

## **Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba**

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Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development  
Manitoba Legislative Assembly

6:30 p.m., Monday, October 22, 2007

Appearing - Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba President, Maxine Balbon and Representative, Elizabeth Fleming

### **Thank you for the opportunity to speak to **Bill 21–The Housing and Renewal Corporation Amendment Act (Fund for Housing Revitalization)****

The Provincial Council of Women of Manitoba (PCWM) has followed the debate on Bill 21, the questions posed by the opposition parties during estimates of Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation and we have taken careful note of the Minister's responses.

The Council has worked long and hard to prevent urban sprawl in and around Manitoba's urban centres. We are acutely aware of the environmental and economic costs of sprawl. For years, Winnipeggers have watched as suburban sprawl has steadily drawn resources away from the inner city – both the downtown and existing neighbourhoods. Sprawl also removes high class agricultural land from production, displaces wildlife and increases dependency on the automobile at a time when we should be reducing, not increasing, greenhouse gases from transportation.

PCWM members were pleased when Becky Barrett, then opposition Urban Affairs critic, asked if she could adopt PCWM's resolution on "Responsible land use around Manitoba's existing urban centres" as a private member's Bill. That Bill, of course, went nowhere. We remained hopeful however that when the New Democratic Party formed government it would act against urban sprawl. You can imagine our dismay when the NDP cabinet proposed Waverley West – a mega-subdivision the size of Brandon, Manitoba's second largest city. It would have made sense if MHRC had developed its land banks in Meadows West and Fraipont but these smaller parcels remain islands of undeveloped land almost surrounded by urban areas.

We also noted in 2005 that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs failed to send the Waverley West Plan Winnipeg amendment to the Municipal Board for a recommendation based on public hearing. Instead, cabinet rushed ahead to develop. This was especially disappointing because it prevented closer, independent professional scrutiny of the large discrepancy between the findings of the MHRC/Ladco/NDLea cost benefit analysis and that of the City of Winnipeg.

Disappointing too was cabinet's decision to act as both the developer of Waverley West and the regulator of all lands in the province of Manitoba. This, is a clear conflict of interest.

It is evident that the development of Waverley West is controlled by cabinet. Key decisions are made by cabinet. The board of the MHRC is made up entirely of senior public servants who take direction from their minister. The MHRC is a crown corporation but its annual reports are not reviewed by a Standing Committee of the House.

There are a number of reasons why we think Bill should not proceed.

1. Bill 21 is not necessary – except perhaps to take the bad look off Waverley West. One of the purposes of the Housing and Renewal Corporation Act as it now stands is, 2(b) to enhance the affordability of, and accessibility to, adequate housing for Manitobans, particularly those of low and moderate income.

The MHRC already has the authority and can channel revenues for inner city housing.

2. The lack of prompt and complete answers to the critics' questions during discussion of Housing Estimates does not inspire confidence. This is a public development by government, not a joint venture. Land development carries risks. Private sector developers have much sharper pencils and more to lose than Government. The government should be transparent and accountable.

3. It is difficult for citizens to see how the MHRC accounts publicly for its land development costs and benefits. This fund will do nothing to help. In fact it could mask the true costs (e.g. loans under the Loans Act that may or may not be paid back) and benefits and allow Government to take credit for a "profit" that is just creative accounting. We know that land development has high costs in the early years and the "profits" come later. Manitobans do not know who will pay the cost of the largest ticket item, the Kenaston extension, or how and when that cost will be shown on the books.

4. The Minister mentioned that the numbers on Waverley West are being re-worked. We do not seem to have a base line cost/ benefit. By contrast, the joint-venture agreement with pro forma for Royalwood was tabled in the House and discussed by politicians. There is no such debate on this development and it is 100% Government owned and led.

In conclusion, we would like to see the Government be much more open, forthright and accountable about its land development enterprises. Bill 21 is redundant; misleading to the public and we believe it should not pass.

Thank you for this opportunity to address Bill 21.