



**Manitoba Division**

400 – 141 Bannatyne Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0R3  
Telephone: (204) 943-9595  
Fax: (204) 943-8444  
Toll Free: 1-800-268-7582  
[www.mssociety.ca](http://www.mssociety.ca)

June 7, 2004

*[to all Winnipeg mayoralty candidates]*

Dear .....

On behalf of the MS Society of Canada, Manitoba Division I am writing to you as a candidate for mayor of Winnipeg, to let you know about some issues of importance to the hundreds of Winnipeggers living with multiple sclerosis (MS). We would appreciate hearing about your views and commitments on these questions and others that affect the ability of people living with disabilities to participate fully in the life of the city.

Typically diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 40, MS is the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada. Manitoba has one of the highest incidences of MS in the country, with an estimated 3500 Manitobans living with this chronic, progressive condition. Of these, a significant number live in or regularly visit Winnipeg. 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.

It is for this reason that the Universal Design Policy adopted by the City of Winnipeg in 2001 and the city's commitment to improving accessibility for all are extremely important to us. We recognize that implementation is a slow process, but we would like to see improved adherence to and enforcement of this policy. This includes everything from maintaining sidewalks and curb cuts in a better state of repair, improved snow clearing of public sidewalks and spaces in winter, better disabled access signage and provision of more accessible buildings and washrooms, to ensuring that all new projects in which the city is in any way involved incorporate the most up-to-date barrier-free design.

Another important aspect in the implementation of this policy is education - for everyone from city engineers and planners, to building inspectors, construction workers and snow removal crews. For this reason, we welcome the city's opening of a Universal Design Office staffed by a Universal Design Coordinator as a resource for city staff. We hope that funding and support for this important office will be maintained and enhanced in the years to come.

Although the Universal Design Policy applies only to city properties, projects and services, we would also like to see the city consider ways in which it can encourage private businesses to improve accessibility. Possible steps that could be taken include such things as waiving encroachment fees for businesses that want to build a ramp outside their premises, offering tax incentives or small grants for building upgrades undertaken to improve access, or other measures.

Another major concern of ours is the general shortage of affordable, accessible housing in Winnipeg. Because MS is a progressive condition, over time many people, while still able to live independently, experience increasing levels of disability. Many are also unable to continue working and can face significant reductions in income. Difficulty finding somewhere to live that meets both their physical needs and financial circumstances is a common problem.

We look forward to a continuing commitment by the city to provide more affordable, accessible housing. In addition, we would like to see the city take steps to ensure that all new housing developments, such as the proposed Waverley West project, are required, as a minimum, to include if not fully accessible housing, at least a certain number of “visitable” homes.

The other civic issue of importance to people living with MS is public transportation. We applaud the introduction of low floor buses that enable people using wheelchairs, scooters and walkers to travel on regular transit buses alongside their families, friends and colleagues. More education on using these buses, both for potential users and drivers, would enhance this valuable service. In addition, many people with MS are regular users of Handi-Transit. We trust that this essential city service will be properly maintained and enhanced with adequate funding and support.

Thank you for taking the time to read about some of our concerns. We look forward to your response and ideas about how Winnipeg can continue to be a city that welcomes and includes people with disabilities as equal and fully participating citizens and visitors. If you have questions, we would be happy to discuss these issues further with you.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Segal  
Social Action Coordinator