

Report: Making Downtown Winnipeg Safer and Friendlier Part 2

Background: Winnipeg is facing a major problem of crime and anti social behavior in the downtown area. Successfully making Downtown a safer and friendlier place is crucial to the health of our city for all residents. The issue of crime, much of it driven by the meth crisis, affects other parts of the city. The fact that the downtown is a social centre for people who live downtown, mostly poorer people, and people who come downtown to work and take in social events like hockey games and night clubs, mostly better off residents of Winnipeg, makes safety an issue for everyone. The Manitoba Police Commission, issued a report (The Asper Report) which, while including a few positive recommendations, lacked an understanding of the issues and neglected the reality that most people living in and around the Downtown.

The Point Powerline, a crime prevention program based in North Point Douglas with many years experience in dealing with crime and anti social behavior issued Part One of an alternative report. Part One stressed disrupting the criminal element and preventing crime through the involvement of the people who live in the downtown, many of them poorer. People who live in the less expensive apartments around the SHED district of Downtown are potentially the main source of information of who the people are who are committing crimes and other anti social behavior, they are also the most likely victims of crime in the downtown. (See making Downtown Winnipeg Safer and Friendlier: Part One for more details.)

Summary: Part Two of the report:

Preventing crime and anti social behavior is the most important function of any strategy. Solving crime is important but most victims would much prefer that the crime did not take place. Prevention has many facets however this report will focus on early identification and fast response to potential crimes. This report will identify organizations and groups that have a major responsibility in making Downtown Safer and Friendlier.

The report will also respect our reality that both the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg are in a period of austerity and that, even with

major private sector contributions, an overly expensive design of a safety program will result in delay and possible non action, which is unacceptable.

Making Downtown Safer and Friendlier: Part Two

Recommendations:

1. A public phone number and email address be created to allow people and organizations to report potential problems before they become crimes. This number will be able to communicate with resources that can deal with the problem. Resources able to respond should include, Foot patrols, Main Street Project staff, Bear Clan patrol, Mental Health Workers, By Law enforcement, health department, Police cadets, Police. This phone line needs to be available to ordinary people in the Downtown area, not just foot patrols and official organizations as proposed in the Asper report.
2. Police must be intimately involved in the design of the response system. While non police responders should be utilized when confronting non violent problem situations, only police are trained and capable of dealing with situations with weapons or violent acting out.
3. The Community Support Unit of the Winnipeg Police Service is an important asset in preventing criminal and anti social behavior. The WPS should transfer officers from lower crime communities to the Downtown Community Support Unit.
4. Jane Jacobs identified the concept of “Eyes on the Street” as a crime prevention technique. Enabling people who live and work in the downtown area to be “Eyes on the Street” and mobilize preventive action will develop an understanding that criminal and anti social behavior is not accepted. Once those who are tempted to perform anti social or criminal acts understand that their behavior will be reported, it will result in a decrease in negative behavior. An example of this is one of the techniques used to deal with meth dealers in North Point Douglas. Neighbours observe and report a dealer. The Powerline communicates with the Community Support Unit of the Winnipeg Police Service. A highly competent, professional Police Officer visits and has a discussion with the identified dealer indicating dealing is not acceptable behavior and if it continues Police will return with

a search warrant and arrests will take place. 90% of the time dealing of drugs ceases after the police visit. This is old fashioned preventative policing which only works if the community is willing to work with police.

5. The taxi industry should be recruited to be a major factor in identifying potential problems. Taxis cruise the downtown 24/7. They deliver people who are potential problems to the downtown. They deliver drugs to dealers and young girls to high end hotels. They are required to accept all potential passengers but they do not support the criminal behavior. The majority of drivers are largely family men from the Sikh community, a community with a long tradition of law enforcement. Major efforts should be taken to encourage taxi drivers to report problems they observe or hear passengers discussing.

6. Potentially a Punjabi language tip line could be established operated by volunteers so drivers could report issues as they see them without passengers being aware they are being reported.

7. Due to the lack of security in the Downtown many business' and apartment blocks have employed private security guards to make their properties safer. Security companies and individual security guards should be encouraged to report potential problem behavior that takes place within view of the property they are guarding.

8. The Bear Clan Patrol has developed a national reputation for its mobilization of volunteers to minimize problems in the inner city. They need to be intimately involved to ensure that situations that are the result of poverty are dealt with in a humane helpful manner.

9. Publicly intoxicated persons are problematic. People who suffer from an addiction are potentially threatening to their own health and in some cases, to the public. Presently para medics are dispatched and if the person is deemed to be intoxicated they call the police or the cadets to take the person to the IPDA facility operated by Main Street project, in handcuffs. The huge majority of intoxicated persons are not obstreperous. The para medics should take the intoxicated person to an appropriate non incarceratory facility if they are not acting out. This could be their home or the Main Street Project voluntary facility. The IPDA facility should be reserved for persons who are a danger to themselves or to the public. Main Street

project mobile van should also be utilized wherever possible since their staff are highly skilled in dealing with intoxicated people.

10. Meth and other illicit drugs are a major cause of crime and anti social behavior. Disrupting the retail trade of the sale of meth is a crucial part of making downtown safer. Landlords and property managers need to be actively involved in cooperating in rapid eviction of illicit drug dealers. Landlords and property managers should encourage tenants to report illicit drug dealers and forward that information to the phone number/email address identified in recommendation number 1 as well as proceed to evict.

11. The Residential Tenancies Branch, which promised to make eviction of drug dealers easier, has failed to keep their commitment. The RTB must make it clear that criminal behavior, particularly illicit drug dealing is an evictable activity. The RTB must provide landlords with clear workable guidelines to allow eviction of criminals.

12. The tri government Task Force on Illicit Drugs has several recommendations that are applicable to the needs of our downtown area.

13. Out of Control parties are where twenty percent or higher of assaults take place due to people acting violently when they become intoxicated. As well often men invite young girls and get them drunk and sexually abuse them. Tenants need to report out of control parties. Police are the only ones able to respond to this problem due to the unpredictable behavior of inebriated groups. Police need to utilize existing methods to seize alcohol at out of control parties. The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Authority need to utilize the policy to ban alcohol from addresses with a pattern of out of control parties.

14. Slum housing is not allowed under Winnipeg's Livability By law. However there are many apartments in the Downtown area that are unacceptable under the Livability By law. The City of Winnipeg needs to ensure that immediate active enforcement of the livability by law is a top priority.

15. Panhandling is not illegal and methods recommended in the Asper report are anti social and bound to fail a court challenge. People pan handle because they are poor. Overly aggressive panhandling is unacceptable and needs to be confronted quickly. Once pan handlers know

what the rules are and that there are consequences for being overly aggressive the incidents of aggressive panhandling will decrease.

16. The City of Winnipeg has a Chronic Problem Building Committee which was established to bring together all departments of the city to deal with buildings with continuing criminal problems and by law problems. This committee needs to be re-energized and the WPS need to appoint an inspector level person to ensure police work with the other departments.

17. The business community has a role to play in bringing crime in the Night Club and late night facilities under control. Police need to build improved relations with night club owners and bouncers to ensure police are notified whenever suspicious people are at the club or when disagreements begin. Once people with outstanding warrants and bail or parole conditions that ban them from drinking alcohol learn that the club will report them they will cease to visit the clubs. Clubs which refuse to cooperate with police should receive massively increased attention.

18. Sexual Abuse of Children at high end hotels. Many of the customers for sexual services from under age children are staying at high end hotels. It needs to be made very clear that having sex with a child under 16 is a criminal offence and the hotel will notify police. Hotels have policies against prostitutes accessing clients in their facilities however these policies are rarely enforced. The Downtown Biz should play a leadership role in getting Hotels to actively cooperate in protecting children from abuse. This is an important but largely invisible part of making our Downtown safer.

19. The contribution of the Downtown business community in developing a program to reduce crime and anti social activity must be recognized and supported. However it is important that non official groups or individuals that have a deeper understanding of crime and social conditions in the downtown be included in the planning and oversight of whatever program is to be implemented. The influence of Meyers, Norris, Penney (MNP) is problematic. This accounting consulting group have been the recipients of Requests For Proposals from the City of Winnipeg. Their report on police helicopters is in conflict with a successful program to make Downtown a safer and friendlier place. MNP were asked to evaluate the Winnipeg Police Helicopter. This report did not provide justification for maintaining the existing helicopter and then recommended a second

helicopter. In a time of austerity it is difficult to envision the purchase and operation of a second helicopter which brings into doubt the validity of MNP as a consultant on crime prevention. Their lack of consultation with resident based crime prevention groups also raises doubts about their role.

Conclusion: This report does not claim to have all the answers to the actions needed to make "Downtown a Safer and Friendlier Place". However it does identify a series of resources and actions that need to be included in any program. You will note that most of the recommendations utilize already existing resources at little or no cost. Some of the recommendations are included in other reports. Many are new innovative responses to a difficult situation. This report strongly suggests that more of the same will not succeed. In a time of austerity it is crucial to recommend what is possible to fund under existing conditions.

Making Downtown Safer and Friendlier: Part Three will be released in early February.

Part Three will deal with how to respond to the root causes of poverty that lead to much of the crime and anti social behavior. It will discuss the need to encourage an increase in general civility which will reinforce positive behavior.

The role of social service agencies and the need for more social agencies to be open evenings and weekends will be discussed

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