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# FAST FACTS

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## Cities within Cities II

**M**oney Sense Magazine 2009 reported survey results placing Brandon 10th out of 154 cities as “Canada’s Best Places to Live.” Like Brandon, Winnipeg fared well, placing 8<sup>th</sup> overall. Thompson on the other hand dropped from 19<sup>th</sup> place to 88<sup>th</sup>, largely due to a drop in ranking related to housing affordability and access to housing. This Fast Facts takes a closer look at Winnipeg’s standing.

As we did in our analysis of the 2008 *Money Sense* survey, we caution readers to beware of the limitations of surveys that use non-comprehensive and aggregate survey data purporting to depict conditions in particular cities. The absence of analysis on access to health services, incidence of violent crime, and other conditions allows us to ignore the deep disparities that exist in our cities.

A ‘best’ city? It depends on who you are and where you live.

Examining variables at the neighbourhood level provides a more accurate picture of what life is like for its residents. For example, analysis of the provincial electoral divisions in Winnipeg shows that we are a city divided by income and geography. And while pockets of poverty clearly exist across the city, poverty continues to be concentrated in the inner city.

To illustrate, we compare census data in the following three provincial electoral constituencies in Winnipeg: Point Douglas, an

inner-city neighbourhood; Seine River, a suburban neighbourhood located in the south end, and Fort Whyte, a prosperous neighbourhood in the southwest quadrant of the city. (For more details on the boundaries of these electoral constituencies, see: <http://www.boundariescommission.mb.ca/maps/area.aspx?type=proposed&area=winnipeg>).

Fort Whyte has the highest family median income in Winnipeg at \$99,528 while Point Douglas has the lowest at \$31,351. Other characteristics that demonstrate the stark differences in the three communities are shown in the following table.

These census data very clearly illustrate the inequality that exists, and explains why the *Money Sense* survey may resonate with some Winnipeggers, while others will question the validity of a survey that clearly does not reflect their reality.

The disparity is most pronounced when comparing neighbourhoods in Winnipeg’s core with neighbourhoods in the south side of the city. For example, 56% of Point Douglas economic families had incomes below the poverty line in 2005, compared with 4% in Seine River and 6% in Fort Whyte. The unemployment rate in Point Douglas was almost 3 times that in Seine River and Fort Whyte in 2005. Instances of homeownership, as an indicator of stability, vary greatly between these three communities. Families living in Seine River are 100 times more likely to own their home



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MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1  
T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201  
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca  
www.policyalternatives.ca

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## FAST FACTS continued ...

**TABLE: Selected Social and Economic Indicators for Specified Geographical Areas**

Indicator	Manitoba	Winnipeg	Point Douglas	Seine River	Fort Whyte
Population	1,148,400	633,451	20,560	23,095	29,480
Lone parent families	17.0%	19.5%	44.5%	11.8%	6.8%
Tenant households	29.7%	34.9%	76.0%	7.7%	8.7%
Aboriginal identity	15.5%	10.1%	36.2%	5.9%	2.7%
Unemployment rate	5.5%	5.2%	14.1%	3.6%	3.7%
% of pop 15+ with emp. income	71.6%	72.7%	52.2%	79.3%	78.8%
Median total income pop 15+	\$24,194	\$26,015	\$14,982	\$33,362	\$35,339
Incidence of low income (families)	12%	15%	56%	4%	6%
Incidence of low income (single 15+)	38%	43%	67%	28%	29%
Median income all econ. families	\$60,754	\$65,016	\$31,351	\$83,585	\$99,528
Median income couples	\$66,686	\$72,337	\$38,820	\$87,859	\$102,547
Median income female lone parent	\$32,883	\$34,960	\$22,128	\$51,305	\$62,801

**SOURCE: Manitoba Bureau of Statistics and Statistics Canada, Census 2006, Income data for 2005**

than those in Point Douglas, and renters are almost non-existent in Fort Whyte. Point Douglas is also home to a much larger Aboriginal population (36%) and almost half of Point Douglas families are sole parent headed—a striking difference from the demographics and household structures of the two suburban neighbourhoods.

Also of note is the differing incidence of crime across the city. A 2004 study by Fitzgerald, Wisener and Savoie showed unequivocally that the incidence of property and violent crime is higher in the core area, where poverty is also highest. This is not to suggest that life in inner-city neighbourhoods is all bad news. On the contrary, residents in Point Douglas, for example, have achieved remarkable results in the development of community-based solutions to combat the illicit drug trade and the most recent wave of gang violence.

*Money Sense* uses housing affordability as an indicator for ranking cities. While housing prices may be less expensive in Winnipeg than in other major urban centres, for low-income

households, affordable housing, and in particular rental housing, has become increasingly difficult to obtain. There has been a zero-vacancy rate for rental accommodation for more than two years in Brandon. Winnipeg's vacancy rate is 1%. This situation is further exacerbated as landlords take advantage of market conditions by renovating their units and successfully applying for above guideline increases. The result has been steep rent increases and displacement of low-income tenants.

Annual surveys like the *Money Sense* "best cities" survey may have some use as a marketing tool for governments, employers seeking workers, and perhaps as a 'feel good' meter to soften Winnipeg's poor self image. But beyond that they don't tell us much of anything. Worse yet, they fail to educate us about the disparities that exist so we can do something about them.

*Errol Black is a Brandon City Councillor and a CCPA-MB board member, Shauna MacKinnon is the director of CCPA-MB*



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