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Statement on Proposed Dismantling of Bus Shelters by City Council

Main Street Project does not support this motion and refers Coun. Nason and all City Councillors to the Kíkinanaw Óma Strategy which the City of Winnipeg was a partner in creating, along with a several others including End Homelessness Winnipeg and Main Street Project. There are many solutions-oriented recommendations in this strategy, including a guide for the public with advice on what to do if they encounter folks living unsheltered. Any formal actions that impact people living unsheltered should be taken with a human rights based approach.

Additionally, with the absence of any safe consumption sites in Winnipeg, people using substances will inevitably use in public sheltered spaces. Eliminating one or two bus shelters will not address this issue. The solution to homelessness is housing. The City can couple investments in community outreach with investments into housing to ensure there is safe, supportive housing so that our unsheltered citizens have somewhere to transition to.

There have been comments made in the media and by some City councillors criticizing the approach MSP takes. We feel it is necessary to detail the work we undertake (what we do) and add context to *how and why* we approach our work in this deliberate way.

As an agency, we value the importance of life and acknowledge that every person has their journey of healing. Individuals living in bus shelters are the graphic, highly visible evidence of what trauma, racism, and anti-oppressive systems do to people. What may be perceived as erratic or defiant behaviours to some is not what we encounter. Many of our unsheltered community members utilize bus shelters to have the same human experience as everyone else: comfort and belonging within their community. They provide a refuge from the elements during extreme weather, and finally, sometimes they are the only structures or places some may access without being labelled, stigmatized and denied entry.

Many people MSP outreach serves are referred through health care providers, hospitals, and community health groups, often living with acute to critical conditions. Some of these individuals aren't able to make an informed decision promoting a lifestyle of safety and well-being; as such, the van team responds to the essential needs to keep the individual alive until a plan can be developed that promote stability.

Main Street Project values the importance of life over the discomfort of the privileged. Many of the people living unsheltered struggle to find a sense of safety outside of their community. Their physical and mental health becomes compromised from living on the streets. Their openness to trust is limited due to empty promises, budget cuts, and a society's lack of empathy repeatedly shows them,

Finally, policy and structures have created a divide and deem people living unsheltered as undeserving of the most basic human needs. By removing bus shelters and performing acts of hostile architecture,

“moving people along” you continue participating in the inhuman treatment of our most vulnerable and do not align with Truth and Reconciliation.

If you truly want to support Truth and Reconciliation and the well-being of a just society, you will vote against this motion. You will promote initiatives that support healing, rather than hinder it.

The current challenge that outreach teams face is the disjointed government systems that need to be engaged to access support. Income assistance, medical treatment, and access to the most basic needs such as access to personal identification (required to access mainstream social services) are all done in separation from each other, all have long waiting periods and are not always accessible to people that aren't trusting or engaging in support. Outreach teams, have to create creative and unique ways to support individuals living in these conditions.

Eliminating bus shelters is a discriminatory, colonial, punitive action that distracts from the proactive, evidence-based recommendations that would help address these issues namely supportive, accessible low-income housing and safe consumption sites.

The approach we take is lead by a trauma-informed, human rights, anti-colonial and harm reduction values. We build relationships and work to meet the needs of the people who are the most vulnerable in the city. When leaders at City Hall misrepresent our work, it is not only harmful but creates division in community and spreads misinformation. MSP is happy to provide tours, support and training to all councillors to help them better inform the work we do. Last year we made 10 presentations to different council committees, EPC, and Council, also offered presentations to each City councillor.

MSP would like to clarify some misleading statements being made in the media and at City Hall about our 24/7 city-wide outreach work. We operate a 24/7 mobile outreach program that provides the following services:

- 1- Providing basic needs to people living on the streets, in encampments or sleeping rough. This includes, food, water, clothing, care, connection and building relationships.
- 2- Offers of transportation: we provide transportation to people to get to services, shelters or other locations in the city. We also provide voluntary transport for WPS, and WFPS
- 3- 311 responses: we respond to 311 requests and calls directly from the public to provide wellness checks, connect with encampments or reports of people on the streets or sleeping rough.
- 4- Housing and case management support: we offer case managers in the outreach van directly to support housing people on the streets, sleeping rough or in encampments. Through a human rights approach, we build relationships, identify needs and goals for people and support person-centered work to house and keep people housed.
- 5- Access to services: our outreach team provides connection to primary care, income supports, housing and other services across the city.
- 6- Harm reduction services: MSP offers harm reduction services, supplies, Naloxone kits, training on Naloxone and administration.

Main Street Project believes that collaboration is essential in working with other community agency partners to create new pathways for people living rough and to reduce duplication of service.

Community collaboration related Mobile Outreach:

- I. End Homelessness Winnipeg:
 1. Extreme Weather Committee (Chair)
 2. Kíkininaw Óma – A Strategy to Support Unsheltered Winnipeggers (inception members and leaders)
 3. Coordinated Shelter Group
 4. Coordinated Access Group and Council

- II. City of Winnipeg:
 1. Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service:
 - Voluntary transport replacement since 2018
 - Fire safety education partnership
 - Encampment identification and response

 2. Public Works
 - Identification of abandoned encampments for mindful garbage clean ups

 3. 311
 - Triage and response to 311 calls for encampment support, rough sleepers, bus shacks

- III. Winnipeg Outreach Network:
 - Active members
 - Led and implemented new technology for communication

- IV. Downtown Community Safety Partnership:
 - Mutual communication on each shift regarding the transportation of people to shelters and other locations (MSP provides transportation of people with disabilities)

The Main Street Project is in partnership with over 120 community connections. It operates in collaboration with many working groups from the community base to all three levels of government. Main Street Project will continue to foster strong partnerships moving forward and into the area of Coordinated Access, which will strengthen alliances and referrals in the sector.

To reiterate, the solution to homelessness is housing. The City can make direct investments into transitional and supportive housing along with community mobile outreach to ensure there is safe, supported transitional housing so that we can support people to be housed.
