



Manitoba Division

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March 22, 2005

Mayor Sam Katz
City Hall
510 Main Street
Winnipeg MB,
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Dear Mayor Katz,

I am writing on behalf of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Manitoba Division to express our concern about the difficulties many people in Winnipeg living with multiple sclerosis (MS) have experienced when trying to navigate the city's streets and sidewalks this winter. Unfortunately, in a city committed to making itself accessible to all, many people have found themselves either housebound or faced with numerous hazards and dangers when they have ventured outside their homes.

Multiple sclerosis is the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada, with Manitoba having one of the highest rates of this lifelong chronic condition in the country. It is typically diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 40, when people are in the prime of their lives and are active independent participants in the community. While the type and severity of symptoms vary between individuals, most people with MS experience some form of mobility restriction. Many remain ambulatory but use canes and walkers to assist with walking; others use wheelchairs and scooters to get around. In these circumstances, properly maintained and cleared sidewalks and streets are extremely important.

We appreciate that Winnipeg has received above average snowfall this winter. However, not only has the snow and ice clearing has been woefully inadequate, but it has posed a serious risk of injury for anyone with balance or mobility problems, let alone for those who use mobility aids. When they have been cleared, the ice-packed, rutted sidewalks have been treacherous for everyone; people with poor balance or difficulty walking have been at particular risk of tripping and falling. People who use walkers, wheelchairs and scooters have routinely found the curb cuts they need to use blocked; even the smallest mound of ice and snow, not to mention massive snow banks, render them impassable. All this has made getting around not only frustrating and time-consuming but also dangerous and has discouraged many from even attempting to go outside.

People with MS as well as those living with other disabilities want and have the right to participate, just like everyone else, in the life of our community. However, doing so has been particularly difficult this winter. Accordingly, we urge that the City of Winnipeg pay greater attention to maintaining accessible streets and sidewalks in winter; improved education for and supervision of snow clearing crews and contractors would be one place to start. We are

hopeful that the city will continue to live up to its commitment to make itself accessible for everyone and look forward to a much-improved situation next winter. If we can be of any assistance in working towards this important goal please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Segal
Social Action Coordinator

cc. Councillor Jenny Gerbasi
Councillor Harvey Smith
Judy Redmond, City of Winnipeg Universal Design Consultant
Kathy Taylor-Hallick, City of Winnipeg Access Advisory Committee