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**Presentation to the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services  
March 8, 2010**

RE: 2010 Preliminary Operating Budget Estimates

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Councillors. I am Rita Burgess, Chair of the Winnipeg Public Library Board. I am very pleased to be here this morning, along with our Vice-Chair, Christine Kolybabi-Labossière, to represent the Library Board.

It has been said that “Knowledge is free at the library. Just bring your own container”.

The Winnipeg Public Library service is a valuable asset to all the citizens of Winnipeg and we are appreciative of the very positive support you have all given to our library system and the Board. We were very pleased when we reviewed the City’s preliminary 2010 operating budget, to see that the Library materials’ budget will, if approved, receive an \$80,000 increase for this year. We were also very appreciative of the \$20,000 increase to the Library Board grant. So essentially we are here today to say **THANK YOU!**

And while this may be considered “preaching to the choir”, I wanted to take this opportunity to state once more how libraries impact our community in so many ways.

Libraries bolster our economic prosperity and improve the market worth of our community.

The Library has an important role in literacy development, not only for children, but also for adults. According to a report from the Canadian Council of Learning, 48% of Canadians aged 16 and older only possess a level 2 or lower in literacy. A level 3 is considered the “minimum threshold for coping with the demands of the global knowledge-based economy”, according to the Council. In Winnipeg, 44% of our citizens have a low level of literacy (level 2 or below). Crime levels have been linked to literacy levels. For example members of the Winnipeg legal community estimate an illiteracy rate of 80% among inmates at Headingly Correctional Centre. Libraries are an important part of a solution.

Libraries and library services are among positive features that attract new citizens to Winnipeg. Winnipeg Public Library is working very hard in meeting the needs of our growing immigrant population.

Improving and expanding the range of meaningful Library services for Aboriginal peoples living in Winnipeg is an important commitment for both Winnipeg Public Library and the Library Board. The Library’s goal is to identify new service innovations, while building on past successes and developing a growing understanding of needs, expectations and potential. To that end, a needs’ assessment and community consultation is now underway (to be completed May 2010, with funds received from the Aboriginal Youth Strategy along with funding from the Library Board). A portion of the increased grant to the Board will be used to further examine this issue, with the goal of familiarizing Aboriginal Winnipeggers with the resources available in our libraries, an enabling strategy noted in the “Call to Action for Our Winnipeg”.

The population of Winnipeg is aging. Our public library system has many excellent services and materials in place to meet the needs of this demographic, but there are ever increasing demands for more, for example, from aging baby boomers, some of whom are developing visual impairments.

We feel it is critically important to reinvest in libraries for sustainability and look for long term sustained funding for materials. We will continue to advocate for **permanent, ongoing annual funding increases of 3% (or better) to the materials budget.**

It would be important to note at this time, that when we speak of materials it is not just books. Materials include electronic and non-print materials, which together make up approximately 30% of the materials budget. In 2009 our Library's overall circulation increased 4% over 2008. EBooks/E-Audio Book Checkouts increased **42%** over 2008.

In 2008 Winnipeg ranked 32nd of the 44 Canadian Urban public libraries in average materials expenditure per capita (at \$4.16). This year's increase does not yet bring us to the national "average" of \$5.21, but is a step in the right direction. To bring us to the national average, an injection of approximately \$600,000 would be required. While we understand that that amount is not achievable in the current economic environment, it does highlight the importance of continuing to increase the spending on materials every year.

On behalf of the Library Board, I would like to take this opportunity say how proud we are of the tremendous job that Manager of Library Services Rick Walker and all the staff of the Library do in meeting the educational, informational and recreational needs of the citizens of Winnipeg, with the funds available to them.

It should be noted that Winnipeg Public Library continues to operate very efficiently, providing great service with extremely low salary costs as a percentage of expenditures, ranking 43rd out of 44, or 55% of total expenditures.

Were you aware that 70% of Winnipeggers have a library card and that our citizens' satisfaction with libraries is 92%. That is a lot of happy, satisfied people! And that was before the Sunday hours at Henderson, Pembina Trail and Westwood Libraries were announced. Thank you for proposing the increase to the library budget that will make these extended hours a reality!

The additional funding in our Board grant will also allow us to provide the Winnipeg Library Foundation with an increase to their operating grant, to allow them to continue to work on fundraising initiatives for the library, including the Millennium Library Park, the Adapted book project and other new initiatives.

We are encouraged with how efficiently our city has come through the economic challenges of 2009 and know that many challenges lie ahead for the Mayor and Council in 2010. Libraries are a core service to the viability of our city and we thank you so very much for ensuring that the necessary funding is in place to ensure it remains effective.

Thank you for your time and attention to this vital matter!