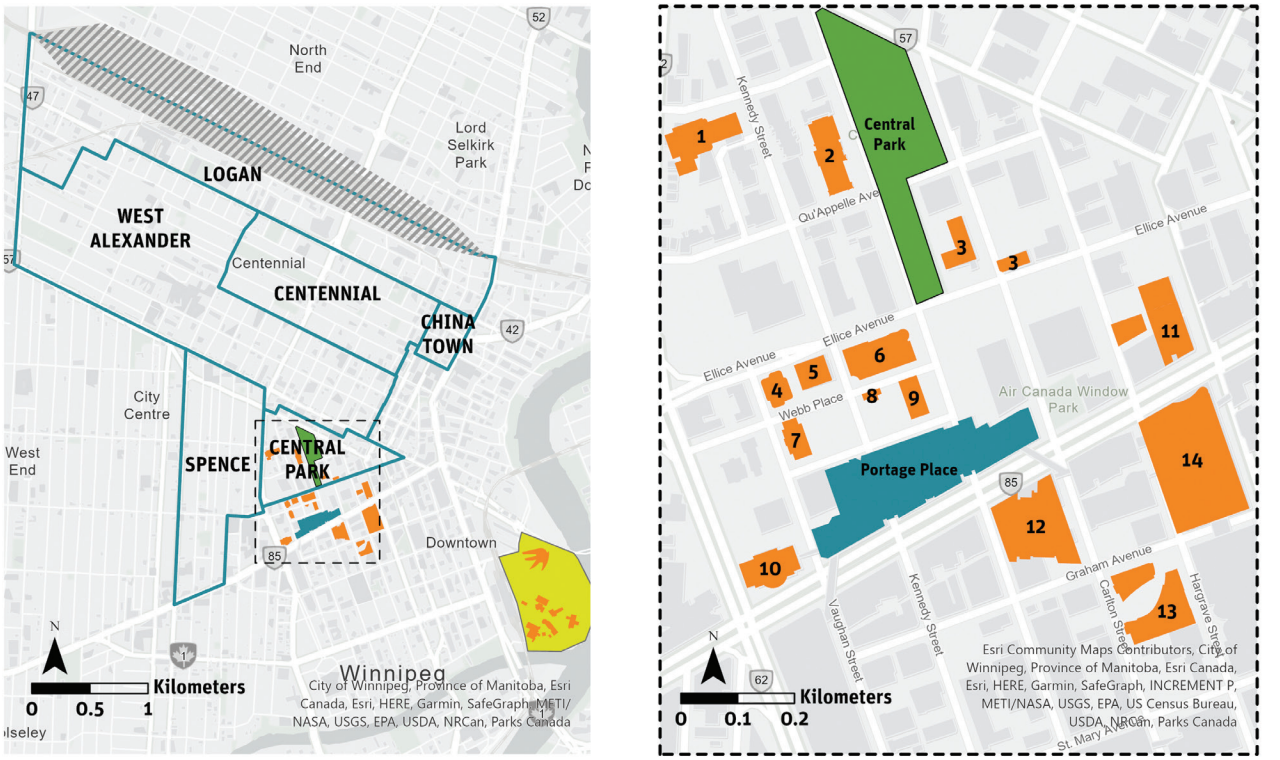
Owen Toews

"I think the lesson that I'm taking away is that we have the vision and capacity in Winnipeg to redevelop Portage Place." — *Michael Champagne*

Introduction

The story of Portage Place is just beginning. At thirty-five years young, Winnipeg's quintessential mix of visiting, resistance, and creativity is at a turning point. The proposed sale of Portage Place Mall to Starlight Acquisitions — requested in 2019 by the Forks North Portage Partnership (which owns the land under Portage Place) and opposed by the community — fell through in September of 2021. As the powers that be quietly scramble to find another developer to gentrify the mall, the door has opened for community leaders to make a counter proposal for Portage Place and seize the public conversation. Since 2019, inner-city community leaders have established the broad outlines of a four-pillared vision for Portage Place based on priorities that radically differ from those of corporate property owners and business-oriented politicians. (1) Portage Place should become a non-profit community centre (that may include for-profit stores offering affordable

FIGURE 1 Map of Central Neighbourhoods and Important Sites



Legend

- CPR Yards
- Central Park
- Portage Place
- The Forks
- Other significant buildings

1 - Sister Mac School
2 - Knox United Church
3 - Quest Health & Natawiwewak Clinic
4 - Fred Douglas Place
5 - Hotel Royal Plaza
6 - Symcor Building
7 - Kiwanis Chateau
8 - Iqra Islamic School
9 - Place Promenade
10 - Investors Group Building
11 - Glasshouse Condos & Alt Hotel
12 - MB Hydro Building

necessities, as determined by the community) primarily for the people in the neighbourhood, rather than a corporate shopping mall aspiring to entertain suburbanites attending Jets games. (2) Hundreds of new rent-geared-to-income social housing units should be built at Portage Place. (3) A real safety plan that centres Indigenous women and girls should replace the current security approach. (4) Indigenous peoples should own Portage Place. What is needed now is a formal counter proposal, based on these four pillars, for communities to rally around. This chapter aims to educate people interested in fighting for that community vision about the basic facts of the situation, including who has done what over the past two and a half years. It aims to build confidence in the possibility of a community-driven future for Portage Place and to document how ordinary people have already made progress toward it.

This chapter is made up of five sections that discuss: the history of inner-city community action that led to Portage Place; the past and present community connection to Portage Place, especially Indigenous peoples' connection; the gentrification frontier that advanced toward Portage Place starting in the early 2010s; the Forks North Portage Partnership's proposed sale of Portage Place to Starlight in 2019 and the different phases of community resistance that followed, with a focus on lessons learned by those involved; and a summary of where things stand now, including opportunities and challenges for community action.[1]

Community Action Led to Portage Place

The story of Portage Place began with one of the earliest campaigns against the City of Winnipeg's organized abandonment of the city centre: the fight to relocate the Canadian Pacific Railway yards that run through the heart of the city. In 1977, the City approved a plan to destroy homes and community spaces in the Centennial, West Alexander, and Logan neighbourhoods (sometimes referred to today as the Central neighbourhoods) to make way for an overpass spanning the rail yards at Sherbrook and McGregor Streets.[2] Residents mounted a popular, high-profile campaign against this proposal, insisting that their homes and community spaces were precious. They unified around a counter proposal to relocate the rail yards instead of bulldozing their homes, and to spend the money that would be saved on the repair and replacement of bridges and overpasses, on affordable housing, daycares, community clinics, youth recreation facilities, and other community spaces in the inner city.

A strong community development ethos had been fostered among neighbourhood residents in the years prior to the City's overpass proposal, marked by a belief that communities have the right to determine their own futures, that neighbourhoods should be refurbished for the people who live in them and not bulldozed, and that the key to urban improvement is investing in people not corporate profits. Local organizations that espoused and supported such views at the time included the Centennial Neighbourhood Improvement Committee, Community Education Development Association, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Indian Métis Friendship Centre, Kinew Housing, Winnipeg Chinese Development Corporation, Rossbrook House, Company of Young Canadians, Dufferin Elementary School, and St. Matthews-Maryland Christian Centre. The idea of redeveloping the rail

yards to meet community needs built, in part, on planning completed by Indigenous community organizers between 1969 and 1975, to remake Winnipeg's Main Street strip into a Native village called Neeginan, operated by and for Indigenous peoples, consisting of affordable housing, schools, clinics, daycares, youth recreation space, and worker co-operatives.[3]

Key to Central neighbourhoods residents' momentum was their ability to broaden the definition of the problem from the City's attack on their specific neighbourhoods to the City's deliberate neglect of a much larger area that the community took to calling the "inner city." By framing it as an inner-city issue they were able to unite a broader coalition of community organizations — including Indigenous organizations, churches, schools, residents' associations, and small businesses — from beyond their immediate neighbourhoods, under the banner of the Inner City Committee for Rail Relocation. In 1980, the coalition successfully defeated the Sherbrook-McGregor overpass. Today, the elementary school in Central Park is named after a leader of the rail relocation movement, Rossbrook House founder Sister Geraldine MacNamara.[4]

Shortly after, in 1980, Liberal MP for Winnipeg South Centre, Lloyd Axworthy, announced that in response to the rail relocation movement's calls for the government to reinvest in Winnipeg's inner city, he was creating something called the Core Area Initiative. The five-year, $96 million ($304 million in 2021 dollars) Core Area Initiative would be funded equally by the municipal, provincial, and federal governments and would be followed by three more such five-year plans (for more on these agreements, see Chapter 1 starting on page 25), with total funding of $346 million (roughly $577 million in 2021 dollars). However, instead of funding the kinds of community facilities prioritized by the rail relocation movement, the bulk of Core Area Initiative money from 1981 to 1991 was spent on Portage Place and The Forks, shopping centres that inner-city residents never asked for.[5] To build Portage Place, the Core Area Initiative destroyed homes and community spaces between Ellice and Portage Avenue — precisely the bulldozing that the rail relocation movement had opposed — and ignored community leaders' demands around affirmative action, affordable housing, and safety.[6] The three levels of Canadian government spent $20 million ($45 million in 2021 dollars) to build Portage Place, retaining public ownership of the land and underground parking beneath the mall, and handing the mall itself over to commercial real estate firm Cadillac Fairview, who contributed $12 million to the mall.[7]

In 1990, a new coalition with strong leadership from Indigenous women community leaders, including Dorothy Betz and Kathy Mallett, launched the Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization. The Inquiry received presentations from ninety community organizations, including Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata, Native Women's Transition Centre, and the Original Women's Network. The Inquiry blasted the Core Area Initiative for spending public money on shopping centres that "have not met the basic shelter, employment and other needs of many inner city residents, nor have they provided significant 'trickle down' benefits to core area people."[8] Instead, Inquiry organizers proposed an alternative city-centre improvement agenda centring the well-being of Indigenous women and children. Their alternative prioritized funding for women's resource centres, preschools, parent-child centres, community clinics, post-natal programs, and housing for women including women escaping intimate partner violence. The Community Inquiry made it evident that the Core Area Initiative had co-opted the political activity of inner-city people and sidelined their actual demands. It is not a stretch to say that Portage Place represents the misappropriation — so far — of $45 million in public funding from affordable housing, daycares, community clinics, and youth recreation space called for by the Inner City Committee for Rail Relocation and the Community Inquiry Into Inner-City Revitalization.

Portage Place Has Always Belonged to the People

The neighbourhood that was flattened to build Portage Place was lively, valuable, and home to a loving community. As a girl in the 1970s and 1980s, Jackie Traverse lived with her dad, Joseph Fabian, in the West End and Central Park neighbourhoods of downtown Winnipeg. They lived on Cumberland Avenue and later on Furby Street, but for Traverse, who is Anishinaabe from Lake St. Martin First Nation, it was the sweet streets between Ellice and Portage Avenues — Kennedy, Edmonton, Carlton, Hargrave, Donald — that were special. For as long she can remember, Traverse has been drawn to those streets, first on daily trips with her dad, then as a teenager, arcading with friends at video-game spots and pool halls (Long John Silver's, Circus Circus, Las Vegas, Magic Land, Dr. Q's) shopping at fun stores (Dominion News, O'Calcutta) and sharing meals at cheap cafés (Manhattan Restaurant, Family Hamburger House). Traverse was sixteen when Axworthy's Core Area Initiative expropriated and bulldozed most of her and her friends' favourite hangouts.

When construction fences went up on Portage Avenue around the ruins, young people in the neighbourhood quickly retook the space by covering the tall, sky-blue walls with graffiti.[9] Traverse, now a renowned multi-disciplinary artist, created one of her first pieces: a giant spray-painted heart with an arrow through it and the words, "JACKIE LOVES LES."[10] (Les was her boyfriend at the time). "It was too big to miss," Traverse recalls, laughing, "you'd be like, 'Oh yeah look, there's construction, oh, and look at that, Jackie loves Les.'" Traverse's graffiti so dominated the streetscape that the city's official narrators felt compelled to dispel any notion that "JACKIE LOVES LES" was the story of what was happening there. "I think it was the *Free Press*, or something, was writing about, like, what's going to be built there," Traverse continued, "and he mentioned, like, 'Who cares if Jackie loves Les?'" The columnist's point was, as Traverse remembers it, that "they're putting a mall there and we don't care if Jackie loves Les,' you know, that's not what this is about." The real lesson of the fences, typically overlooked by the cheerleaders of capitalist progress, was that the neighbourhood, and its residents' love for one another, were not going anywhere.

While its goal was to boost real estate values by luring white suburbanites with disposable income to shop downtown, from the day it opened in 1987, Portage Place was adopted by locals who made it part of their lives and fought for their right to be there. The escalators had barely started turning when it became clear that the Indigenous neighbourhood was a problem for mall management.[11] Over the years, despite its corporate owners' focus on enforcing urban apartheid for the comforts of white shoppers, neighbourhood residents built up a longstanding community in the food court, atriums, and other common spaces of Portage Place.[12]

"The nickname we had for it was Indian Place, because that's where all the Indigenous people would hang out," explained Ian Ross, celebrated Anishinaabe and Métis playwright, who frequented the area before Portage Place was built and lived in an apartment connected to the mall during its early years. When Portage Place opened, young people such as Ross, Traverse and their friends flocked to the charming mall that had replaced their old haunts. To this day, at the age of 52, nearly two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Traverse goes to Portage Place virtually every day. "I know everybody at that mall," Traverse boasts, "and it's usually the same people that have been coming there for years." Over the years, Portage Place gained a quintessential place in Winnipeg culture, featuring in the work of writers such as Marvin Francis, Trevor Greyeyes, Tasha Spillett, and Chimwemwe Undi. Now in its thirty-fifth year, the mall has ingrained itself

across generations and phases of life. For the last fifteen years of her dad's life, Traverse visited with him at Portage Place on a weekly basis, meeting up for fish and chips at Cherry Creek Café after her dad's daily workout at the Portage Place YMCA.

Many residents' connections to Portage Place, however, are far more profound than the brief arcs of their own lives. When I asked Traverse about the Core Area Initiative's goal of using Portage Place to change the demographics of the neighbourhood, she replied, "I never believed that would happen. Like when people would say that, I'm like, 'No way.'" This belief is rooted in Traverse's knowledge of the deep Indigenous connection to the area. In response to a 2000s Downtown BIZ campaign against Indigenous people panhandling on Portage Avenue, Traverse began to envision an art piece that would assert Indigenous peoples' right to make lives of their choosing in downtown Winnipeg. "I was like, 'These people don't have a right to do this,' because they don't know the history here, you know, that our people have a right to be here, and our people are drawn to this place because for thousands of years our relatives have used this place and walked this way and sat this way." Traverse created the piece in 2020—it is featured on the cover of this report and will soon be installed on the ceiling of a new building at the downtown Winnipeg campus of Red River College.

In the piece, Traverse explains, "I say that our people have a right to be in this area, to be downtown, if they want to be with their ancestors. You know, it's a blood memory thing, it's a DNA thing, and that's just naturally where the people are drawn to, to walk with our ancestors... I wanted to say how important it was that our people be allowed in the area, without being looked down on." Traverse now has hopes for a public art installation near Portage Place, to install solar panel projectors that will project archival images of Indigenous peoples walking on the land that became downtown Winnipeg. "It's the same thing," Traverse explains, "we're still doing the same thing, it's just we're just not dragging around our tipis and our horses and stuff, our people are still going the same way, to do the things they need to do in their daily lives, just like the people were then. Why should we think that now, 'oh, with the concrete jungle, these people don't have a right to be here no more?' It's still on the land, people are connected to the land. That's one thing people don't understand, you know, there's an actual connection to land, and places, and spirit." Over the past thirty-five years, the Portage Place community has vigorously resisted organized attempts to sever that connection.

Resistance to the policing of Indigenous people at Portage Place ratcheted up during the early days of the Idle No More movement — which not coincidentally kicked off in Winnipeg at a three thousand-person round dance inside Portage Place[13] — and in the years to follow, when hundreds of supporters held flash mobs and round dances inside the mall in support of Annie Henry, Joseph Meconse, and other Indigenous people harassed, assaulted, and/or evicted by the mall's security force.[14] Guards attempted to ban Traverse herself from the mall, for videoing them as they assaulted a young Indigenous woman. It was a proclamation she refused to recognize. "There's no keeping me out," said Traverse, laughing, "like even if you say I'm not allowed in there, I'll go in through the next door." Indeed, attempts to push Indigenous peoples out of Portage Place have only backfired.

In 2016, following the groundswell of support for the aforementioned Joseph Meconse, a pipe ceremony was held in the central atrium of Portage Place to honour Meconse (who passed away three years later, in 2019) and name him the official ambassador and Ogichidaa of Portage Place.[15] (Ogichidaa is Ojibwa for warrior, veteran, or ceremonial head). The ceremony lent credence to a common feeling at the mall: Portage Place shopping mall is better referred to as Portage Place First Nation. For Meconse's daughter, Renata Meconse, who often visited with her dad at Portage Place, "Portage Place First Nation" signals that there is a real community at Portage Place, that people there are connected to each other, and identify as part of that community. "Being a part of the Portage Place community, I would call it a community, we even dubbed it the Portage Place First Nation, how much we felt a part of it and made it our own, and he [Joseph Meconse] was given the name Ogichidaa there being a veteran and for his role in that community," said Renata.

The meaning of Portage Place First Nation, for Renata, is also about Indigenous peoples' response to colonial displacement and their making of new communities in the city. "If you think about it," Renata explained, "Winnipeg is made up of many First Nations people from all over. We have the highest population of Indigenous people across Canada…Portage Place is a community for people like my dad. This includes people who have been displaced at some point in their lives. For Joe, he was displaced from his community as a little boy and he didn't go back to his community [Sayisi Dene First Nation] for a very long time, so for a big part of his life, Winnipeg was his home. He had friends and family meet him there at Portage Place, it was a place where he could be with others and they could see him…And we also have people travelling from their First Nations coming in to shop, coming

in for medical, and often are having to wait in between their appointments and travelling back home."

Joseph Meconse was the product of, and helped shape, an inclusive, caring, community-minded Portage Place that fosters relationships between people from all walks of life. "My dad," said Renata, "he was the people's person. He knew and was friends with people from all walks of life. He knew people in...the powwow community, the unemployed, people who worked downtown, our relatives who were struggling, real people who make up the fabric of our community, our city...My dad would also see the guys who had spent time in the penitentiary there too, and they would come and say hello to him. There was mutual respect between each other and that really spoke to who my dad was." Renata continued, "At Portage Place First Nation, people can always count on getting a coffee and sharing if they don't have the money to get a coffee, or a meal, or whatever, they might be able to get a friend to do that, and sometimes my dad was that friend, and sometimes he would be on the receiving end of getting a coffee or a meal from one of his friends." Portage Place is a rare venue where people for whom the rest of the city can be largely unwelcoming — teenagers, elderly people, formerly imprisoned people, unhoused people, people who use drugs — have created community. "[Portage Place] is a place where a lot of people who are struggling with homelessness have been able to find warmth and company," said Fearless R2W organizer Michael Champagne, "It is also a place where a lot of people who are using drugs were able to find a place...A lot of Indigenous young people that are aging out of child welfare and also struggling with housing are able to connect with one another." This, Champagne said, is what makes Portage Place a true "community asset."

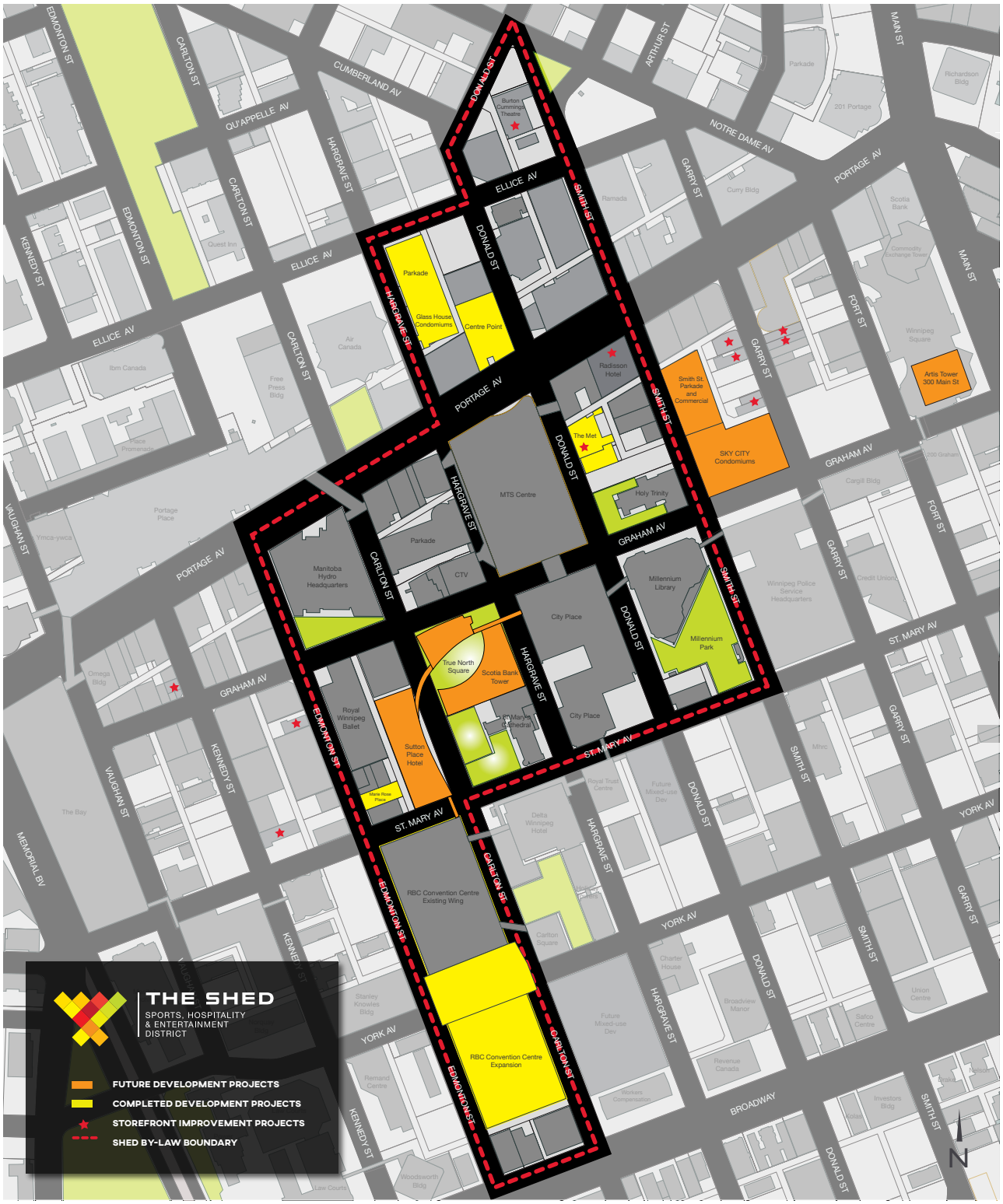
Like everywhere else, there are legitimate safety concerns at Portage Place — above all, the safety of Indigenous women and girls. Corporate ownership's aggressive policing of the mall only makes it less safe and is not capable of addressing real harms such as sexual exploitation or intimate partner violence. (Bear Paw Security, an Indigenous security firm hired after Meconse's eviction, ended up no better than the rest, according to Jenna Wirch, a long-time helper in the Winnipeg community. "It's the same violence being perpetuated by our own brown people now," said Wirch, "I was a victim of being pushed out by Bear Paw Security, so I know first-hand what it's like.") Members of the Portage Place community acknowledge safety concerns, but refuse to let them define Portage Place. For instance, the buying and selling of criminalized drugs is sometimes mentioned as an activity that makes Portage Place unsafe, but Traverse made the point that

big crowds anywhere attract people who buy and sell drugs. "There's always a bad side to people gathering like that, like if you know there's going to be large crowds of people and you want to make money," she explained. "I've seen times that it felt dangerous to go there," said Meconse, "There was times when I think there was violent things that have happened there, and I always felt bad about that, that it had gone that way, or it had gone down that way, because I personally have had a lot of good experiences there." Traverse, Meconse, and other members of the Portage Place community readily acknowledge the need to make Portage Place safer — especially from racial profiling, harassment, and assaults committed by security guards — through measures that prioritize de-escalation, harm-reduction, and people's right to be downtown without spending money.

Portage Place has also become a rare place for peoples with different experiences of colonialism (British or otherwise), of oppression under the Canadian racial order, and of kindred anti-colonial traditions to associate. It has, in Champagne's words, "become a space for Indigenous peoples and newcomers to build relationships." (The term "newcomers" is widely used in Winnipeg to refer to people who have recently moved to Canada, especially from non-Western countries). Over seventy percent of all refugees who arrive in Winnipeg settle in Central Park neighbourhood, where Portage Place is located.[16] Thousands of immigrants and refugees live in Central Park, Chinatown, Centennial, and other neighbourhoods within a short walk of Portage Place, and use the mall daily.[17] "In this community there are a lot of newcomers," a neighbourhood resident named Maan told Humans of Portage Place, an Instagram account published in 2019. "Portage Place is also an important meeting place for us. Isolation is a big problem for us when we are new to the community so we need the community space that Portage Place provides. It is the heart of our area. We practice English there. We see our friends. Communication is very important."[18]

As it became clear that Portage Place is, more than anything, a gathering place for Indigenous peoples, migrants, and refugees, the goods and services offered there became more relevant to the neighbourhood. Through the 2000s and 2010s, Portage Place retailers shifted from expensive luxuries to affordable necessities. Portage Place now offers a variety of affordable hot food, clothing, medicine, household items, and (not so affordable) phone plans. These items are accompanied by affordable fitness services at the YMCA, access to social assistance at a Service Canada office, legal assistance at the Legal Help Centre, family counselling at Family Dynamics, art programs at Artbeat Studio, live theatre at Prairie Theatre Exchange, a dentist's office,

FIGURE 2 SHED Map



Source CentreVenture

and an optometrist. All of these are connected by indoor, climate-controlled walkways, ramps, and elevators, in a tree-lined, sun-filled setting, making Portage Place one of the most accessible spaces in the city and a frequent destination for accessible transit. For the past decade, however, the future of Portage Place as a community asset has been put in jeopardy.

The Coming of the Gentrification Frontier

After the suburbanization of North American cities in the mid-twentieth century, real estate investors began to see an opportunity for high rates of profit in older city centres where property had become cheap, as long as they could rebrand older urban spaces to appeal to affluent, usually white suburbanites. This process of buying up cheap city-centre property, displacing existing lower-income residents — who are more likely to be Black, Indigenous, immigrants, or refugees — and replacing them with a more profitable, whiter clientele, is known as gentrification.[19] Geographer Neil Smith found that gentrification tends to advance along a "frontier of profitability" that is an actual physical location that distinguishes areas of disinvestment from areas of reinvestment. Behind the gentrification frontier, property values are increasing, properties are being "revitalized," and people are being pushed out. Ahead of the frontier, property values are still stagnant, owners are not investing in their properties, and lower-income homes and community spaces remain intact. Locating gentrification frontiers can assist communities in anticipating and defending against displacement. Indeed, there is evidence that a gentrification frontier began creeping towards Portage Place ten years ago.[20]

Following the 2002 demolition of the Portage Avenue Eaton's store, the construction, in its place, of a hockey arena owned by the city's super-rich Chipman family and paid for, in part, with $40 million in public money, and the 2011 arrival of a National Hockey League (NHL) franchise co-owned by the Chipmans and Toronto-based billionaire David Thomson, the Manitoba NDP government announced in 2012 that an eleven-block area surrounding the arena and bordering on Portage Place would become Manitoba's first-ever tax increment financing zone. The decision meant that all future real estate investors in the district would, instead of paying taxes, pay into a special fund for the "mall management" of the area.[21] A miniature real estate boom in the Sports, Hospitality, and Entertainment District (SHED) followed (See Figure X), with a luxury condo tower and boutique hotel going up on the

north side of Portage Avenue, a block east of Portage Place, and even more investment going into True North Square, a $400-million luxury condo, hotel, office, and retail complex owned by the Chipman family in partnership with the Winnipeg-based billionaire Richardson family and the Vancouver-based billionaire Gagliardi family, a block south of Portage Place.[22]

Through their "mall management" strategy, the Chipman family and their billionaire associates have aggressively removed Indigenous peoples and poor working-class people from the area around True North Square, and clearly view doing so as crucial to the profitability of their investments. Soon after the Province's commitment of funds, CentreVenture carried out the mass-eviction and demolition of two hundred units of short-term housing primarily used by First Nations peoples visiting the city for medical appointments. It was explicitly the removal of the inhabitants of the Carlton Inn and St. Regis Hotel — not merely the demolition of the structures — that was portrayed as key to clearing the way for new investment in the area.[23]

Policing of local people intensified at the onset of the "mall management" era. Most infamous, perhaps, was the Winnipeg Police Service's 2016 operation "Centreline" which deployed two hundred specially trained foot patrols within one kilometer of the hockey arena to police not crime but "social disorder."[24] Indoor gathering places connected to the arena via the city's skywalk pedestrian corridor system are now more policed than before the creation of the SHED. "City Place is a big one," said Wirch, speaking of the mall located between True North Square and the hockey arena. "Much more security, at Robin's Donuts, there, people are like, getting ushered to move. Inside the skywalks, from City Place to [the hockey arena] they're just getting moved out, kicked out…they target our houseless relatives who just want to gather." Portage Place, one block away from the Chipmans' hockey arena and directly connected to it by the skywalk system, was affected from early on.

Soon after the NHL's return to Winnipeg, the Forks North Portage Partnership — owners of the underground parking lot beneath Portage Place — began marketing special Portage Place parking packages to NHL ticketholders.[25] Interlocutors said they have since witnessed increased policing, especially by Winnipeg Police Service cadets, of community members in Portage Place on NHL game days. The Forks North Portage Partnership was an early backer of the mall management of the Sports, Hospitality, and Entertainment District and even contributed land it owned at 315 Portage Avenue to the Alt Hotel development.[26] Inner-city community leaders speculate that Portage Place is likely much too close to True North Square for the Chipmans and

their billionaire associates to tolerate it as an Indigenous gathering place indefinitely. Indeed, interlocutors pointed out that the Chipmans chose 190 Disraeli Freeway, nearly two kilometres away, next door to most of the city's jail-like shelter infrastructure, as the location its security patrols will take so-called vulnerable people after picking them up from around True North Square.[27] The tentative integration of Portage Place into the NHL-based gentrification agenda down the block set the stage for a dramatic series of events starting in 2019.

The Starlight Threat

As Portage Place transitioned from aspiring luxury mall to neighbourhood gathering place, its corporate owners lost interest. In 2015, then-and-current owner, Vancouver-based Peterson Group, admitted it had stopped investing in Portage Place, wanted to sell it, and to find a buyer, wanted the Forks North Portage Partnership to include the publicly-owned land and underground parking in a package deal. Ominously, large real estate developers seem to value the land and parking lots beneath Portage Place much more than the mall itself. Soon after, the Forks North Portage Partnership began to offer Portage Place—land and underground parking included—for sale to big firms across the country.[28]

Early Community Resistance

In early summer, 2019, people in Central Park caught wind that changes were afoot at Portage Place. At a meeting of the Central Park Stewardship Committee, a Forks North Portage Partnership spokesperson announced that the Forks North Portage Partnership was actively seeking to sell off the land and lucrative parking garage it owned beneath Portage Place.[29] Community-minded groups at the meeting protested, telling the spokesperson that the neighbourhood must have a say in the future of the publicly-owned components of Portage Place and that the government-owned Forks North Portage Partnership must not sell the land before consulting with the community. The spokesperson responded that The Forks could not survive without the cash from the sale of Portage Place, and that was that. There would be no consultation.

The Forks North Portage Partnership's manoeuvres have everything to do with what Portage Place and The Forks have become over the past thirty

years. Both were built by the Core Area Initiative and maintained by the Forks North Portage Partnership for the same reason: to attract a whiter and more affluent clientele to the city centre and spur gentrification. The Forks succeeded in doing so and Portage Place failed. While the Forks — especially Oodena Celebration Circle, the monument honouring missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the rivers themselves — attracts inner-city residents and is frequently used for Indigenous gatherings, it has become a city-wide destination that attracts a significant number of suburbanites and tourists, while Portage Place has not. For years, the Forks North Portage Partnership has funneled approximately $5 million per year[30] in parking revenues and ground rents out of the Portage Place neighbourhood and into The Forks, indicating that the corporation prioritizes the enjoyment of the whiter and more affluent suburban and tourist clientele that the Forks is able to attract, over the quality of life of Portage Place's largely low-income, Black, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee clientele. It was in early summer, 2019, that it became clear, according to community helpers who attended the committee meeting, that the Forks North Portage Partnership was committed to washing its hands of the Portage Place community once and for all, and in one fell swoop shifting all the Core Area Initiative's public investment out of Portage Place and into The Forks.

Soon after that meeting, on July 5, 2019, the Forks North Portage Partnership announced a tentative deal to sell Portage Place to Toronto-based, Daniel Drimmer-founded Starlight Acquisitions, one of the country's largest and most notorious slumlords.[31] Starlight would pay $70 million in total, with $23 million going to Peterson Group for the mall and $47 million going to the Forks North Portage Partnership for the land and underground parking. Starlight released virtually no details of its plans for Portage Place, other than its intention to build multiple residential towers on top of the mall, and to dedicate some units to university students. The Forks North Portage Partnership announced it would put the $47 million in an investment account and use the annual returns, estimated at $3 million, to subsidize the Forks.[32] Because the Forks North Portage Partnership is controlled equally by the municipal, provincial, and federal governments, each level of government needed to approve the sale. The Forks North Portage Partnership ensured only the briefest of windows — thirteen days — would pass before Winnipeg City Council would vote on the deal on July 18, 2019.

Community resistance to the sale was immediate. "As soon as we knew Portage Place was going up for sale, that's when the informal conversations began happening in the community about wanting to make sure it

remained essentially a community asset," Michael Champagne recalled. "So because those conversations were happening, when it became evident that Starlight was the purchaser of Portage Place, that's when everyone kind of went into organizing mode." On July 15, 2019, *Winnipeg Free Press* columnist Niigaan Sinclair published an article opposing the sale, arguing, "Winnipeg's town square is Portage Place," and concluding, "Let's keep it the place community built."[33] On July 16, 2019 the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba published an op-ed opposing the sale, demanding community control over Portage Place and the return of the $45 million (in 2021 dollars) in public money originally spent on Portage Place to the community.[34] During this thirteen-day period the Central Neighbourhoods community development corporation and the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg teamed up and mobilized people to speak against the sale at City Hall. Nine days later, community leaders presented a clear, united stance on the future of Portage Place.

First, community leaders insisted that any reimagining of Portage Place be dictated by the Portage Place community itself. With this demand in mind, delegates perceived that any meaningful democratic process had been side-stepped by the Forks North Portage Partnership, Starlight, and City Council, who were trying to dictate the future of Portage Place behind closed doors. Indeed, it had come to light only the day before, on July 17, 2019, that a near majority of City Councillors — Janice Lukes, Scott Gillingham, Markus Chambers, Vivian Santos, Devi Sharma, Ross Eadie, and Jeff Browaty — had met privately with Starlight executives in a hotel that afternoon. "Why are [Starlight executives] not presenting to Council whatever they told you yesterday?" delegate Sandra Somerville demanded to know, "Why is it behind closed doors? Why the secrecy?" The speed with which the Forks North Portage Partnership was trying to ram the deal through was suspect to the community. "Portage Place holds a very special place in my heart and my family's," said Anishinaabe activist Kakeká Thundersky. "I grew up at Portage Place. Portage Place was the place where my family would go to visit our relatives...I just heard about this not too long ago and now here I am a couple of days later, speaking to everybody here. And I don't know, it's really fast." Central Neighbourhoods Executive Director at the time, Mareike Brunelli, compared it to the scandal, nine years earlier, when City Council, CentreVenture, and the evangelical Christian organization Youth for Christ kept under wraps until the last minute a plan to build what one Indigenous community leader then referred to as a "contemporary, altered form of the Residential School experience," at Higgins Avenue and Main

Street.[35] As Brunelli's comparison signaled, community helpers advocating for a more imaginative use of Portage Place were prepared to make connections between the issue of the moment and longer histories of capitalist development in the city. Winnipeg's history of gentrification and several of its specific lessons — including that real estate capitalists cannot be taken at their word because they will do and say anything to maximize profits, will push people out of community spaces, and will not benefit local people with their investment — had clearly been absorbed into the consciousness of inner-city community leaders.[36]

Second, community helpers were immediately able to see that the Forks North Portage Partnership and Starlight were trying to gentrify Portage Place. "I'm worried about the area being gentrified," said Thundersky, "We see it everywhere. More condos aren't going to solve the housing crisis." For Val Cavers, Executive Director of Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network, the Forks North Portage Partnership's stated reasons for the sale — including "re-development of an under-utilized building" and "potential to attract new private investment dollars" — were red flags. "This language is more language of exclusion and gentrification. It's not the language of reconciliation. It's not the language of community building," Cavers told City Council. "It's a widely known fact that trickledown economics does not work," delegate Angie Herrera reminded City Council.[37]

Delegates later told me they were motivated to speak out by the recent intensification of efforts to push people out of downtown, specifically the proliferation of Winnipeg Police Service cadets and private security guards who harass and evict Indigenous peoples, and the (now removed) security checkpoint at the Millennium Library. Community leaders were also motivated by the Chipman family's sidestepping, a year earlier, of a government requirement to build approximately 20 units of affordable housing in exchange for $20 million in public subsidies.[38] "After time and time again of history repeating itself," said Brunelli in 2019, "Winnipeggers cannot be so naive to believe that a community has any leverage with the private sector even when promises are made, even when conditions are signed on paper."[39]

Third, community leaders articulated two clear principles that should guide the future of Portage Place: Land back, and people over profit. Because the land Portage Place is on was taken by force and fraud from Indigenous peoples, delegates reminded City Council, it must be returned to Indigenous peoples. Portage Place is on "land that our ancestors passed on to us, furthermore, that was stolen from us," Wirch, a member of Long Plain First Nation, told City Council. "I may remind you," Wirch continued, "if you

are not Indigenous, you are still a visitor to this land. You still have treaties to uphold." Wirch explained in a later interview that to honour Treaty 1 at Portage Place means that nothing may be done there without the prior and ongoing consent of the Indigenous people who use the mall. "This land the city's preparing to sell is public land, it's Indigenous land, it's stolen land," Brunelli concurred that day. "It strikes me as rather audacious to try to sell something that doesn't belong to the attempted seller," added Herrera.[40]

The needs of the people rather than the imperatives of profit-making — or euphemisms for the latter, such as 'increasing the tax base' or 'attracting private investment' — must guide the state's planning for the future of Portage Place, community leaders stated. "There seems to be this understanding that north Portage and downtown are places of business, commerce and profit. But people live in this area, this is their community, and we seem to keep forgetting that," said Brunelli, "we would rather see investments in community than gifts to the private sector." "Why are we selling a very large chunk of that land in downtown Winnipeg to private interests? That land was purchased with the taxpayers' money," added Somerville, "I do not believe that corporate interests trump the needs of the Winnipeg citizenry." On this note, community leaders suggested a creative, but obvious, twist to the way we think about Portage Place.[41]

Portage Place, they argued, should be seen as a neighbourhood community centre rather than a corporate shopping mall. "Let's not forget there is no community centre in North Portage or Central Park," Brunelli pointed out. "Community centres are the hearts of where we come together as neighbours, friends, and families. They're gathering places where residents celebrate many different milestones and aspects of life…Portage Place serves that purpose. It is our de facto community centre." Cavers observed that the municipal government, which built and operates sixty-three community centres across Winnipeg, had neglected to provide one in Central Park, a neighbourhood that — because virtually all residents live in small apartments and many have larger than average numbers of children — desperately needed one. "These are low-income families, large families supported by an average household income of less than $30,000," said Cavers, "and there is no access to municipal recreation facilities…For many years now, Portage Place has been part of filling that gap."[42]

On July 18, 2019, Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman and all fifteen City Councillors — including Cindy Gilroy, the Councillor for the area –voted unanimously to approve the sale of Portage Place to Starlight Acquisitions. For at least one delegate I spoke to, it was an important learning experience

that Winnipeg's City Council does not care about the people of the inner city and is committed to making decisions on behalf of capital regardless of what the people want. On August 1, 2019, it was reported that Conservative Premier Brian Pallister had given provincial approval for the sale.[43] On the same day, however, the Liberal federal government via the Western Economic Diversification department announced it was delaying its approval of the sale by 30 days to do its due diligence, including examining its treaty obligations.[44]

The Portage Place Community Coalition

Acting in response to the 30-day window, Central Neighbourhoods community development corporation and Social Planning Council of Winnipeg organized a meeting of community helpers interested in stopping the sale and working towards a community-owned Portage Place, or, failing that, in stopping Starlight from gentrifying Portage Place and making sure the $47 million sale price went to the community and not to the Forks. The meeting was the first of the new Portage Place Community Coalition, which would come to include representatives of Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network, Knox United Church, Women's Health Clinic, Public Interest Law Centre, Spence Neighbourhood Association, End Homelessness Winnipeg, Make Poverty History, Manitoba Harm Reduction Network, local police and prison abolition organizations, and other long-time inner-city community helpers. The Coalition agreed to call on the federal government for clarity about its intentions for the 30-day window; support a First Nations ownership plan for Portage Place if one would emerge; initiate a community conversation about the role and mandate of the Forks North Portage Partnership; and host community information and planning sessions for Portage Place in the Central Park neighbourhood.

The Community Coalition was also able to connect with members of Ottawa's Herongate Tenant Coalition, who for years had resisted Starlight's and other Daniel Drimmer-affiliated firms' systematic neglect and displacement of people in the low-income immigrant and refugee Herongate neighbourhood. Herongate organizers informed the Winnipeg coalition that Drimmer's companies, since purchasing the Herongate Mall and hundreds of housing units in the neighbourhood in 2007, drastically cut back on maintenance and repairs, then demolished the mall and carried out one of the largest mass-evictions in Canadian history.[45] In light of this information, CBC Manitoba published a piece questioning Winnipeg City Council's failure to do its due

diligence in welcoming Starlight to Winnipeg, and putting Starlight's racist, predatory track record firmly on the local radar.[46]

After calling, emailing, and visiting federal MPs' offices for weeks with no response, on August 22, 2019, the Coalition received a message from then Winnipeg Centre Liberal MP Robert Falcon-Ouellette, informing them that the 30-day delay was intended to avoid a court challenge by Treaty 1 First Nations like the one through which First Nations acquired the Kapyong Barracks in Winnipeg in 2015. (After breaking its treaties with First Nations, Canada implemented a Treaty Land Entitlement process that gives First Nations a right to land the federal government intends to sell. This presumably applies to the land under Portage Place because it is owned in part by the federal government). On August 28, 2019 the federal government approved the sale of Portage Place to Starlight. After apparently failing to prevent the sale, the Portage Place Community Coalition stopped meeting. There was still strong interest in resisting the gentrification of the mall and keeping the $47 million sale price in the community, but three barriers to further action emerged.

First, a key gap in communication prevented the group from taking further action. The Coalition had no lines of communication with Treaty 1 First Nations leaders such as the chiefs of Long Plain and Peguis First Nations and Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs officials, all of whom the Coalition was aware had been meeting with Starlight.[47] Because the Community Coalition was mostly non-Indigenous and supportive of any hypothetical First Nations ownership plan for Portage Place, it decided to wait and see what First Nations leaders would do. This would be a theme moving forward, as an ongoing lack of communication between First Nations officials and urban community organizers — both Indigenous and non-Indigenous — was cited by several urban organizers as an impediment to grassroots action on Portage Place.

Second, the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, for unknown reasons, was supportive of the sale to Starlight. Despite vocal opposition to the sale by other Indigenous community leaders, some members of the Community Coalition felt the Aboriginal Council's support of the sale made it difficult for them to continue pushing for a community-owned Portage Place.

Third, a strategic disagreement about how to relate to proponents of the sale created a rift in the Coalition. Some members believed in maintaining friendly working relationships with Starlight and organizations, such as the Downtown BIZ, whose commercial interests are aligned with gentrification, by meeting and sharing information with them. Other members were unable to see the strategic value in doing so, considered it a waste of precious organizing time, and began to distrust those who insisted on it.

The Portage Place Community Voices Committee

A predictable turn of events came on January 17, 2020. After announcing it planned to install five hundred apartments, a daycare, and a grocery store at Portage Place — but with the sale not yet finalized — Starlight sent letters requesting $20 million apiece from each level of Canadian government to help the multi-billion-dollar firm "close anticipated funding gaps."[48] A month later, Starlight announced its plans for Portage Place had been updated to include "up to" 10,000 square feet for a so-called community hub that neighbourhood residents would be able to access twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The space represented a meagre 2% of the commercial space at Portage Place — not at all what community organizers were calling for. Starlight claimed the new plan was a result of consultation with "key community stakeholders," although the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs was the only organization Starlight was able to mobilize public support from.[49]

At this point, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg invited organizations to form a new coalition with the aim of privately meeting with, rather than publicly opposing, Starlight. The coalition, which took the name Portage Place Community Voices Committee, included groups such as Fearless R2W, Fred Douglas Place Residents' Council, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, Graffiti Gallery, Ethno-Cultural Council of Manitoba, Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network, Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. In the months following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, Winnipeg City Council voted to give Starlight the $20 million it was asking for, while the Conservative provincial government decided to throw $29 million Starlight's way.[50] After those announcements, with True North's 2018 swindle of the $20 million intended for affordable housing at the top of their minds, the Community Voices Committee's top priorities were ensuring that the $49 million in public money now committed to Portage Place would directly benefit low-income neighbourhood residents, and that a great deal of the five hundred new apartments would be truly affordable, ideally rent-geared-to-income.

Fearless R2W, whose mission is to support parents fighting back against state apprehension of their children, had a strong vision for new housing at Portage Place. The organization was completing a study, "Housing Solutions for Indigenous Youth Aging Out of Care in Winnipeg," that would form the basis of its plans, published in 2021, to create affordable housing dedicated to young people aging out of state guardianship and to families who are

reuniting.[51] The idea of creating such housing at Portage Place ingeniously built on the mall's role as a place for gathering, visiting, and tending to relationships.

Over the course of a year, the Community Voices Committee met several times with Starlight spokespeople. The unanimous conclusion of Community Voices Committee members I spoke with was that the tactic of meeting privately with Starlight was a failure. Starlight sent employees to meetings who had no decision-making power, refused to share information, and never committed to anything. Starlight's constant refrain was, "That's a great idea, I can take it back," said Champagne. "There was never anything more to report, the people from Starlight could never really say anything because they were in negotiation with the federal government, or this person, or that person," continued Champagne. "It just became clearer and clearer that there wasn't any wiggle room," said Social Planning Council Executive Director Kate Kehler, "we were going to get 10,000 square feet of community space and some sort of affordable housing and that was going to be it." Committee members realized that the proposed dollar store-sized community space was a cynical tactic to minimize community gains.

According to Champagne, "[Starlight] began to hyper-isolate the impact of our Community Voices collective, in the terms that we would only be used for community consultations and the community consultations would only be for a small area somewhere within Portage Place that would be designated as a community space." Champagne continued, "That's where the Starlight people were really throwing all of their energy, in terms of saying, 'Hey, we are listening to you, and look, it's all contained in this one tiny little area!'" Starlight's approach was creepily reminiscent of Canada's founding apartheid Indian Reserve system, whereby Indigenous nations who insisted on retaining access to their entire traditional territories were forced to winnow the scope of their rights down to tiny reserves.[52]

Starlight, in a further act of treachery, exploited committee members' willingness to meet with them by claiming that the meetings fulfilled their obligation to consult with the community. The committee was clear with Starlight that the meetings did not constitute genuine community consultation. Instead, the committee drafted a memorandum of understanding for Starlight to pay for an extensive community consultation process, complete with a dedicated storefront at Portage Place, an event at Central Park, and a commitment to talk to residents out and about at all hours of the day and night.

A major turning point came on March 2, 2021, when Starlight inflated its request to the federal government to $50 million plus $240 million in loans. (Starlight estimated the total cost of its plan at $300 to $400 million.)[53] In response, the socialist NDP MP for Winnipeg Centre, Leah Gazan, who defeated Liberal MP Falcon-Ouellette in the fall of 2019, released a statement excoriating corporate handouts and calling for public ownership of Portage Place. "Our community has been very clear about what it wants," Gazan wrote. "Investment in affordable, accessible, social housing, a place to buy food and essentials, and a safe place where community members can gather." "I will continue to advocate for the decommodification of housing stock," Gazan continued, "and for public ownership of community spaces."[54]

Starlight's astronomical new request was the final straw for all members of the Community Voices Committee. "[Starlight] gave us no heads up that this was coming," recalled Kehler, explaining that even the committee members who had supported $20 million in federal grants for Starlight could not bring themselves to support $50 million. "It just came to the point," said Champagne, "where we felt like the amount of government dollars that was committed to Portage Place could in and of itself sustain a satisfactory future development that would be consistent with the values put forward by this collective." As Kehler put it, "We could have had real social housing for that amount of money."

On May 19, 2021, the Community Voices Committee stopped meeting with Starlight. "[A]s the committee's work has been misrepresented in the media by Starlight as community support for their proposal," the Committee stated, "the committee must clarify that it has not met with Starlight since the increase ask in federal government funding came to light and given the pandemic, no community consultations have taken place."[55] Brunelli's keen observation, made twenty-two months prior, that "Winnipeggers cannot be so naive to believe that a community has any leverage with the private sector," had been proven correct.[56] As a final act, the Committee sent letters to all Manitoba MPs and relevant federal Ministers urging them to reject Starlight's request, and requested that the Forks North Portage Partnership issue a new request for proposals for Portage Place, which the public corporation declined to do.

The choice to meet privately with Starlight—rather than work in the neighbourhood to raise awareness about what was happening and build grassroots support for a counter plan—depleted Committee members' limited organizing energies and left them feeling frustrated, burned out, and pessimistic. Upon reflection, Kehler's takeaway from the experience was

that time is better spent tending to relationships within community, rather than chasing after concessions from developers who will most likely betray the community at the first opportunity. "Starlight will come and go," said Kehler, "what matters are the folks that are here, doing the work."

Community Voices Committee members reflected that they came up against two of the same barriers to success that beset the Portage Place Community Coalition in 2019. First, opening the committee to supporters of Starlight, and not being clear from the start that there were two camps within the committee — one in favour of the sale to Starlight and one in favour of pursuing an alternative community proposal — made it difficult to make progress. "There were so many different voices there and so much painstaking work to come to an agreement about how we were going to work with [Starlight], that there really wasn't a lot of progress," said Cavers.

Second, the ongoing absence of clear communication from high-level elected officials led to a 'wait and see'-type of idleness at the grassroots. "We were really hoping," said Champagne, "that the fact that the Treaty Land Entitlement process has to first go to First Nations, I think that's why we were so excited about trying to maintain our relationship with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, as part of this collective, but…we never got to have a really clear understanding of what Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs' plans were." (It is important to note that the Indigenous political landscape in Canada consists of different types of bodies with different types of claims, some of which are legally recognized and some of which are not. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is not a rights holder within the Treaty Land Entitlement process, but a coordinating body, meaning it is up to individual First Nations themselves to make Treaty Land Entitlement claims). Community helpers reported a similar type of idleness-producing uncertainty following interactions with supportive federal politicians during this period, who reassured community leaders that a community-oriented plan for Portage Place was in the works but neglected to share specifics and never brought one forward.

Keeping the Spirit of Resistance Alive

Two new players picked up the flame of community resistance to Starlight in the summer of 2021. The West Broadway Tenants Committee, a grassroots group of tenants with an overtly anti-capitalist analysis, took a notably different approach from prior waves of organizing. Grounding its approach in solidarity with communities across the country who had been standing up to Starlight for the past ten years, the Tenants Committee aimed to

build knowledge and confidence among ordinary people in Winnipeg by making them aware of the growing movement against Starlight and other multi-billion-dollar real estate firms across the country. On May 25, 2021, the Tenants Committee hosted a panel, "Communities vs. Starlight," featuring Ashleigh Doherty, tenant organizer with Parkdale Organize! in Toronto, and Josh Hawley of the Herongate Tenants Coalition in Ottawa. Doherty and Hawley's presentations included testimony about Starlight's ongoing criminalization of tenant resistance in Parkdale and Starlight's and other firms' overall strategy of evicting and demolishing entire neighbourhoods to "re-position" them as long-term speculative investments for large investors, including pension funds.[57] Following the panel, the West Broadway Tenants Committee formed a Portage Place working group consisting of people who were inspired by the panel to support a counter-proposal to Starlight.

Much of the Tenants Committee working group's energies so far have been spent trying to figure out what organizing has already happened around Portage Place and where to fit in. Almost two years out from the initial community resistance to the sale, two not-well-publicized community coalitions later, and still with no clear understanding of what Treaty 1 First Nations aspirations for Portage Place were, community leaders are grappling with a lack of clarity about who is doing — and has done — what with respect to Portage Place. The Tenants Committee working group agrees that their role is not to invent their own vision for Portage Place, but to support a counter proposal based on the priorities of those with the most at stake.

Another organization that attempted to keep organizing around Portage Place in the summer of 2021 was the Central Neighbourhoods community development corporation. The organization had a new Director who similarly struggled for a clear picture of what organizing had already happened and what others were doing. In May of 2021, MP Gazan contacted Central Neighbourhoods to see if the organization could help come up with a counter proposal that Gazan could use to fight Starlight. Central Neighbourhoods tried to find funding to finance the creation of a counter proposal, but could not. In late summer 2021, the Director arranged a meeting of Fearless R2W, Knox United Church, Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, and the West Broadway Tenants Committee to plan next steps, but then the Director left Central Neighbourhoods for a position at the City of Winnipeg and the meeting did not happen. The turnover at Central Neighbourhoods — which had three Directors in just over a year — posed a barrier to progress during this phase of organizing and is indicative of the riskiness of relying on non-profits, whose funding is such

that they can only offer low pay and no job security, and therefore struggle to retain paid staff.[58]

Happily, on September 29, 2021, it was reported that Starlight had notified the City of Winnipeg that it was unable to proceed with the purchase of Portage Place. It seems that the Liberal federal government's reticence to provide the requested $50 million in grants and $240 million in loans was the deciding factor, although the federal government still has not made an explicit decision on Starlight's request. The only statement by a federal official came from a spokesperson for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation — which ironically had initially, many decades ago, been established to build affordable housing for people of modest means — who said the government agency was still open to discussing the deal with Starlight.[59] Without any more information, we can only speculate that two years of community resistance, plus, perhaps, the Community Voices Committee's letters to federal officials and MP Gazan's activities in closed-door meetings, added up to enough, alongside whatever other unknown factors, to prevent the federal government from giving in to Starlight's request for funding. Lesley Harrison, the Minister at Knox United Church who participated in the initial resistance to Starlight in 2019, reflected: "I think the lesson is...that every action has the potential to have a cumulative effect with every other action...and [even] if an entire City Council votes for it, that there's still, that power still continues to exist, and takes a different form, and continues. So I guess the lesson in it, the most simple of statements would be, don't stop, always speak out, always say what you need to say, don't be pushed into a corner by the powers that be."

Where Do Things Stand Now? Opportunities and Challenges.

Almost two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the people of Portage Place are missing each other. "A lot of the regulars from before that used to come, before COVID, they don't come now," said Traverse. "I wonder if I'm going to see some of the elders we used to see, are we going to see them again, you know? That to me is sad. The band office has been dismantled." When we are finally done with the self-isolating and social-distancing required to stop the spread of COVID-19, the desire to get back to gathering at Portage Place will be stronger than ever, and the question of how to keep Portage Place a community asset for generations to come will be as relevant as ever.

Community Counter Proposal for Portage Place

Several inventive ideas ordinary people have proposed for the future of Portage Place demonstrate the creativity of the community and the kinds of specifics that could go into a community counter proposal for Portage Place:

- **Workshop space and craft market.** Artisans, including downtown fixture Jimmy the Turtle, already make and sell pieces — beadwork, moccasins, and mukluks — at Portage Place, and could use dedicated space.
- **Indoor park.** People flock to Central Park in summer, but in winter the park's amenities becomes less accessible. A Portage Place community centre could offer free indoor versions of things — playground, splash pad, soccer pitch — people enjoy in the summer at Central Park.
- **Fearless R2W's Community Safety Host program.** In addition to making sure everybody has the food, housing, and healthcare they need, and that people are allowed to be at Portage Place without spending money, an Indigenous-led safety plan for Portage Place could replace security guards with Fearless R2W's Community Safety Host program (which Champagne describes as, "an entirely Indigenous value-infused, deliberately anti-racist, deliberately harm reduction approach"), create a 24/7 safe space, and ensure all Portage Place workers are trained to understand what sexual exploitation looks like.
- **Housing for Indigenous elders.** "That's something that I've wished for and dreamed for," said Meconse, "We're the biggest First Nations population, urban centre in Canada, and we have very few Indigenous Housing options specifically for 55+ and assisted living. I'm aware of one building in the North End, and First Nations elders have no other options. There should be more options for our Elders to live safely, independently and as part of a community."
- **Community-based renaming.** Parts of Portage Place could be renamed and furnished with public art to honour important people and communities at Portage Place, such as renaming the food court after Joseph Meconse, the central atrium after Annie Henry, and the fountain after the source of Winnipeg's tap water, Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

Where have we arrived after two-and-a-half years of community organizing to defend Portage Place? Now that Starlight has skipped town, community members interested in working towards a counter proposal for Portage Place face a series of new opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities

By far the greatest opportunities are the ones established by inner-city community leaders themselves over the past two-and-a-half years. It has been proven that the community in and around Portage Place cares deeply about the mall, has creative ideas for its future, and is willing to put in the

work to make that future happen. "I think the lesson that I'm taking away," said Champagne, "is that we have the vision and capacity in Winnipeg to redevelop Portage Place…Because the commitment, passion, ideas, and ability to organize in a quick manner of that community voices collective was really what maintained those conversations happening, even after the formal committee went away." A solid foundation has been set for the next phase of community action.

Four consensus pillars of a community counter proposal for Portage Place have been established. (1) Portage Place should become a non-profit community centre (that may include for-profit stores offering affordable necessities, as determined by the community) primarily for the people in the neighbourhood, rather than a corporate shopping mall aspiring to entertain suburbanites attending Jets games. (2) Hundreds of new rent-geared-to-income social housing units should be built at Portage Place. (3) A real safety plan that centres Indigenous women and girls should replace the current security approach. (4) Indigenous peoples should own Portage Place. Because this consensus has been clearly established, there is widespread agreement among organizers that a vague, open-ended community consultation about Portage Place's future is unnecessary. "The ideas are there already to pick up and move with," as Lin Howes-Barr, executive director of the Spence Neighbourhood Association, put it. What is needed is a formal counter proposal, based on these four pillars, for communities to rally around. Once funding and agreements have been won for such a proposal, specifics of what it will look like can be hashed out in a community planning process.

Three facts established since 2019 are ripe for organizers to take advantage of. First, the federal government has acknowledged that it must consider its treaty obligations when deciding to sell off the land under Portage Place. There is some sense that a Treaty Land Entitlement process like the one that led to the Treaty One Development Corporation's Naawi-Oodena development on the former Kapyong Barracks land is the best bet for a successful community-based Portage Place. "I feel like First Nations leaders are in the best position to acquire the land," said Champagne. "I think it's the most likely of the options that are available to community organizations and community-minded folks." While turning Portage Place over to the Treaty One Development Corporation would not guarantee a people-over-profit vision for Portage Place, it could open the door to it.

Second, the City and Province have shown their hand by establishing that they can find, at minimum, a combined $49 million for the redevelopment of Portage Place. "Now we know how much money people were willing to put

on the table to a Toronto-based private, corporate organization," said Kehler, "why would they not be willing to consider that same amount of money for a publicly-run organization?" While that money was justified by those governments' neoliberal ideology that the role of the state is to 'increase the tax base' and 'attract private investment,' it still at the very least constitutes an acknowledgment by governments that forever claim the cupboards are bare when it comes to their constituents' urgent basic needs, that $49 million for Portage Place is already in the budget. In addition, some expect that the Liberal federal government may soon make more money available for social housing and that these funds could go to Portage Place. Given that the mall was for sale before the pandemic for only $23 million — and the pandemic seems to have prompted some retailers to abandon the mall — a public purchase of Portage Place would seem to be easily accomplished.

Third, in 2020, the Hudson's Bay Company permanently closed its downtown Winnipeg store, which is attached to Portage Place by a skywalk, and announced that the building, which it values at $0, is up for grabs. Given that it is attached to Portage Place, the reality that the bulk of the Hudson's Bay Company's wealth was stolen from Indigenous peoples by means of exploitative terms of trade and a 7 million acre land grant from the British Empire made without the involvement of Indigenous peoples, the immense level of unmet need that exists in Winnipeg's city centre, and the stated willingness of the City and Province to support its redevelopment, the Bay building would make a logical component — and the Hudson's Bay Company would make a logical funder — of an Indigenous-owned Portage Place-Bay building community centre and housing complex.[60]

Another source of confidence for the community should be the fact that, in 2022, Winnipeg would be far from the first city to attempt to transform a shopping mall into a community centre. The profit rates of corporate malls around the world are declining and a worldwide process of "demalling"[61] is taking place, with many cities turning disinvested malls into "human services centres."[62] Winnipeg community organizers have a demonstrated capacity to transform large, outmoded buildings into thriving new community infrastructure, with a long track record of inspiring examples including the redevelopment of the Canadian Pacific Railway depot on Higgins Avenue into the Neeginan Centre, the Gault building on Arthur Street into Artspace, 91 Albert Street into the Old Market Autonomous Zone, the Canadian Pacific Railway Postal Station on Main Street into the Social Enterprise Centre, the Christie's Biscuits factory on Notre Dame Street into the Specialized Services for Children and Youth centre, and, as we speak, Kapyong Barracks into the

Naawi-Oodena development. These precedents might provide both confidence and potential governance models for a community-owned Portage Place.

Now that Starlight has ghosted Winnipeg and the level of urgency around Portage Place is dialed down somewhat, there may be an opportunity to establish new spaces for collaboration, lines of communication, and feelings of identification between like-minded, but not very well-connected, groups in the city.[63] "Hopefully what happens in the next stage, now that Starlight has backed away," said Kehler, "maybe we can come together again and say, 'Okay, what do we really want for the community?' We don't have to worry now, we don't have a corporation to be concerned about, what can we as community members, as community organizations, do to come together and say this is what Portage Place should be?" As Kehler and others noted, the current moment offers an appealing opportunity to unite around a common purpose, to be energized by the fight *for*, rather than against, something.

One movement relationship that interlocutors specifically mentioned Portage Place provides an opportunity to strengthen is the one between urban grassroots community leaders, especially Indigenous community leaders, and high-level First Nations leaders. "I will just note that, at least within the grassroots activist circles in Winnipeg," said Champagne, who is a member of Shamattawa Cree Nation, "there are many people that are of the same opinion as me, where we have not had previous partnerships and relationships with First Nations. So my hope is that Portage Place can be an opportunity for partnership between urban Indigenous leadership and First Nations leadership as well. Because it's different. I always talk about the village, right, and the village is the urban Indigenous activist collective here in Winnipeg...and it's just a different type of leadership, cooperation, and collaboration that seems to happen here than I've seen with First Nations. And I think that Portage Place represents a really great opportunity for reciprocity between those groups that I mentioned, urban Indigenous leaders and First Nations chiefs."

Because relationships between Indigenous peoples and immigrants and refugees are essential to the Portage Place community, there would seem to be an excellent opportunity to foster understandings of the resemblances between Indigenous communities and immigrant and refugee communities, including experiences of colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, and Canadian white supremacy. There is also a clear need to find common purpose and establish better lines of communication between white activists and each of these groups. In these ways, Portage Place could offer an opportunity to

renew the promise of multi-racial, multi-issue coalition-building that the original "inner-city" activism of the 1970s introduced.[64]

There is also an opportunity to build connections between community leaders and the Portage Place community itself, and perhaps to build confidence among regulars at Portage Place that they have a right to shape the future of the mall. "You know what," said Traverse, "for most people, they really don't have opinions on stuff like [the future of Portage Place] just because they've never had any say in anything, you know what I'm saying? Like these people, its mostly Indigenous people, right, and if you ask them what they think, they'd be like they don't know, because when has their voice ever mattered?" Lesley Harrison, Minister at Knox United Church, believes that grassroots confidence will come from a gradual, intentional process of getting to know each other better. "It probably sounds kind of trite," said Harrison, "but I would always come back to the small group model of how can we get to know each other as human beings in a setting where we are safe and comfortable enough to do that, and then begin to infuse that setting with the vision of where we might want to go."

Finally, there is an opportunity to stretch the kind of thinking and acting people are doing around Portage Place much further. "We need to stop looking at these projects as one-offs," said Kehler, "We need to look at the downtown as a whole and we need to stop thinking, 'Oh, well we have one community space for folks," you know...that certainly can't answer the needs that we have downtown, so we have to be careful." Widespread interest in a land-back, people-over-profit Portage Place offers a chance to think about decolonial, de-commodified housing and community space elsewhere and at other scales. Thinking about what we want Portage Place to be could help us think about what we want the world to be. The experiment of transforming Portage Place could be a laboratory — or a rehearsal space — for becoming the kinds of people who are capable of extraordinary change. Remaking Portage Place together in community could allow us to improvise, try things out, break old habits, and form new ones. If taking over one shopping mall seems like a daunting task now, perhaps we could see it as an opportunity to build the skills, capacities, and sensibilities we will need to feel more confident in the future.[65]

Challenges

The biggest thing standing in the way of a community counter proposal for Portage Place will be the Forks North Portage Partnership, for the simple

fact that its entire business model relies on extracting value from Portage Place for the benefit of the Forks, and they will surely resist any proposal that doesn't involve a big pay day for them on the scale of the $47 million they hoped to receive from Starlight. Any shift in leadership or enlightenment within the organization is unlikely to overcome this economic imperative.

The Forks North Portage Partnership extracts approximately $5 million each year in total from multiple parking lots and land leases in and around Portage Place, and re-invests very little back into the community.[66] The vast majority of the Forks North Portage Partnership's involvement in the neighbourhood has been firmly in line with the gentrification agenda that created the mall in the first place, and has been done in coordination with gentrification-committed groups such as CentreVenture, the Downtown BIZ, and the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.[67]

It is time for the inner city to stop paying for the Forks. The $5 million per year should stay in the inner city and would go a long way toward operating funding for a community centre at Portage Place. "Why is the revenue generated in North Portage being floated over to the Forks when this area could sure benefit from it?" Brunelli rightly questioned in 2019.[68] The Forks is a National Historic Site and a tourist attraction that boosts the profits of the downtown hospitality and luxury real estate industries and should be publicly financed by taxing those firms that market and profit from their proximity to it. One way forward might be for the three levels of Canadian government to reinstate the independence of North Portage from the Forks (the two merged in 1994), then transfer North Portage to the community. In the unfortunate event that the Forks North Portage Partnership does sell the land and underground parking against the community's wishes, the full sale price should be transferred into a fund for social housing and a community centre somewhere in the central neighbourhoods.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents both opportunities and challenges. Early pandemic emergency measures showed that the "impossible" can be done (and quickly), and federal government stimulus measures may make money available for urban infrastructure. But inner-city community helpers seeking state support for working-class communities hammered by pandemic unemployment, restricted access to services and networks, and the virus itself, will have to contend with downtown capitalists' counter-push for state investment in a gentrification-recovery. Fearing a reversal of the modest gains made toward the gentrification of Winnipeg's city centre over the past decade, big downtown property owners and their allies are

already calling for more corporate handouts and renewed state investment in their fifty-year-old racial project of 'bringing people back downtown.'[69]

Finally, people interested in organizing around Portage Place will be faced with the challenge of avoiding the trap of meeting privately with the Forks North Portage Partnership and the next corporate real estate firm it tries to sell Portage Place to. As Starlight's manipulation of the Community Voices Committee demonstrates, big developers know how to use private meetings to string community leaders along, claim they have consulted with the community when they haven't, and keep the broader community uninformed and idle. Learning from that experience, organizers' time will be better spent working in community, fostering popular knowledge of what's happening, support for a counter proposal, and the community power we will need to make that proposal a reality.

Conclusion

What a fabulous opportunity Portage Place is, in 2022: a beloved gathering place at a turning point, offering the multitude of people that care about it a chance to unite around something tangible, positive, and energizing. To be sure, the city's ruling institutions are lined up against that prospect. But the history of Winnipeg's inner city is nothing if not a history of people with the courage to fight for a better world, against all odds.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

1 The bulk of this chapter is based on telephone interviews conducted by the author in November and December of 2021, in Winnipeg. Thirteen people were interviewed, selected for their involvement in different phases of community resistance to the sale of Portage Place to Starlight, and/or for their involvement in the Portage Place community. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Winnipeg and interviews were recorded with permission. Interlocutors were asked about the meaning of Portage Place in their lives, the experience of resisting the sale to Starlight, and lessons learned. A majority of the thirteen interlocutors are Indigenous peoples and a majority are women. No recent immigrants or refugees were interviewed, which is an important shortcoming of this piece.

2 The area set to be bulldozed was roughly between Sherbrook and Furby streets, from Notre Dame Avenue to the CPR yards.

3 Damas and Smith Limited 1975. The term "Native" was the term originally used by the Indigenous proponents of the Neeginan plan in the early 1970s and is reproduced here for accuracy.

4 Toews 2018, 146–150.

5 Toews 2018, 154, 158.

6 Ladyka 1989.

7 Silver and Toews 2009. Cadillac Fairview contributed $12 million to the construction of Portage Place. https://uniter.ca/view/portage-place-marks-25th-anniversary

8 Urban Futures Group 1990.

9 Mullin 1986.

10 Traverse's paintings include "My Love," "Blue Moon," and "Sweethearts," her short films include "Butterfly," "Two Scoops," and "Empty," and she is the author of the colouring books, *Sacred Feminine: An Indigenous Art Colouring Book* and *Ikwe: Honouring Women, Life Givers, and Water Protectors*.

11 Ladyka 1989; Santin 1989; Thomas 1991.

12 Following the abolition of Canada's apartheid Indian Reserve pass system and increased migration of First Nations people to Winnipeg in the post-WWII period, Winnipeg's white property owners have drawn and redrawn an urban apartheid geography in an effort to keep Indigenous peoples out of certain parts of the city. For many years, landlords, business owners, police, and others made Indigenous peoples especially unwelcome south of Portage Avenue. The construction of Portage Place on the north side of Portage Avenue redrew this line to some extent. See Toews 2018, 212.

13 Sinclair 2019. Idle No More is among the largest uprisings in Canadian history. It was sparked in 2012 by Prime Minister Harper's Bill C-45, which aimed to abolish an array of Indigenous land rights and environmental protections, as Indigenous peoples carried out hundreds of flash mobs, round dances, hunger strikes, occupations, and blockades across the country.

14 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2013; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2014; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2016.

15 Zoratti 2016.

16 City of Winnipeg 2019.

17 Statistics Canada 2011; Manitoba Collaborative Data Portal 2019; Major countries of origin for immigrants and refugees living around Portage Place include Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Syria, Afghanistan, Philippines, Vietnam, China, Pakistan, and Bhutan.

18 Humans of Portage Place 2019.

19 Rucks-Ahidiana 2021; Smith 1992.

20 Smith 1996.

21 CentreVenture 2010.

22 The Richardson family are perhaps the wealthiest and longest-standing tycoons in Manitoba. James Richardson & Sons Limited is a Winnipeg-headquartered conglomerate invested in food production, oil and gas, trucking, finance, insurance, real estate, and more. The Vancouver-based Gagliardi family conglomerate is invested in hotel and restaurant chains, real estate, construction, the Dallas Stars NHL franchise, and more.

23 McGowan 2013; McNeill 2016; Kives 2017.

24 Winnipeg Police Service 2016.

25 Forks North Portage Partnership 2011.

26 Forks North Portage Partnership 2011.

27 Baxter 2021.

28 City of Winnipeg 2020.

29 The Central Park Stewardship Committee was established to care for the park and consists of municipal officials, community-minded groups such as Central Neighbourhoods community development corporation, Knox United Church, Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network, and Artbeat Studio, as well as profit-minded groups such as the local business improvement zones and the Forks North Portage Partnership.

30 Santin 2019; Forks North Portage Partnership 2014; 2019. In addition to the Portage Place land lease and parking lot, the Forks North Portage's North Portage revenues come from parking lots at the Investors Group headquarters and Place Promenade apartments and land leases at the Investors Group headquarters, Place Promenade apartments, Kiwanis Chateau Seniors' Residence, Fred Douglas Seniors' Residence, Symcor Inc. offices, Hotel Royal Plaza, and YMCA.

31 MacLean 2019; August 2020; August and Walks 2018.

32 Santin 2019.

33 Sinclair 2019.

34 Toews 2019.

35 Roussin and Christensen 2010; Hugill and Toews 2014.

36 City of Winnipeg 2019; "Capital is a fiend," writes geographer Annie Spencer, and addiction "is an organizing principle of capitalist social formations."

37 City of Winnipeg 2019

38 MacKinnon, Shauna (2018) Tax increment financing and True North Square. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/fast-facts-tax-increment-financing-and-true-north-square

39 City of Winnipeg 2019

40 City of Winnipeg 2019

41 City of Winnipeg 2019

42 City of Winnipeg 2019

43 It is unclear what formal process led to the provincial government's decision to approve the sale.

44 Keele 2019.

45 Yearwood and Kitz 2020; August 2020; August and Walks 2018.

46 MacLean 2019

47 The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Peguis First Nation, and Long Plain First Nation did not respond to multiple interview invitations for the 2022 *State of the Inner City Report*. Treaty One Development Corporation declined to participate.

48 City of Winnipeg 2020.

49 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2020.

50 Kavanagh 2020; Kives 2020.

51 Morton et al 2021.

52 Craft 2013; Morris 1880.

53 Kavanagh 2021; Winnipeg Free Press 2019.

54 Gazan 2021. MP Gazan declined to speak to the 2022 *State of the Inner City Report*.

55 Portage Place Community Voices Committee 2021.

56 City of Winnipeg 2019

57 See August 2020 and August and Walks 2018.

58 Silver, et al 2009.

59 Petz 2021.

60 The Hudson's Bay Company received seven million acres of land from the British Empire that did not belong to them as part of the transfer of colonial authority over the North West from the Company to Canada (see Manitoba Indian Brotherhood 1971 and Gaudry 2016. "During Treaty 4 negotiations," Gaudry writes, "the Gambler, a Saulteaux spokesperson, protested the Crown's Treaty Commissioner, Alexander Morris that "the Company have stolen our land.") In 2020 the City of Winnipeg created a citizen's committee to propose ideas for the future of the Bay building and in 2021 the government of Manitoba committed $25 million to preserving the building.

61 Guimaraes 2019.

62 Vander Ark 2020.

63 Gilmore 2008.

64 Toews 2018, 146.

65 Gilmore 2020.

66 Santin 2019; Forks North Portage Partnership 2014; 2019.

67 Forks North Portage Partnership 2010; 2011.

68 City of Winnipeg 2019.

69 Distasio 2021.

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