

City threatens to remove Housing Improvement Zones

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On March 10, 2011, the Standing Committee on Property and Development recommended a move of \$500,000 from the Housing Rehabilitation Investment Reserve (HRIR) to the Home Renovation Tax Assistance Program, despite years of calls from housing and community organisations for increased funding to the HRIR. Although the recommendation was not passed, this move calls attention to the vulnerability of the funding intended to support housing rehabilitation and development in Winnipeg's inner city.

Much has been written about the urgency of the affordable housing crisis in Winnipeg, particularly for those with lower incomes. The HRIR provides funding for housing programs in the five Housing Improvement Zones (HIZs) identified by the City of Winnipeg, as well as to Aboriginal housing organisations, to address housing needs in these core areas. The HIZs are one tool to address the need for safe, affordable housing in Winnipeg.

Although housing in the five Housing Improvement Zones has improved in the last ten years, there is still much work to be done, especially in the current context of reduced availability of affordable housing. The City of Winnipeg's work with the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative and HRIR is a step towards addressing these problems, but the City should be increasing its efforts to support affordable, safe housing for all its residents, not merely redistributing funds in a way that imperils already fragile neighbourhoods.

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