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Faith in future 'Hope Alley' upgrades

By: [Kevin Rollason](#)Posted: **7:05 PM CST Tuesday, Nov. 14, 2023**Last Modified: 8:21 PM CST Tuesday, Nov. 14, 2023 | [Updates](#)[Print](#) [Email](#)

A formerly homeless Winnipegger is pleased civic officials are mulling plans to make a temporary memorial that offers hope to the community a permanent one.

"It would say to people that the city cares about you," said Al Wiebe, who convinced the City of Winnipeg in 2022 to bestow the honorary name of "Hope Alley" to a stretch of Henry Avenue at Main Street, beside the former Bell Hotel.

"It would make their lives more comfortable there. We want to create a little comfort for them and give them a little hope," he said Tuesday.

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Al Wiebe, a Peer and Community Engagement Trainer with lived experience, at Henry Ave. and Main St. in Winnipeg.

Council's executive policy committee is recommending the city continue to support efforts to put permanent features into the area (as well as find out how much they would cost).

Some of the possibilities for the area include: putting an arch across Main Street, which Hope Alley branches off from; installing more benches and some type of awning with heating coils over the seating; and painting a mural on the side of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's parkade.

Hope Alley, where only pedestrians have through access, is a daily route for clients of Siloam Mission, Salvation Army, Union Gospel Mission, Lighthouse Mission and Main Street Project.

Coun. Vivian Santos (Point Douglas) was an early supporter of the project.

"It is about inclusivity," Santos said Tuesday. "Anyone who walks or drives through that area can be part of the community."

"The people who are there are part of this community — especially the unsheltered population — I want it to be more welcoming to them in that area," she said. "I'm super excited about this."

Local architect Wins Bridgman, whose firm is located a few doors down on Main Street, said he is very supportive of the project, but also hopes the city will take the opportunity to also study the safety of the area's streets and pedestrian access.

"This is a route taken by a lot of people," Bridgman said. "Everything we can do to enhance the safety of that journey we would want to encourage."

"It is very much a place which people use. I think it is a really strong

initiative and one I applaud."

Community activist Sel Burrows said it is a nice place for people to sit down while getting out of the sun's heat in summer.



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Wiebe hopes the city will approve his plan to convert the block into a space for the local community and rename it Hope Alley.

"There is a real need to connect with people in need and Hope Alley is one of the places you see people out," Burrows said. "It should have lots of benches, good lighting and garbage pickup."

Once the city has priced out each of the potential features, Wiebe said he can then ask for funding from organizations such as the Winnipeg Foundation.

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Wiebe knows what it is like to need hope.

In 2010, after working in advertising, Wiebe lost his job and found himself living on the streets for 28 months.

"I was homeless," he said. "I slept in a car at McPhillips and William (behind a vehicle repair shop) for 14 months, and then I was at the

Salvation Army for 14 months. I lived in the area where Hope Alley is."

Wiebe, who now works as a homeless consultant and offering community peer support, said: "I've been very fortunate, and now people know there is hope to get out."

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Kevin Rollason

Reporter

Kevin Rollason is one of the more versatile reporters at the Winnipeg Free Press. Whether it is covering city hall, the law courts, or general reporting, Rollason can be counted on to not only answer the 5 Ws — Who, What, When, Where and Why — but to do it in an interesting and accessible way for readers.

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HISTORY

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