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Winnipeg Free for All:

Towards Democracy at City Hall

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**Winnipeg Free for All:
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About the Author

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Introduction

Sam Katz, the baseball team-owner turned mayor brought a now notorious level of corruption to Winnipeg's City Hall. Katz's administration was marked by numerous charges of corrupt dealings, including hiring his close friend and business partner as the City's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO),¹ gifting city contracts to friends and business associates,² and accepting lucrative "secret commissions" for city construction projects.³ But after promising to reform aspects of the city's governance structure that enabled Katz's shady dealings, Winnipeg's current mayor has — to no one's surprise — failed to do so. For all his unique traits, Katz was a direct product of a governance structure that encourages corruption and makes the mayor of Winnipeg the single most powerful mayor in Canada. While Brian Bowman has challenged certain business interests more than his predecessor — asking suburban developers to pay new fees, for instance — there is ultimately nothing structural preventing him from serving the narrow interests of his Chamber of Commerce friends just as Katz did. This report investigates the structural aspects of civic governance in Winnipeg that allowed Katz to operate with relative impunity and even encourage such tendencies in others. It offers

a critical history of this structure, a summary of how it works, an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, and a list of suggestions for making it more amenable to the pressing needs and aspirations of everyday Winnipeggers.

Democracy, the motivating principle for this report, has a simple meaning: "Rule by the people."⁴ Democratic governance, in other words, is self-governance. Democratic ideals dictate that decisions about the future of a community ought to reflect the will of the entire community, and all parts of the community, rather than a single individual or a small group. This report treats democracy not as a static condition that is automatically ensured by certain institutions — such as elections — but as a tendency that can be either inhibited or promoted by various structures. When power over the entire community is structurally concentrated in the hands of a few — as it is in Winnipeg's civic governance structure — democracy is inhibited. The more that power is dispersed equally among the members of a community, the more democracy is promoted.

What is at stake in the question of democracy — or the lack thereof — at city hall? While it is true that the local state in Canada is the

least powerful of the three levels of government, municipalities have primary responsibility over several crucial aspects of everyday life including: policing, public transportation, zoning, land use, urban planning, firefighting, roads, bridges, parks, libraries, pools, and community centres. Through its zoning powers, city council can decide to make housing more, or less affordable. Through its land use powers, city council can decide to turn urban land over to Indigenous nations, or not. Through its public transportation powers, city council can decide to provide free, fast, and frequent public transit, or not. Through the municipal budget, city council can decide to direct less money to the police, and more to pools, libraries and community centres, or not. The lack of democracy at city hall silences policy ideas such as these and excludes the full range of needs and aspirations in our city.

The City of Winnipeg has a dubious history as regards democracy — more on that short-

ly — that makes radical change necessary if real democracy is to be realized. This report is written in the hopes that radical change can be achieved and real democracy can be created, so that city hall can be recycled into something we can actually use. In this spirit, it follows in the footsteps of the many grassroots organizers who have — by choice or necessity — considered Winnipeg's City Hall worthy of their attention. From the many tens of thousands of Winnipeggers who elected communists Jacob Penner and Joe Zuken to city council, to the militant Indigenous organizers who made George Munroe the first Indigenous city councilor at the City of Winnipeg in 1971, to the multitude of Indigenous women — such as Dorothy Betz, Kathy Mallett and Leslie Spillett — who have organized against police brutality in Winnipeg for decades, Winnipeggers have long considered city hall worth struggling in, with, and against.

History of Civic Governance in Winnipeg

“Winnipeg was established by businessmen, for business purposes.”

*Alan Artibise*⁵

As Alan Artibise taught us, the City of Winnipeg was never intended to be a democratic institution in any meaningful sense of the word. Rather, it was designed in 1873 by a small faction of the city’s population intent on serving its own narrow interests. Much like the Canadian nation-state in general, the City of Winnipeg was founded by people who considered themselves to be white property-owning men in order to expand the power of white people, men, and capitalist property owners.

It is crucial to note that, like the Canadian nation-state, the City of Winnipeg was premised on the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the denial of Indigenous sovereignty, a process that relied — as the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation Report* made clear — on genocide. We can therefore say that the foundations of the City of Winnipeg are settler colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism — four pillars upon which true democracy can never be achieved.

The settler-colonial foundations of the City of Winnipeg—and the same is the case for oth-

er municipal governments—are crucial to any contemporary understanding of democracy in Winnipeg’s civic government, not only because they prove that the city was established undemocratically, but also because these foundations persist in denying the right to self-determination of Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg today. The legal foundations underlying the City of Winnipeg’s right to govern are extremely shaky for a number of reasons. First, the Doctrine of Discovery that underlies Canadian sovereignty over the North-West and provides the basis for the City of Winnipeg was premised on fantasy rather than any actual material presence or relationship to the North-West.⁶ Second, the promises of the *Manitoba Act* — which established the Province of Manitoba — that guaranteed a land base for the Métis nation have never been fulfilled.⁷ Third, the Anishinabe signatories of Treaty One never agreed to a complete surrender of the land, meaning the Crown’s understanding of Treaty One is largely a misinterpretation.⁸ These precarious legal grounds mean that the City of Winnipeg’s right to govern the lands of the Anishinabe, Cree, Dakota, and Métis peoples is based less in the consent of the people than on coercion.

To illustrate briefly the undemocratic origins of the City of Winnipeg on a more concrete level, consider the actual human geography of 1870s Red River, the community upon which the City of Winnipeg was imposed. At the time, the population of Red River consisted of 9,900 Métis people, 1,000 First Nations people, and 1,500 non-Indigenous people of European descent.⁹ The mostly-Indigenous residents of the community did not come together as freely consenting citizens¹⁰ to establish the City of Winnipeg. Rather, the City of Winnipeg was established by and for a tiny group of white businessmen — most having arrived in Red River from Ontario only in the previous few years — and imposed on the rest of the community who were mostly barred from participating in its “democratic” institutions. Democratic is in quotations because these institutions were the product of, and reflected the will of, a very small minority of the community, to the exclusion of most who lived there.

These men — the merchants, financiers, renters, and manufacturers who Alan Artibise called the city’s commercial class¹¹ — imposed their rule over the people of Red River in part in order to bypass the provincial legislature, in which Métis residents had significant power.¹² Establishing the City of Winnipeg as a settler-dominated level of government enabled the commercial class to more efficiently impose a new phase of racial capitalism—racial in part because it consciously and deliberately excluded the Indigenous majority—in the region through which they would profit immensely to the detriment of nearly everybody else. The historical lack of democracy within civic governance in Winnipeg, therefore, is rooted not only in the dominance of capital over labour, or in the dominance of men over women, but also in the dominance of European settlers over Indigenous peoples. We must keep each of these vectors of power in mind — and understand their intersections — if we want to genuinely imagine a more democratic City of Winnipeg.

The small commercial class that first established the City of Winnipeg has continued to govern the city more or less uninterrupted to this day. How has such a small group of people so effectively monopolized the governance of an entire city? At first, it was relatively straightforward: the people who called themselves Winnipeg’s City Fathers established bans restricting the right to vote and to hold political office to people like themselves: property-owning men with British citizenship.¹³ For the city’s first five decades, therefore, the vast majority of Winnipeggers—not to mention those Indigenous people who had been pushed out of Winnipeg—were disenfranchised. The city’s mayor and twelve councilors — known as aldermen — in these years were elected by a mere ten percent of the city’s population.¹⁴ In 1890, to make it worse, a “plural vote” system was introduced that allowed a man to vote in every ward he owned property in, enabling the wealthiest men in the city to vote over sixty times in a single election.¹⁵ Civic Governance in Winnipeg was therefore literally the exclusive domain of ultra-rich white men: in 1910, the majority of Winnipeg’s nineteen millionaires held positions at city hall.¹⁶ Thirty-seven of Winnipeg’s first forty-one mayors were business owners, and the other four were classified as “professionals”.¹⁷ All but five of over five hundred elected officials between 1874 and 1914 were Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Virtually all resided in the city’s wealthy South End.

While most of the City Fathers’ outright bans on participation in civic governance were defeated over the course of the twentieth century, wealthy white men¹⁸ have continued to dominate Winnipeg’s City Hall and to leave the basic needs and aspirations of most Winnipeggers off the city’s agenda. After losing some ground to workers between 1919 and 1936, the descendants of the Citizen’s Committee of 1,000 — the anti-democratic and right wing (and in many cases even fascist-sympathizing¹⁹) white businessmen’s group that militarily defeated the 1919 Winnipeg

General Strike — continued to dominate Winnipeg’s City Hall under the banners of the Citizens Election Committee (CEC) and the Independent Citizens Election Committee (ICEC) for most of the twentieth century. This control persisted via informal blocs — including the so-called Gang of 18 — following the elimination of political parties in Winnipeg’s civic elections.²⁰ How have they continued to do so, despite the growing power of workers, women, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, LGBTQ2S people, labour, and other oppressed groups over the course of the twentieth century and especially since the 1960s? The ability to manipulate the structure of civic governance itself is part of the answer. As their formal bans on political participation have been defeated, and as ordinary Winnipeggers have attempted to organize for power at city hall, Winnipeg’s commercial class has turned more and more to altering the city’s governance structure in order to make it more difficult for everyday people to reach the levers of power.

The governance structure established in 1972 by the Manitoba NDP for Unicity — the amalgamation of the old City of Winnipeg with eleven adjacent municipalities — while problematically shifting power away from the old City of Winnipeg to new suburban constituencies, was democratic enough to have been called a “bold experiment in citizen participation.”²¹ By establishing a relatively large fifty-member city council — at a ratio of one city councilor to every ten thousand residents — as well as thirteen community committees and resident advisory groups (RAGs) to provide avenues for citizen participation, parts of Unicity’s governance structure were designed to make it more possible to challenge the control of commercial land developers over city council.²²

Almost immediately, however, Winnipeg’s commercial class set about dismantling Unicity’s democratic provisions and introducing reforms aimed at shutting people out of city hall. In general, these reforms sought to shrink the numbers and powers of city councilors, com-

munity committees, and RAGs. In 1977 the new Conservative government of Manitoba cut the number of Winnipeg City Councilors nearly in half, to twenty-nine, and slashed the number of community committees by more than half, to six, while also weakening their powers.²³ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the provincial Filmon Conservative government went even further, cutting the number of city councilors in half again, to fifteen, further reducing the number of community committees, banishing political parties from municipal elections, and considerably strengthening the powers of the mayor and the Executive Policy Committee (EPC).²⁴

Organized labour was outspoken in its opposition to Filmon’s cuts to civic democracy. The City workers union — Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 500 — critiqued Filmon’s plan as “symbolic”, rather than fact-based, and warned that further reducing the number of city councilors and community committees was only the latest in a barrage of recent attacks on Winnipeggers’ access to local government. The process had begun with the amalgamation of the metropolitan area in 1971, CUPE 500 pointed out, reminding Filmon that, “One of the cornerstones of Unicity was the assurance to all citizens that amalgamation would not reduce resident involvement in civic politics.” How could 29 city councilors possibly be considered too many, CUPE 500 asked, for a city that had been governed by 112 elected representatives only twenty years earlier? Not only that, but Winnipeg comprised two thirds of Manitoba’s population, while the other third was governed by 1,202 municipal officials.²⁵

Filmon’s reforms sent the ratio of city councilors to residents soaring to an unprecedented one councilor per 41,680 residents, more than twice the number recommended by a 1988 City of Winnipeg commission.²⁶ The reforms were also criticized for further reducing the power of people in the old City of Winnipeg, increasingly referred to as the inner city by the 1980s.

Filmon's reforms left the inner city severely outnumbered on city council, with only three representatives versus twelve from the suburbs. Since the inner city in the postwar era had become home to large numbers of Indigenous peoples and other people of colour, in contrast to the suburbs, systemic reductions in the area's political power were correctly criticized as being structurally racist.²⁷ Critics also pointed out that LGBTQ2S people, immigrants, students, tenants, and lower-income households were more highly concentrated in the old City of Winnipeg and that Premier Filmon's reforms would structurally reduce the power of these groups.²⁸

The shrinking of local democracy in Winnipeg was accelerated by the worldwide success of a class strategy, often called neoliberalism, which glorified markets and disparaged public services. The city's commercial class joined their wealthy peers around the world in calling for more "streamlined" and "efficient" governance in the 1990s. Anti-democratic ideas that favoured even fewer political representatives, even fewer avenues for citizen participation, and even less public debate were becoming increasingly popular with local elites in Canada as part of a doctrine called "New Public Management" — an approach that advocated applying private sector models to the public sector.²⁹ In New Public Management-speak, governance was rebranded as "business" and citizens as "customers". Social justice activists in 1990s Winnipeg identified talk of "efficiency" as a coded attack on democracy. "The most efficient city council [sic] would be a council of one," pointed out the CHOICES Coalition for Social Justice, "It is not democracy, but it is efficient in a Machiavellian sense of the word."³⁰

The neoliberal plan to minimize the interference of citizens in urban governance was closely connected to the implementation of a neoliberal policy agenda to cut services, impose user fees, privatize public resources, and cut taxes. These were precisely the political goals of Winnipeg's fortieth mayor, Susan Thompson. Thompson, a

leather goods merchant elected mayor in 1992, was hostile to government and a vocal proponent of what has been called the anti-state state.³¹ "The government that we have built up is one that our citizens can no longer afford to support," Thompson proclaimed, as she clashed with anyone — especially city workers and their allies on city council — who resisted cuts, layoffs, and privatization.³² More than her predecessors, Thompson alienated city council and the city's board of commissioners — a committee of department heads tasked with coordinating city administration and communicating with city council about service delivery — and instead used the EPC to unilaterally direct policy change.³³ After reelection in 1995, Thompson sought to formally entrench these de facto shifts in governance style.

Thompson hired George Cuff — former mayor of Spruce Grove, Alberta and a New Public Management devotee — to author a report on civic governance in Winnipeg and to recommend a series of reforms. Cuff's report was framed as a "corporate review" of the City of Winnipeg and analyzed the city as a standalone entity — a "corporation" — rather than a democratic mechanism through which the people of Winnipeg set and meet collective goals. As such, while Cuff interviewed two hundred city officials, administrators, and councilors he did not speak to a single community resident, activist, or organization. Unsurprisingly, Cuff found that the City of Winnipeg was not operating "efficiently" enough and faced a series of challenges — including a prohibitively high cost of providing services, a large debt, and city departments overly focused on "self preservation" — that would require slashing the local state and streamlining decision making. "We simply cannot afford to be over-governed," Cuff concluded.³⁴

Filmon and Thompson imposed Cuff's recommendations with what observers at the time called "obscene haste", totally ignoring calls by Winnipeggers to participate in the restructuring of their own local governance model.³⁵ City

council took only eighteen days after the publication of the Cuff Report to adopt its recommendations, which the *Winnipeg Free Press* decried as “a gross violation of the democratic process.”³⁶ At hearings held after the fact, the only public supporters of the Cuff Report were two pro-business organizations: the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Opponents of the Cuff Report who attended these hearings included the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, the Provincial Council of Women, and several members of the RAGS.³⁷

CUPE 500 was one of the most strident opponents of the Cuff Report, critiquing Cuff’s recommendations as “ideological in the extreme.”³⁸ CUPE 500’s President characterized the Cuff Report as a platform for Mayor Thompson’s political agenda to cut, privatize, and contract-out city services, rollback city workers’ wages, and reduce the power of city departments. By implementing the Cuff Report, CUPE 500 told city council, city council chose to attack city workers and weaken city services rather than confronting the provincial government — the true source of the city’s fiscal woes, according to CUPE — for withholding funding for municipal services.³⁹

The implementation of Cuff’s recommendations — called “the most sweeping changes since unicity [sic] was established 25 years ago”⁴⁰ — led to an exceptional concentration of power at city hall and made Winnipeg the least democratic city in the country according to at least one Canadian political scientist.⁴¹ The main result of Thompson and Filmon’s reforms was to concentrate far more power in the mayor’s hands than was previously the case. This was achieved primarily by giving the mayor extensive powers over the EPC and by replacing the Board of Commissioners with a CAO overseen by the EPC. The Winnipeg Labour Council had long called for the retention of the board of commissioners

and to have its membership approved by EPC.⁴² The stated reason for abolishing the board of commissioners, however, was that as representatives of city departments — and not “financial experts” — they too often opposed budget cuts.⁴³ Avenues for citizen participation were also severely weakened, as amendments to the *City of Winnipeg Act* removed provisions requiring the establishment of community committees and RAGS. It was now left up to city council itself to decide how much citizen participation it desired, if any.⁴⁴ Immediate steps were also taken to reduce the power of city departments. The number of departments was cut from nineteen to fourteen — abolishing the Parks and Recreation Department, most notably — and over fifty city administrators were laid off.⁴⁵ The city also committed to replacing city departments with Special Operating Agencies, private-sector style firms in control of public funds but insulated from democratic interference.

To summarize, as outright bans on political participation were defeated over the course of the twentieth century, the restructuring of civic governance took on increased importance as a method of excluding the majority of people from decision-making at city hall. These efforts were boosted by the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s that galvanized support for anti-democratic reforms in the name of efficiency and reduced government spending. In general, these attacks on local democracy took three forms. First, as attacks on city council, primarily through reductions in the total number of city councilors, reduction in the power of non-EPC councilors, and by centralizing power in the mayor’s hands; second, as attacks on avenues for citizen participation, primarily through reductions in the power and number of community committees and RAGS; and third, as attacks on the influence of city departments, primarily through the establishment of the CAO.

The Current System

The Province of Manitoba’s “City of Winnipeg Charter” and the City of Winnipeg’s “City Organization By-law” — which must adhere to the Provincial Charter — determine the current system of civic governance in Winnipeg. According to these documents, the people of Winnipeg may elect fifteen city councilors and one mayor every four years. City council, however, has the power to increase the total number of city councilors to any odd number greater than fifteen.⁴⁶ Winnipeg is divided into fifteen geographically defined wards and the residents of each ward may elect one city councilor. The mayor is elected at large by a citywide vote. A few outright bans on political participation remain: Winnipeg residents who are not Canadian citizens or are under eighteen years old are banned from voting and holding office,⁴⁷ and residents who have been convicted of an offense and have not paid any fine imposed on them for the offense are banned from holding office.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, people who do not live in Winnipeg but do own property in Winnipeg are allowed to vote in the ward in which they own property.⁴⁹

The primary power of city council — which consists of all city councilors plus the mayor — is its authority to approve or reject by-laws and reso-

lutions. Council’s decisions are usually made by a majority vote, although council has the power to decide that certain kinds of issues require more than a majority vote.⁵⁰ By-laws must be voted on three separate times by council, but two of these votes may happen at the same meeting and all three may happen at the same meeting if two-thirds of council consents.⁵¹ Even after council has approved a by-law or resolution, however, the mayor may suspend its implementation within forty-eight hours of it being approved, if the mayor deems that the by-law or resolution contains an “error” or “omission”. This action forces council to vote on the by-law or resolution again at a future meeting.⁵² city council meetings must be open to the public, however city council may designate certain kinds of issues eligible for secret, “in camera” meetings as long as two-thirds of councilors agree that a given topic qualifies for and ought to be discussed in secret.⁵³

The City of Winnipeg Charter mandates the existence of a special committee of city council called the Executive Policy Committee (EPC) over which the mayor has total control. The EPC is tasked with filtering information and recommendations from the Standing Policy Committees (SPCs) of council and from city departments

to city council, and with setting the overall policy direction for city council. The mayor — via the Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives, a “group of professional staff” within the Mayor’s Office — provides direction to the EPC in matters of policy development and analysis, strategic planning, and economic development.⁵⁴ The mayor must be the chairperson of the EPC, approve its agenda, and select the other members of the EPC, who are paid significantly higher salaries than non-EPC members and who automatically become chairpersons of the SPCs. After selecting the SPC chairpersons, the mayor may appoint additional councilors to the EPC as long as the total number of EPC members is less than a majority of city council.⁵⁵ The mayor may remove councilors from EPC at any time. In addition to appointing the members of the EPC, the mayor appoints councilors to the positions of deputy mayor (to replace the mayor if the mayor is absent) and acting deputy mayor (to replace the deputy mayor if the deputy mayor is absent).

The EPC has significant powers. Not least is the committee’s responsibility to set the policy direction on city council. The EPC is required to “formulate and present recommendations to council respecting policies, plans, budgets, by-laws and other matters that affect the city as a whole,”⁵⁶ and to “Identify annual and longer range priorities for the growth and development of the city.”⁵⁷ The EPC “coordinates the work of committees of council,” receives reports from the SPCs, and assesses these reports before passing them on to city council.⁵⁸ The EPC receives all reports from the CAO — the individual in charge of all city departments — and therefore controls the flow of information from city departments to city council. The EPC is also required to “Recommend to council...all rates, fees, utility rate structures, and other charges for civic services and facilities,”⁵⁹ and to recommend to city council the appointment or removal of all “statutory officers” including the CAO, City Clerk, Chief Financial Officer, and City Auditor.⁶⁰ The EPC also

has significant power over city departments. The EPC is required to supervise the CAO and city departments in order to “ensure the implementation of policies adopted by council”.⁶¹ The EPC may also, following the decision of the mayor to suspend the CAO, recommend to city council that the CAO be fired.⁶²

The CAO is the second most powerful individual at city hall after the mayor. The CAO’s role is to ensure the implementation of city council by-laws and resolutions, and the CAO is given significant powers, including the task of preparing the city’s annual operating and capital budgets. The CAO is given significant authority over the city departments, including the power to determine the city’s overall administrative structure,⁶³ to coordinate the work of city department heads,⁶⁴ to chair any meeting of any city department and to determine procedures of conduct for those meetings,⁶⁵ and to hire, supervise, suspend, or fire any city worker other than the handful of “statutory officers.” The CAO is the lone representative of all city departments to city council. The CAO reports to the EPC, to city council, and to the SPCs on the activities of city departments and has the authority to coordinate and approve reports from any city department intended for city council.⁶⁶

Below EPC are a number of SPCs intended to address various policy areas. city council may decide to establish SPCs or not,⁶⁷ and it currently maintains five of them. Apart from the SPC on Finance, SPCs must consist of a chairperson appointed by the mayor and three other city councilors elected by city council.⁶⁸ The SPCs have relatively little power and play an advisory role to the EPC. They also have certain powers to approve or deny appeals for zoning variances, grants to cultural organizations, building permits, and so forth.⁶⁹

The City of Winnipeg Charter no longer requires community committees but the city has chosen to maintain five community committees to address issues of local concern in five sub-re-

gions across the city.⁷⁰ A community committee is composed of the three city councilors whose wards make up one sub-region. Community committees have limited powers, such as approving or rejecting small grants to non-profit organizations.

The City of Winnipeg has established a number of private corporations to carry out functions that city departments used to provide. These currently include CentreVenture, the Assini-

boine Park Conservancy, an array of Business Improvement Zones, and several Special Operating Agencies. These corporations are given mandates through agreements with the city to take over management functions, land ownership, and/or segments of the city's tax revenue. They have their own private boards and CEOs and have minimal responsibilities to city council in contrast to other city departments.

Analysis

Winnipeg is an exemplary case of the lack of democracy in civic governance across the country. The overriding power of the mayor is one of the most glaring barriers to democracy in civic governance in Winnipeg. The greatest source of the mayor's power is their authority to determine the membership of the EPC — and therefore the SPCs, since EPC members are SPC chairpersons — and to shuffle its membership at any time.⁷¹ This means that the EPC is less a mechanism of collective planning, strategizing and decision-making than a tool of the mayor. By appointing a city councilor to EPC, the mayor automatically increases that councilor's access to information, public notoriety — an advantage for reelection purposes — and salary. If an EPC member disagrees with the mayor, the mayor can remove them from the EPC and immediately reduce their salary, access to information, and notoriety. In effect, this means that the mayor pays EPC members to support the mayor's position and as a result the EPC almost always follows the mayor's lead. Once the EPC forwards a recommendation to city council it is very likely to gain approval since the number of city councilors on EPC may be as many as one fewer than a majority on council. This means it is only nec-

essary for the mayor to gain the support of one more non-EPC city councilor in order to pass a by-law or resolution. The mayor's authority to appoint — and remove at will — both the deputy mayor and acting deputy mayor gives the mayor a good chance at achieving this.⁷² The mayor also has great influence over which city councilors are elected speaker and deputy speaker — positions that are also paid a significantly increased salary — since city council elects these positions annually and the mayor can use the EPC to influence that vote.

Even if EPC membership were decided in a more democratic fashion — by city council or the electorate at large, for instance — the very institution of the EPC, as this paper has argued, does not promote democracy. The problem is that the EPC creates two tiers of city councilors: a first, more powerful tier that steers the policy direction of city council and filters the information that travels from city departments and SPCs to city council; and a second, less powerful tier whose members are often denied important information and are forced to react to the agenda set by the first tier. The EPC, as even Cuff recognized, acts as a gatekeeper, controlling the flow of information and policy recommendations to the

rest of city council.⁷³ As longtime Winnipeg activist Nick Ternette concluded from his decades of fighting city hall, the EPC “is not accountable to the public, sets its own agendas and holds secret meetings to ensure there is a degree of consensus among members before any major issue comes forth for public debate.”⁷⁴ By disempowering half of city council, the EPC is a major anti-democratic force at city hall.

The CAO position is another powerful gatekeeper-style institution and another key way that power is concentrated at city hall. With the authority to supervise city departments and to guide their implementation of city council decisions, and with the authority to control the flow of information and recommendations from city departments to city council, the CAO may possess just as much if not more power than city council itself.⁷⁵ To vest this much power in just one individual is extremely undemocratic and prone to petty corruption, as recent events have demonstrated. The CAO position perfectly encapsulates the neoliberal principles of the New Public Management doctrine, replacing public debate and citizens’ wishes with the so-called expert knowledge of a single boss. It is a technocratic, rather than democratic, approach to governance.

The powers of the mayor and the CAO are bolstered by the way city council meetings are structured. The rule allowing the smallest possible majority of city council to approve a by-law or resolution automatically disregards the views of what can be, in some cases, nearly half of city council, and facilitates the rule of EPC on council. Enabling all three votes on an issue to occur at a single city council meeting — especially given the ability of the EPC and the CAO to conceal policy proposals until the last minute — significantly reduces the opportunity for citizens to organize in advance around city council decisions. The “in camera” provisions for secrecy function similarly. Finally, the mayor’s ability to suspend by-laws or resolutions due to perceived

errors or omissions essentially gives the mayor veto power over city council if it were to approve something against the mayor’s wishes.

Winnipeg’s electoral system also significantly constrains the power of the people. The size of wards has ballooned to an average of 48,000 residents per city councilor, five times the size Winnipeg’s wards were in 1972. Bigger wards make it less possible for citizens to influence their political representatives, making politicians less accountable to their constituents and leading to lower quality representation.⁷⁶ Bigger wards also make it much more difficult to defeat an incumbent, which is a major factor in the longevity of some councilors. The larger the ward, as CUPE 500 has pointed out, the more expensive it is to run a campaign for city councilor, excluding average people from running for office.⁷⁷ Large wards further disempower oppressed communities and are less reflective of the city’s diversity than smaller wards are.⁷⁸ The current system has effectively reduced the number of Indigenous city councilors, for example, and may have been designed to do just that.⁷⁹ Groups that are concentrated in certain places to some degree — a few examples in Winnipeg might include French-speaking people in St. Boniface, Indigenous peoples in Point Douglas, or Black people in Central Park — would be more likely to be represented on city council if wards were smaller. A similar logic can be applied to Winnipeg’s approach to electing the mayor at-large, since at-large elections systematically silence groups who are outnumbered in the city as a whole. At-large elections are widely considered to entrench structural racism within North American cities and for this reason have been struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court.⁸⁰ In Winnipeg, for example, the suburbs essentially elect the mayor every time. The combination of electing the mayor at-large and then giving the mayor such a large amount of power is therefore extremely problematic. The relative infrequency of civic elections — now held once every four

years — similarly reduces the ability of citizens to hold city councilors accountable. The absence of political parties, moreover, makes it more difficult for voters to figure out the politics of each individual candidate, and enables politicians to hide political agendas behind personality-based campaigns.

Banning city residents who are not Canadian citizens from voting or holding municipal office, it should go without saying, is inherently undemocratic and systematically disenfranchises an entire segment of the community. To the extent that non-citizen migrants are more likely than people with Canadian citizenship to be people of colour, this measure is also a clear instance of systemic racism. The fact that non-resident property-owners *are* allowed to vote in municipal elections only adds insult to injury. Under the current system, people may be barred from voting for their city councilor while their absentee-landlord is empowered to cast such a vote.

The lack of structural avenues for citizen power in Winnipeg's civic governance structure — beyond elections — also drastically diminishes the relationship between city councilors and their constituents. When the only substantive mechanism putting city councilors in relation to their constituents is an election every four years, it is easy for city councilors to become distant and unresponsive to the needs of the communities that elected them, and to become overly influenced by business interests in elite social gatherings and back rooms. This can function as a tactic to divide and conquer communities and their movements. For example, Winnipeg's first Indigenous city councilor, George Munroe, was asked by fellow community organizers at the IMFC to run for city council — primarily in order to fight poverty and get affordable housing

built — but chose to leave city council after feeling disconnected from the grassroots struggles at the IMFC.⁸¹ In this way, Winnipeg's governance structure is in many ways typical of Canada's colonial strategy to impose hierarchies that make it easier to control Indigenous nations.⁸²

The private corporations — including CentreVenture, the city's business improvement zones, and the Assiniboine Park Conservancy — established by the city to replace city departments are highly undemocratic to the extent that they exist to avoid interference from elected city councilors and to serve narrow special interests. Rather than providing avenues for direct grassroots participation in planning, management, land ownership, and/or control over segments of the city's tax revenue, the current models overwhelmingly tend to hand direct access over public resources to small groups of wealthy business people. In the case of both CentreVenture and the city's business improvement zones, for instance, publicly-owned land and tax revenues have been captured by wealthy land developers and merchants who deliberately seek to push Indigenous peoples, women, elderly people, and the poor out of the city in order to establish more profitable, heavily-policed, luxury zones for the city's professional classes.⁸³

The main strength of the current system of civic governance in Winnipeg is the strength of the mayor and the CAO. To the extent that the mayor and the CAO are given a significant amount of power, the two could hypothetically pursue a bold vision for remaking the city according to the needs and aspirations of the majority. But this has never been the case. In fact, the current system is designed to guarantee the continuation of business as usual and to prevent the people of Winnipeg from exercising self-determination.

Concrete Effects

Social structures — including governance structures — cannot be assessed in and of themselves, they must be judged based on their actual effects on communities. What have these abstract reforms to governance actually done to the city? Since Thompson and Filmon’s 1990s reforms the city has pursued an intensified — albeit typical — neoliberal agenda based on three pillars: slashing taxes, cutting services, and investing exponentially in police. While most Canadian cities pursued a similar agenda during this time, by 2012 Winnipeg had the lowest tax rates and the lowest public spending levels of nearly any major Canadian city.⁸⁴ Policing, as in most other cities, was a glaring exception to this trend, as the police budget ballooned by one hundred and forty-five percent between 2000 and 2016.⁸⁵ Police now consume nearly thirty percent of the entire city operating budget, up from seventeen percent in 2000.⁸⁶ While this agenda has benefitted wealthy property and business owners, it has had serious detrimental effects on the lives of women, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, migrants, homeless people, youth, seniors, tenants, transit riders, and people with disabilities — in other words, most people.

The centrality of police expansion within the city’s neoliberal agenda cannot be ignored. While

the expansion of policing is a typical feature of neoliberal abandonment, Winnipeg has been a leader among Canadian cities in this regard and now has the most police officers per capita of any city in Canada.⁸⁷ Policing in Winnipeg, as across Turtle Island, has long been associated with anti-Indigenous racism and ongoing settler colonialism⁸⁸ as well as xenophobia and anti-Black racism.⁸⁹ While it is the biggest single municipal policy issue for many Indigenous community organizers in Winnipeg, allies on city council have been virtually non-existent during the long struggle to address police mistreatment of Indigenous peoples.⁹⁰ The recent focus on “community policing” and the establishment of the Winnipeg Police Board in 2013 have done nothing to challenge the overall trend of municipal investment in police above all else.⁹¹ In fact, these measures may facilitate the expansion of the city’s police budget by creating new policing initiatives and making the police appear to be more accountable to the people than was previously the case.

Affordable quality housing — particularly for women and children — is perhaps the city’s greatest single need and was identified at a 2014 Grassroots Women’s Mayoral Forum as one of the most pressing issues of municipal govern-

ance in Winnipeg.⁹² While Winnipeg has experienced a housing crisis for over one hundred years,⁹³ a stunning ten thousand Winnipeggers are now homeless — seventy percent of whom are estimated to be Indigenous⁹⁴ — and another one hundred and thirty-five thousand Winnipeggers are considered “at risk” of being homeless.⁹⁵ Over the course of the 2000s and 2010s, however, the City of Winnipeg has reduced its already paltry commitments to building quality affordable housing.⁹⁶ The city has also been criticized for its lax enforcement of by-laws intended to ensure that landlords maintain acceptable standards of housing quality.⁹⁷

Public transportation is a crucial requirement to make the necessities of life — including food, shelter, healthcare, childcare, jobs, education, social services, friends, and family — accessible to people without cars. This is an important issue for all poor and working class people and especially for parents, elderly people, people with disabilities, youth, and students. Winnipeg has one of the worst levels of bus service — measured in bus hours per capita — among Canadian cities⁹⁸ because city council has consistently sided with car owners over transit riders by spending considerably on new roads, bridges, overpasses, and underpasses for suburban expansion without matching spending increases on public transportation.⁹⁹ The proportion of the municipal budget spent on public transit has actually decreased in recent years.¹⁰⁰ Endless fare hikes imposed by the city to make up the funding gap have meant that Winnipeg relies more on user fees and advertising to fund public transit than almost any other Canadian city.¹⁰¹ The recent decoupling of provincial funding from municipal transit budgets, combined with the funding freeze, will give the city license to shift dedicated funds away from transit. It remains to be seen how it will allocate transit funds now that the province has removed oversight of provincial funding transfers, but the mayor has warned of cuts to municipal services across the board.¹⁰²

Pools, libraries, and community recreation centres — particularly their youth programming functions — constitute some of the most important infrastructure provided by the municipal state. As infrastructure that doesn’t directly facilitate profit making, however, these facilities have been some of the biggest victims of the pro-business interests who dominate city hall under the current governance model. After commissioning the Public Use Facilities Study (PUFS) in 2005 city council has closed several pools, libraries, and community centres, imposed new user fees, and cut programming hours significantly.¹⁰³ Winnipeg now spends approximately half of what other Canadian cities spend on youth recreation per capita.¹⁰⁴

City council’s insistence on austerity in youth programming has led it to act shamefully in more than one instance, especially when engaging with Indigenous youth service providers. When Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and a coalition of North End Indigenous community organizers decided recently that a special transit service to bring children to and from recreational programming was necessary to ensure children’s safety — especially on cold winter nights — they were met by an unsupportive city council and an insulting non-offer from the mayor.¹⁰⁵ After another coalition of Indigenous youth service providers in the North End warned city council that funding Youth For Christ’s North End Centre for Youth Excellence would be “state sanctifying another more contemporary, altered form of the Residential School experience,”¹⁰⁶ they were told by city council that the evangelical organization’s offer to fund youth recreational programming was simply too good to pass up.¹⁰⁷ Then in 2015, when organizers in Winnipeg’s West End pushed for the creation of a twenty-four hour safe space as part of a community response to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, they were forced to start an online GoFundMe campaign due to lack of support from city council.¹⁰⁸

Finally, city council's commitment to shrinking the local state has been expressed through the privatization of public services. The city's asphalt and concrete plant operations were contracted out in 1994. Eighty percent of the city's snow removal services have been privatized and garbage removal was entirely privatized in 2005. In 2009, despite extensive public opposition, the EPC pursued a plan to privatize the city's water supply. Although the plan ultimately failed, it resulted in a deal with a private firm, Veolia, which the firm hopes will pave the way for the eventual privatization of Winnipeg's drinking water and municipal water systems across North America.¹⁰⁹ The privatization of garbage

and snow removal has worsened the quality of service, leading to excesses of snow and garbage throughout the city that pose dangers and restrictions on mobility, especially for children, elderly people, and people with disabilities.¹¹⁰ Privatization has hurt workers in Winnipeg by cutting hundreds of well-paid full-time jobs with benefits and safety protections and replacing them with precarious, minimum-wage jobs without benefits or adequate safety protections. The city's privatized garbage removal service has been criticized in particular for its record of workplace injuries and for exploiting a largely Indigenous workforce through precarious "day labour" hiring schemes.¹¹¹

What Have Other Municipalities Done?

No Canadian municipality has a governance structure democratic enough to make sure the basic needs of its residents are provided for, as proven by the proliferation of urban homelessness, hunger, and poverty throughout one of the wealthiest countries in the world. In part, this is because the neoliberal attack on democratic governance — reinforced by the ideology of New Public Management — was not specific to Winnipeg but was a national and transnational class strategy that affected every Canadian city to some extent. There are small differences between the governance structures in Canadian cities, however, that either inhibit or promote democracy.

No other city in Canada gives the mayor as much power over the executive committee of city council as Winnipeg does.¹¹² Toronto, which allows the mayor to appoint eight of thirteen members of the executive committee, comes closest.¹¹³ In most Canadian cities that have executive committees, however, all members are elected by city council as a whole.¹¹⁴ Almost as important, no executive committee in Canada comprises as high a percentage of city council as Winnipeg's does, meaning that no other executive committee in Canada has as much power over city council decisions.¹¹⁵ Toronto's execu-

tive committee — at thirteen of forty-five members — comprises only twenty-nine percent of Toronto's city council. Some cities, such as Regina, have an executive "committee of the whole" in which all city councilors are members of the executive committee, meaning that the executive committee is not an exclusive tier of more powerful councilors.¹¹⁶ Many major Canadian cities, however, have no executive committee at all. Cities such as Vancouver and Calgary instead empower the pre-existing diversity of boards, committees, and commissions — consisting of both councilors and citizens — to provide policy direction to city council.¹¹⁷

While the CAO, or city manager, position has been implemented in nearly every major Canadian city as a result of the ascendance of the New Public Management doctrine, many Canadian cities take steps to limit the power of the position. Calgary, Toronto, and Saint John all retain a group of administrators — similar to the board of commissioners model — that function collectively and hold certain powers over the CAO.¹¹⁸ This hybrid CAO/board of commissioners structure prevents the CAO from single handedly dictating to city departments how policy will be implemented, as well as preventing

TABLE 1 Number of Residents per City Councilor for Various Canadian Cities

City	Residents per City Councilor
Regina	22,000
Halifax	25,000
Québec City	25,000
Montréal	26,000
Saskatoon	27,000
Ottawa	38,000
Winnipeg	48,000

the CAO from monopolizing the flow of information from city departments to city council.

When it comes to ward size, Winnipeg's current ratio of one city councilor per 48,000 residents is outpaced by many Canadian cities that have chosen to recognize the democratic value of smaller wards. Ottawa, with twenty-three councilors has a ratio of one councilor per 38,000 residents. Saskatoon, with ten city councilors has a ratio of one councilor per 27,000 residents. Montréal, with sixty-five city councilors has a ratio of one councilor per 26,000 residents. Halifax and Québec City, with sixteen and twenty-one councilors respectively, have ratios of one councilor per 25,000 residents. Regina, with ten city councilors has a ratio of one councilor per 22,000 residents.¹¹⁹

Avenues for meaningful citizen participation in municipal governance are few and far between in Canada. Citizen's assemblies, committees, and task forces mandated to study specific issues, draft plans, and submit them to city council have been established in British Columbia and Ontario municipalities.¹²⁰ Montréal is divided into nineteen geographically-defined neighbourhoods, or boroughs, each represented by a borough council consisting of both city councilors and additional borough councilors — of which there are thirty-eight in total across the city, including a borough mayor for each borough — who are elected by residents of the borough. Borough councilors serve only

on the borough council, whereas borough mayors and city councilors serve on both borough council and city council. The borough council system gives residents increased access to influence decisions at the neighbourhood scale by giving borough councils selected powers over local urban planning, parks and recreation, housing, user fees, and other issues.¹²¹ Halifax has been noted for its system of community councils, which are similar to Winnipeg's system of community committees in that they bring together city councilors from specific geographic areas to deal with issues of local concern. But Halifax's community councils have expanded powers, including jurisdiction over land use planning and the power to submit annual operating and capital budgets to city council for municipal spending in their area.¹²² There is also a history of higher levels of Canadian government mandating local citizen participation as a stipulation of funding to cities for specific projects. The federal government, for instance, attached such a stipulation to urban renewal funding in Vancouver in the 1960s.¹²³

Referendums are another tool of direct citizen participation in governance but have historically been of dubious value to progressive urban change. British Columbia, Québec, and the Yukon have community charter legislation stipulating that city council must submit a decision to a referendum if a certain number of citizens' signatures are gathered on a petition.¹²⁴

Referendums in Canadian cities have been used mostly to decide whether or not to borrow large amounts of money for specific capital projects but there have been exceptions, including in Whitehorse where a referendum was used to protect green space from development.¹²⁵ Referendums, however, have been criticized for many of the same reasons as at-large elections and have historically been manipulated in the interests of wealthy interest groups to cut taxes and avoid public expenditure.¹²⁶

Finally, several Canadian cities — including Vancouver, Montréal, and Québec City — are governed by political parties that in some cases make it easier for citizens to know where politicians stand on the issues, and make it more difficult for candidates to hide their agendas. Québec's provincial legislation encourages political parties in municipal politics by allowing parties to raise and spend money at any time while limiting independent candidates to raising and spending money only during election campaigns.¹²⁷

Options for Winnipeg

Any movement to make governance at city hall more democratic will have to work to redefine city hall as a place of governance, period. Developers and other business interests have maintained their stranglehold on city hall by popularizing the idea that the City of Winnipeg is simply a corporation that should deliver a minimal set of services in the most efficient way possible, rather than a political mechanism for the community to collectively imagine, discuss, and take action towards meeting its goals.¹²⁸ As the origins of the City of Winnipeg indicate, it will take much more than tinkering with the existing model to build a truly democratic local governance structure. What Thompson and Filmon did in the 1990s was not a radical departure from the status quo, but a deepening of it. In other words, there is no mythical pre-neoliberal City of Winnipeg to draw upon if we want a model of governance that can take seriously all the most pressing needs and aspirations of Winnipeggers. This section does not provide a complete picture of what a truly democratic civic government would look like, but it offers a list of possible improvements to Winnipeg's existing civic governance structure.

Any serious effort to make governance in Canada more democratic must contend with the

radically undemocratic character of colonialism and therefore be able to look beyond the settler state as a horizon of possibility. Indigenous peoples have governed themselves for millennia in the area surrounding the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and they continue to do so. In addition to being deeply undemocratic, the imposition of settler authority over Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg is both legally questionable and ethically suspect. Removing settler jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples in the city must be part of any serious reimagining of civic governance in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg has a rich history of grassroots organizing to draw on in this regard. Indigenous women in Winnipeg have long brought a decolonial approach to urban governance that could serve as a model for transforming the City of Winnipeg. Over the course of the 1970s, 1980s and beyond, Indigenous communities in Winnipeg took over urban housing, schools, grocery stores, daycares, child-welfare agencies, employment agencies, and other urban institutions that greatly affected their lives. Children of the Earth High School, Payuk Cooperative Housing, Neechi Foods, and Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre are just a few examples. Notably,

these efforts were directed towards the creation of new community-controlled institutions that would replace — rather than reform — existing settler institutions.

Another part of this movement for community control over urban institutions in Winnipeg has been a demand for a community-controlled resource base to support community-controlled institutions. In 1990, local organizers — most of whom were Indigenous women — organized a Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization that called for guaranteed funding for Indigenous organizations through the transfer of “property or another type of equity base” to the community.¹²⁹ This demand echoed the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood’s 1971 *Wahbung* plan, which called for a similar community-controlled economic base.¹³⁰ The idea of a distinct urban Indigenous government in Winnipeg with control over all funds currently being meted out to local Indigenous organizations by charities and various levels of the Canadian government continues to be promoted by Indigenous organizers.¹³¹ This is an alternative civic governance vision — rather than the City of Winnipeg controlling the economic base of the community, these proposals call for services and resources to be controlled directly by a separate governance body consisting of Indigenous peoples.

The specific challenges of achieving democracy under the structural inequalities of capitalism must also be reckoned with by any serious democratic movement. In this respect, Winnipeg’s labour organizations have a strong history of articulating alternative visions of civic governance. To ensure the representation of working people on city council, it has in the past been proposed that elected officials be drawn from workers in various sectors rather than from wards.¹³² This was effectively the model of civic governance during the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, when coordination of nearly every aspect of urban life — from the distribution of food and water to the public telephone and transportation systems — shifted

from City Hall to the Labour Temple.¹³³ In the same spirit, others have emphasized the need to build autonomous worker power as an alternative to petitioning the state, in order to “no longer plead for legislation to improve the lot of labour,” but instead to build organizations of workers powerful enough to enforce “such demands as such organizations may at any time consider necessary for their continued maintenance and well-being.”¹³⁴ While the composition of Winnipeg’s labour force has shifted significantly away from manufacturing toward service industries, these general principles of worker power still apply.

In addition to these more meaningful transformations, there are a number of smaller steps that could be taken to disperse power at city hall. The mayor’s control over the EPC should be addressed immediately. There are three options for doing this: Abolish the EPC entirely, turn the EPC into a committee of the whole, or have EPC members elected by city council.¹³⁵ The first two options are preferable, since the third would still maintain an unequal two-tier council structure.

The CAO must also be addressed. It does not make sense to give a single individual as much if not more power over information and decision-making at city hall as all of city council put together. The CAO should be abolished and replaced with a larger committee that includes workers from city departments. There are two precedents for this: The Board of Commissioners model that Winnipeg used before 1997 and the hybrid CAO/Board of Commissioners model currently used in cities such as Calgary, Toronto, and Saint John.

Winnipeg’s wards should be significantly reduced in size, as they are far too big to adequately represent the diversity of the city or to give citizens sufficient access to their city councilor. The local state is officially the level of government most directly accessible to the people, yet there are twice as many provincial ridings in Winnipeg as there are municipal wards. Reducing ward size is also much cheaper than New Public Management ad-

herents have said. The cost of city council in any Canadian city — whether for Montréal’s sixty-five councilors or Vancouver’s eleven — is never more than one percent of the municipal operating budget.¹³⁶ The number of wards in Winnipeg could be increased to seventy-two to regain the original 1972 Unicity ratio of one councilor per ten thousand residents. It could be increased to thirty-five in order to achieve the ratio of one councilor per 20,502 residents recommended by a city committee in 1988. Or it could be set at thirty-one, the same number of provincial ridings currently in Winnipeg.

The City of Winnipeg should establish new avenues for citizen power and participation in decision-making. The City of Winnipeg should reestablish RAGs and give them the enhanced local decision-making powers — over local land use, grants, services, capital and operating budgets — they were initially intended to have.¹³⁷ RAGs were extremely active in the 1970s — it was common for up to one hundred residents to attend a RAG meeting — but city council repeatedly ignored their demands.¹³⁸ This led to disillusionment and decreased participation, which the Manitoba Conservatives perversely construed as justification for abolishing RAGs entirely.¹³⁹ New models of grassroots neighbourhood and citywide assemblies predominantly led by Indigenous youth — such as Meet Me at the Bell Tower and 13 Fires Winnipeg — indicate a persistent passion for grassroots community discussion and city planning, especially for the purpose of dismantling structural racism. City council should be directly accountable to these grassroots plans. One option for achieving this was developed by the CHOICES Coalition for Social Justice in 1991, which demanded that “Councilor members of community committees be subject to recall and/or be ruled ineligible for future elections if they do not develop and implement community plans or area action plans.”¹⁴⁰ A network of neighbourhood councils should replace the Mayor’s Of-

fice of Policy and Strategic Initiatives and the EPC in the role of directing policy development and analysis, strategic planning, and economic development. These councils should be open to all citizens interested in planning the future of the city and should be given access to technical assistance from the City’s Property, Planning, and Development department upon request.

The city’s collection of so-called arm’s length organizations may provide another innovative model for establishing real grassroots power. Through institutions such as CentreVenture and the Business Improvement Zones, the city has effectively handed independent control over public resources — including land and tax revenue — to distinct organizations that possess significant freedom to plan and use public resources according to their own development visions. This model could be critically reworked to establish community-controlled development authorities operated by neighbourhood residents pursuing grassroots plans for affordable housing, food, childcare, education, and good jobs.

Bans on participating in elections are always undemocratic and should be abolished. The ban on non-Canadian citizens should be immediately revoked, since all residents of Winnipeg have an equal stake in the city’s future regardless of nationality. The legislation banning people from holding municipal office who have been convicted of an offence and have not paid any fine imposed on them for the offence should be removed, since it extends the structural racism of the justice system into the realm of democratic governance and imposes a fee on democratic participation. The ban on youth participation in elections should be addressed by reducing the voting age to sixteen (the legal driving age in Manitoba) or to twelve (the legal babysitting age in Manitoba). This is based on the radical idea that if someone can be depended on to protect a child’s life they can be depended on to vote for city councilor. The provision giving the right to vote to people who do not live in Winnipeg but own property

in Winnipeg appears to be a holdover from the 1800s and should be abolished.

Winnipeg's electoral system could be reworked in several other ways to promote democracy. The mayor should not be elected at-large, for the same reasons that the Supreme Court struck down at-large local elections in the U.S.¹⁴¹ Measures that rotate the people who fill positions of power generally help to reduce concentrations of power. A two-term limit on holding office could ensure that a wider variety of people, perspectives, and communities are represented on city council since many Winnipeg city councilors — and the occasional mayor — have governed for decade after decade. Reducing term length from four years back to three or even two years could achieve the same goal and give citizens greater power over their elected representatives. Provisions for recalling the mayor and city councilors could bolster this even more. On the other hand, without electoral finance reform, term limits could put progressive candidates at a disadvantage, since incumbents with limited financial resources may be able to defeat wealthier candidates based primarily on their incumbent status. Many of Winnipeg's most radical city councilors governed for term after term.

While limits to municipal campaign contributions in Winnipeg are relatively solid — at maximums of \$1,500 to a mayoral candidate and \$750 to a councilor candidate — they are still far beyond the reach of the average citizen. Perhaps more concerning is the absence of limits on private debt financing for campaigns.¹⁴² This clearly favours the wealthiest candidates who can qualify for the largest loans and run the most expensive campaigns. Loans should be capped at \$1,500 just as individual contributions are. Public financing of election campaigns could be introduced to replace the lost debt financing. Finally, the introduction of political

parties in municipal elections could encourage issue-based rather than personality-based campaigns and make it easier for citizens to know where candidates stand politically.

The structure of city council meetings themselves should be reformed. The speed with which city council is able to decide an issue is an extremely important variable in its ability to stifle or promote community participation in decision-making. The faster city council can decide, the more difficult it is for communities to build support for or against a proposed by-law or resolution. While city council is required to vote three times on any given matter, the spirit of this requirement is evaded by allowing two and even all three votes to be held at a single meeting. The City of Winnipeg Charter should be amended to allow only one vote per by-law or resolution per meeting, meaning it would take three city council meetings to come to a final decision. This would allow more opportunity for citizens to organize and could prevent city council from hastily pushing through decisions without the public's knowledge.

To promote citizen participation and disperse power to individual wards and councilors, city council could impose a two-thirds or three-fourths majority requirement to approve by-laws or resolutions. This could make it easier for the minority of inner city wards to resist the unilateral decisions of the suburban majority and make it more difficult for the mayor — or anyone else — to monopolize city council. On the other hand, such measures may risk producing a litany of deadlocks and rendering the city incapable of effective action. In addition, removing the mayor's power to suspend by-laws and resolutions within forty-eight hours would also reduce the mayor's power on city council. Placing stricter limits on secret in-camera city council meetings would also promote transparency and citizen participation.

Conclusion

While civic governance in Winnipeg has never been very democratic, it has become even less so since 1997. The current desire for “transparency” and “accountability” in civic politics signals a rejection of the neoliberal landscape produced by Thompson and Filmon’s reforms. As a community, we can take this opportunity to fight for small reforms, the most important of which will be to reduce the mayor’s control over

the EPC. We can also prioritize slightly broader reforms, such as reducing ward size and re-establishing and empowering RAGs. An even bolder approach would be to honour, support, and structurally shift power to longstanding grassroots movements — including anti-colonial movements led by Indigenous women — for community control over public resources and services in the city.

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Endnotes

- 1 Bascaramurty 2014.
- 2 Welch 2017.
- 3 Barghout 2017.
- 4 Barnett 2009.
- 5 Artibise 1975, 25.
- 6 Gaudry 2016.
- 7 Supreme Court of Canada 2013.
- 8 Craft 2013, 103.
- 9 Swan 2010.
- 10 I follow Purcell (2003), Varsanyi (2006), and Ridgley (2008) in using “citizen” to denote membership in the community based on physical presence rather than legal status.
- 11 Artibise 1975.
- 12 Burley 2010.
- 13 Artibise 1975, 38.
- 14 Artibise 1975, 38.
- 15 Artibise 1975, 40.
- 16 Artibise 1975, 33.
- 17 Artibise 1975, 24.
- 18 Sixty-nine percent of the members of City Council elected in Winnipeg’s 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014 general elections were white men. The majority of white men elected to City Council in 2014 were business owners, corporate lawyers, and/or Chamber of Commerce representatives.
- 19 Kramer and Mitchell 2010, 319.
- 20 Silver 1995, 2.
- 21 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 97.
- 22 Thomas 1998, 47.
- 23 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 96.
- 24 Cuff 1997, 13, 21, 25; Tindal and Tindal 2009, 97.
- 25 Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 500, 1991.
- 26 Cuff 1997, 13.
- 27 CHO!CES, A Coalition for Social Justice 1991, 2.
- 28 CHO!CES, A Coalition for Social Justice 1991, 2.
- 29 Sancton 2011, 224.
- 30 CHO!CES 1991, 4.
- 31 Gilmore 2009.
- 32 Thompson and the Executive Policy Committee 1997, 1.
- 33 Cuff 1997, 6.
- 34 Cuff 1997, 33.
- 35 Werier 1997; Santin 1997.
- 36 Werier 1998.
- 37 Russell 1998.
- 38 Moist 1996, 10.
- 39 Moist 1997.
- 40 Werier 1997.
- 41 Sancton 2011, 224.
- 42 Winnipeg Labour Council 1985.
- 43 *Winnipeg Free Press* October 30, 1997.

- 44 *Winnipeg Free Press* April 22, 1998.
- 45 Kuxhaus 1998; *Winnipeg Free Press* October 30, 1997.
- 46 Line 17(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 47 Lines 21 and 22 of the Province of Manitoba’s “Municipal Councils and School Boards Election Act”.
- 48 Line 23(2) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 49 Lines 21 and 22 of the Province of Manitoba’s “Municipal Councils and School Boards Election Act”.
- 50 Line 73(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 51 Line 55 of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 52 Line 60 of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 53 Lines 76(1) and 76(2) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 54 Line 16.1 of the City Organization By-Law.
- 55 Line 61(1) and 61(2) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 56 Line 62(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 57 Line 4 of the City Organization By-law.
- 58 Line 62(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 59 Line 4 of the City Organization By-law.
- 60 Line 62(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 61 Line 98(2) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 62 Line 98(2) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 63 Line 17 of the City Organization By-Law.
- 64 Line 26(10) of the City Organization By-Law.
- 65 Line 26(9) of the City Organization By-Law.
- 66 Line 26(5) of the City Organization By-Law.
- 67 Line 63(1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.
- 68 Line 6 and 7 of the City Organization By-Law.
- 69 Lines 9–14 of the City Organization By-Law.
- 70 Line 15.2 of the City Organization By-Law.
- 71 This provision has led political scientists to deem Winnipeg’s mayor one of the most powerful in Canada. See Sancton 2011, 225; Leo and Piel 2005, 117.
- 72 Kives 2017a.
- 73 Cuff 1997, 45.
- 74 Ternette 2013, 107.
- 75 Cuff 1997, 40.
- 76 Sancton 2011, 182.
- 77 Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 500, 2.
- 78 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 248; Munroe 2017.
- 79 Munroe 2017.
- 80 Sancton 2011, 186.
- 81 Munroe 2017.
- 82 Munroe 2017.
- 83 Toews 2015.
- 84 Lett 2012.
- 85 Marcoux 2016.
- 86 Marcoux 2016. Even right-wing City Councilors have begun to suggest the wps budget be reined in.
- 87 Statistics Canada 2012.
- 88 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba 1999.
- 89 Manitoba Human Rights Commission, 2007.
- 90 Mallett 2017.
- 91 Giving the Manitoba government control over the Winnipeg Police Board hasn’t helped, as the Conservative government’s removal of Leslie Spillett from the Board in 2016 makes clear.
- 92 Brunelli 2014.
- 93 Silver 2016.
- 94 Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2015.
- 95 Cooper, “Excuse Me, Canada, Your Homelessness Is Showing.”
- 96 MacKinnon 2005; CCPA 2014, 27.
- 97 Brunelli, 2014.
- 98 CCPA 2014, 39.
- 99 CCPA 2014, 36.
- 100 CCPA 2014, 39.
- 101 CCPA 2014, 39.
- 102 Kives, 2017b.
- 103 CCPA 2014, 53
- 104 CCPA 2014, 53
- 105 Mallett 2017.
- 106 Fontaine 2010.
- 107 Hugill and Toews 2014.
- 108 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2015.
- 109 Brubaker 2011.
- 110 Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 500 2015.
- 111 Fernandez 2016.
- 112 Sancton 2011, 225.
- 113 Sancton 2011, 225; Tindal and Tindal 2009, 252.
- 114 Sancton 2011, 224.

- 115 McCandless 2010.
- 116 City of Regina 2017.
- 117 Sancton 2011, 224; McCandless 2010; City of Vancouver 2017; City of Calgary 2017.
- 118 McAllister 2004, 211; City of Calgary 2017a.
- 119 Statistics Canada 2016.
- 120 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 332
- 121 Ville de Montréal 2017.
- 122 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 339.
- 123 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 343.
- 124 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 335
- 125 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 335
- 126 McAllister 2004, 48.
- 127 Tindal and Tindal 2009, 348.
- 128 The Manitoba Home Builders Association has argued that Mayor Bowman’s suburban development fees are illegal under Winnipeg’s City Charter, a view that perfectly conveys developers’ lived experience — if not legal reality — that the City of Winnipeg is nothing more than a tool for their interests.
- 129 Urban Futures Group 1990, 15.
- 130 Manitoba Indian Brotherhood 1971.
- 131 Silver 2016, 202.
- 132 Penner 1975, 28.
- 133 Gutkin and Gutkin 1997, 158.
- 134 Bumsted 1994, 24.
- 135 The latter option was recommended by the Winnipeg Labour Council in a 1985 brief to City of Winnipeg Act Review Committee of the Province of Manitoba.
- 136 Sancton 2011, 182.
- 137 Brownstone and Feldmen 1972.
- 138 Ternette 2013, 105.
- 139 Ibid.
- 140 CHOICES 1991, 7
- 141 Sancton 2011, 186.
- 142 Line 33.3 (1) of the City of Winnipeg Charter.



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