

Greenspace

A city with trees and parks, shady rivers, green corridors and leafy boulevards is the place we call home. It is a place where people, birds and animals live. Winnipeg is a city blessed with four rivers and four creeks, many large parks, and the distinction of having the largest remaining mature urban elm forest in North America.¹ Greenspace is extremely important to us and is credited with providing some of the fundamental needs of society. Rather than just being nice to have, parks and natural areas are a necessity.

Winnipeggers were passionate about their natural environment at the SpeakUp Winnipeg public consultations.² According to TD Bank's Greensight Report, Canadians highly value green space with "95 per cent agreeing that access to community green space will be important to their quality of life in the future" and three-quarters feel that their local green space could be improved.³

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Winnipeg is counted among Canada's major cities, with a population of 765,600 in 2016.⁴ Its growing population is forecast to increase by more than 200,000 by 2040 putting pressure on the City to maintain quality green spaces and natural areas for its citizens.⁵ The number of residents in Winnipeg continues to increase while the amount of greenspace does not. Adding to the concern, Winnipeg is below average compared to other Canadian cities when it comes to hectares per population of greenspace.⁶

The city regulates land use and approves where development and parks will occur. This responsibility is often passed on to developers where ecology has typically been misunderstood and ignored. It is in all of our best interests that

the City of Winnipeg ensures that greenspace is preserved and enhanced for future generations.

A Master Plan for Greenspace must be implemented by the City of Winnipeg to preserve, protect and enhance its forest, green spaces, natural environment and connecting corridors. The 2011 city planning documents *OurWinnipeg* and Complete Communities provided limited direction for planning and monitoring of greenspace. Six years later the city has been unable to report any progress because it lacks a plan with accompanying measurable objectives and a comprehensive corporate strategy that includes baselines and benchmarks.⁷ With the current pace of development it is disappointing and unacceptable that there is no plan to provide sufficient protection for trees, green spaces, natural heritage and river corridors.

Green spaces and natural areas contribute to environmental sustainability, social equity and economic prosperity. They are city-wide, multi-faceted, and they cross jurisdictional boundaries. Green space includes parks, golf courses, university lands, river corridors, cemeteries, boulevards, industrial lands, rail and hydro corridors and private and public land. Properly managed greenspace yields a healthier and wealthier community. This important resource must be managed like any other infrastructure asset with planning, budgets and accountability.

Currently, many matters pertaining to green spaces are fragmented across multiple departments dealing with different goals, by-laws, budgets, and regulations although their management is left largely to the Parks and Open Spaces Division with a finite budget and scope. The budget allocation for Parks and Open Space Delivery Service has remained virtually unchanged for the past six years. The budget shortfall for the service in 2016 was \$13.6 million and for tree planting alone was over \$2M.⁸ A comprehensive Master Greenspace Plan would be able to navigate this fragmented policy landscape and provide a stronger base from which to manage our green space.

Unfortunately, the absence of a Master Plan for Greenspace has left the door open for ad hoc and political decision making by the City of Winnipeg around how it manages its green assets. Urban forests are being lost to development, disease and poor drainage. Developer led urban planning practices have discounted natural areas and contributed to fragmentation. Ecologically sensitive lands are being sold for development. The worst outbreak of Dutch elm disease in 20 years is eroding the city's green canopy and the arrival of the emerald ash borer beetle is forecast to eradicate ash trees over the next ten years. The river corridors under infill pressure are getting the tallest developments with little to no public access or public green space. Almost an entire ecosystem of high class ecologically significant natural land was destroyed in the Parker area.

The city-owned golf courses, zoned as parkland, provide multiple services such as recreation, wildlife habitat and storm water retention. They were framed by the city as a seasonal business entity or real estate interest after being moved from the Parks Department to Golf Services Special Operating Agency in 2002.⁹ The golf courses occupy 481 hectares and comprise over 11. per cent of the city's parkland¹⁰ (excluding Assiniboine Park). Their value has been measured solely by the dollars generated over the golf season even though they are a rich and significant part of Winnipeg's green space inventory and are used for recreation year round.¹¹ Other cities are investing in future ecological benefits of their golf course lands; Calgary, for example, has six Audubon certified golf courses.¹² Clear Lake Golf Course in Manitoba has a clause in its 25-year contract requiring it to be operated organically.

Winnipeg, like other North American cities is experiencing challenges to its urban environment from increased climate change impacts, more frequent and intense extreme weather events, flood and drought cycles, invasive species, pests and disease. According to the Prairie Climate



Dead tree with Dutch elm disease: Nairn Avenue and Watt Street
—Pam Lucenkiw

Centre “Increasing green spaces and green infrastructure addresses multiple challenges and offers multiple benefits. They often turn out to be more economically viable, even under prevailing economic models.”¹³ The City of Toronto's study, *Every Tree Counts*, concluded Toronto's urban forest provides the equivalent of \$28.8 million in ecological services each year. The benefits derived from the urban forest significantly exceeded the annual cost of management.¹⁴ This is not a time for shrinking budgets and lack of coordination to manage these big problems.

Research has been plentiful in demonstrating the value to human health and well-being from trees, parks and natural areas. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, chose for her 2017 Report the theme “Designing Healthy Living”, because of the “tremendous po-

tential that changing our built environment has for helping Canadians live healthier lives”.¹⁵ The 2017 report “Urban Greenness and Mortality in Canada’s Largest Cities”, studied close to 1.3 million people,¹⁶ and found that being around trees and other vegetation reduced the risk of dying from several common causes of death by eight to twelve per cent.

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The report also found that affluent populations have greater exposure to greenness and increased benefits to their health, compared with those in less-affluent groups. The findings support the importance of having policies related to creating greener and healthier cities for health benefits and their contribution to social equity. Winnipeg is conspicuous for its absence in the examples of Canadian cities that have included green environments as integral parts of city enhancement.

The City of Winnipeg could borrow strategies used in the United Kingdom and London. The Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt)¹⁷ offer a means by which local authorities can adopt a strategic and holistic approach to greenspace management. The standards broadly define connectivity as both the physical ability of local residents to access natural green space, and also how equitable the access to nature is. The Mayor of London’s long-term plan is to make more than 50 per cent of London green by 2050 by creating new green or open space. The plan notes that “all development takes place within a wider environment and green infrastructure should be seen as an integral element and not as an “add on”.¹⁸

Canadian cities are moving ahead with plans to protect their natural heritage. In 2016, Calgary formally joined Local Action for Biodiversity, an

international program to improve biodiversity planning and management. Calgary became the third city in Canada to join this program alongside Montreal and Edmonton.¹⁹ Halifax has a Green Network Plan and is currently partnering with Nature Conservancy to purchase 380 acres of land for an urban wilderness park.²⁰ Toronto’s Strategic Forest Management Plan²¹ describes its urban forest as a resource to be “protected, maintained and expanded.”

Wildlife and their habitats can be found in cities particularly along river corridors. Cities have a responsibility for stewardship of that habitat and wildlife. The greatest threat to urban wildlife is habitat loss caused by human activity such as urban and industrial development, pollution, urban fragmentation and climate change. The World Wildlife Federation Report 2017 showed shocking losses of wildlife populations in Canada and has called on communities to be part of the solution.²²

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It is critical for the City of Winnipeg to implement a Master Plan for Greenspace that would allow informed decisions to be made for green spaces and natural areas based on a rational and transparent approach. This plan must acknowledge the essential services provided and include an ecological lens that affirms links with climate change, development, health, social inclusion, Indigenous knowledge, food security and biodiversity. Full and effective implementation requires political leadership, support and cooperation of various city divisions as well as partners in the public and private sectors, and members of the community. Immediate action must be taken to enable Winnipeg to begin reaping the benefits of a Greenspace plan and prevent further loss of critical assets and opportunities.

The City of Winnipeg Requires a Master Plan for Greenspace with a Dedicated Multi-Year Budget

Four additional staff will be added to the Offices of Sustainability and Environment. The staff will report to the CAO, will coordinate their activities across all City departments and with external partners from the RMs, stewardship groups, experts and NGOs. Staff will research existing

green plans from other jurisdictions and compile and maintain references, plans, regulations and green space inventories.

New Expenditure for staffing and related support:

- \$450,000

Total New Expenditure: \$450,000

¹ Winnipeg Tree Facts <http://winnipeg.ca/publicworks/parksOpenSpace/UrbanForestry/PDF/wpgtreefacts pamph.pdf> Accessed on November 1, 2017

² Our Winnipeg – A Sustainable City, Page 36. Available at: http://speakupwinnipeg.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/07/OurWinnipegJul13.2011.WEB_RGB_.pdf Accessed on December 16, 2013.

³ TD GreenSights Report Creating a lasting legacy of community green spaces across Canada, Page 7 <https://td-capas3.amazonaws.com/prod/default/0001/02/da53687bb37643366c3cce798df8d8a8030d23b6.pdf> Accessed on November 2, 2017

⁴ Fernandez, L. and Jim Silver (2018). “Indigenous Workers and Unions: The case of Winnipeg’s CUPE 500.” Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Mb. Available at: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/indigenous-workers-and-unions>

⁵ City of Winnipeg Population, Housing and Economic Forecast 2016, Page 4 <http://www.winnipeg.ca/finance/files/CoW-Population-Housing-and-Economic-Forecast.pdf> November 4, 2017

⁶ Community Trends and Performance Report 2018, Page 149, 155 http://www.winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2018.pdf Accessed on November 2, 2017

⁷ OURwinnipeg Report to the Community 2016, Page 26 <https://speakupwinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2016-OurWinnipeg-Report-to-the-Community.pdf> Accessed on November 2, 2017

⁸ Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks 2017 Budget Review Item 3 – December 2 2016 <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DM1S/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=15747&SectionId=&InitUrl=StandingPolicy> Accessed on January 3, 2018

⁹ Winnipeg Golf Services Special Operating Agency – 2018 Business Plan, Page 5 <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DM1S/ViewPdf.asp?SectionId=485515&isMobile=yes> Accessed on February 11, 2018

¹⁰ 2015 Report on Park Assets <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DM1S/ViewPdf.asp?SectionId=463130> Accessed November 30, 2017

¹¹ Search Winnipeg’s Parks and Open Spaces Interactive Map <https://parkmaps.winnipeg.ca/> Accessed on November 4, 2017

¹² Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf <https://auduboninternational.org/acspgolf> Accessed on February 11, 2018

¹³ Prairie Climate Centre, Building a Climate-Resilient City: Urban ecosystems Page 1 <http://prairieclimatecentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/pcc-brief-climate-resilient-city-urban-ecosystems.pdf> Accessed on November 2, 2017

¹⁴ Every Tree Counts, A Portrait of Toronto’s Urban Forest 2013, Page 9 https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Parks%20Forestry%20&%20Recreation/Urban%20Forestry/Files/pdf/E/every_tree_counts.pdf Accessed on November 20, 2017

¹⁵ The Chief Public Health Officer’s Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2017 – Designing Healthy Living <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/2017-designing-healthy-living.html> Accessed on Feb 11 2018

¹⁶ Urban greenness and mortality in Canada’s largest cities: a national cohort study, October 2017 <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2542519617301183> Accessed on November 2, 2017

¹⁷ Nature Nearby Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance, Page 14 http://www.ukmaburbanforum.co.uk/document/other/nature_nearby.pdf Accessed on December 30 2017

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- 18** The London Plan https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/new_london_plan_december_2017.pdf Accessed on December 30 2017, 2017
- 19** Calgary's Biodiversity <http://www.calgary.ca/CSFS/Parks/Pages/Planning-and-Operations/Biodiversity.aspx> Accessed on November 13, 2017
- 20** Halifax's own urban wilderness park <http://www.urbanwildernessparkhfx.ca/> Accessed on November 13, 2017
- 21** Toronto's Strategic Forest Management Plan 2012 – 2022 <https://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Parks%20Forestry%20&%20Recreation/Urban%20Forestry/Files/pdf/B/backgroundfile-55258.pdf> Accessed on November 13, 2017
- 22** Living Report Canada, A National Look at Wildlife Loss 2017, Page 6 http://assets.wwf.ca/downloads/WEB_WWF_REPORT.pdf?_ga=2.136833785.890063067.1505397307-254834661.1505397306 Accessed on November 5, 2017