

November 15, 2019

Dear Mayor Bowman and Councillors,

Please consider this letter from citizens representing multiple residents' and other groups as response to your announcement of the new budget process. We, too believe it to be "an opportunity to develop a transformative budget" that recognizes "citizen needs and expectations are evolving".^a As such, we would like you to know that we consider Winnipeg's threatened urban forest a priority and direct City Council to reflect that in the budget.

Recently, neighbourhood associations and community groups from across the city met to talk about the state of our public trees. We took an in-depth look at the effects of the unprecedented disaster of three deadly insect infestations occurring at once, and a decreasing maintenance budget that is failing to meet our forest's needs.

We talked about Calgary's lessons on the power of an adequate pruning cycle. It's clear that years of inadequate pruning here in Winnipeg can be linked to the severity of damage to our public trees (est. 30,000) in last month's snow storm.^b We also talked about the climate emergency and how trees are a powerful tool for climate action.

Some fast facts about the critical state of our urban forest:

- Winnipeg has 300,989 public trees (parks & boulevards)^c, almost 60% of them are elm and ash.^d Within 10 years, Winnipeg is projected to lose 25% of its elm and 100% of its ash trees, which totals more than one third of our forest lost to Dutch elm disease, Emerald Ash Borer and Cottony Ash Psyllid.^e
- Winnipeg's world-class urban forestry department is renowned for staving off complete elm loss to Dutch elm disease. But they need help – in the past five years we've had a net loss of 4268 public trees^f.
- Instead of help, the budget forecast adopted earlier this year cuts reforestation funding in half by 2022^g.
- Industry best practice is to prune 14% of the total canopy every year (equivalent to a tree being pruned every 7-8 years). Yet, in 2014, we were pruning only 8%, and by 2018 were pruning only 4% (i.e., our trees are being pruned every 26 years)^h.
- Consider this: after a snowstorm damaged over 400,000 trees in 2014, Calgary invested \$35 million to mostly tree pruning and maintenance. In 2019, with a similar fall snowstorm, they reduced 311 storm-related calls from over 27,000 to just 20.ⁱ

Winnipeg's urban forest is in crisis and the City cannot bear its cost alone. We are also approaching the provincial and federal governments in their upcoming budget processes for further funding to support our Urban Forestry department's budget.

Winnipeggers have an undefinable love for our trees, and so to us they are priceless, but our forest is also a substantial capital asset worth approximately 5.6 billion dollars.^j Winnipeg's urban elm forest, the largest in North America, is an irreplaceable and international treasure.^k

Consider the benefits of trees - they:

- Are the only municipal infrastructure that appreciate in value and capacity over time^l
- Absorb rainfall, significantly reducing the burden on sewer and aging pipe infrastructure^m
- Reduce heating and cooling costs, energy need, and reduce the heat-island effect^{no}
- Increase property values (and therefore, our assessment base)^p
- Make air cleaner and people healthier^q

We completely empathize with Mayor Bowman’s comment that “creating a multi-year balanced budget will require difficult decisions to be made by Council” and that “hard fiscal choices” will be necessary.^r When we don’t have enough money to do everything we want and must do, every dollar must provide the best return on investment^s.

We have some good news: the groups who have signed this letter represent citizens from across Winnipeg who have considered all of this carefully, and made one of these hard choices for you.

Our Ask

We, the undersigned, ask you to increase the capital budget for Urban Forestry by \$7.61 million each year for 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. This amount is the shortfall expressed in Urban Forestry’s 2019 budget presentation.^{tu} It represents the necessary resources to deal with the threats facing our urban canopy and to restore a pruning cycle closer to the best practice of 7 years rather than the decades-long current 26 years.

We ask you to fund this increase to Urban Forestry by reallocating \$7.61 annually from the roads capital budget.

A smaller increase to roads – the equivalent of approximately 1500 metres of renewal^v —will be transformative for urban forestry.

The 2020 draft roads budget presented by Public Works on November 13th was \$155.745 million^w. The \$7.61 million we ask for is just under 5% of that amount. Yet it would increase Urban Forestry’s budget by 183%, almost tripling it.

We are not asking you to cut the road budget; we’re simply asking you to increase it a little less—by 23% as opposed to 28%. All roads do eventually need repair, and we trust that you, our elected officials along with public administrators can make more strategic choices within the road budget.

Permission to Choose Trees

We know that “hard choices” means budget decisions that may not be politically popular. That is why we, as citizens of Winnipeg, are giving you permission to spend money differently. Roads can wait a little longer; our public trees cannot.

Time is of the essence in protecting and restoring our urban forest because:

- Rapid removal of sick trees prevents the spread of Dutch Elm Disease
- Proactive removal of Emerald Ash Borer-infested trees avoids damage to life and property
- Pruning according to best practice reduces disease and decreases the high cost of damaged trees
- As they say, the best time to plant a tree was 40 years ago; the next best time is now. It takes decades for a new tree to grow to the size of its predecessor.

We look forward to telling you more in person, and to giving you the confidence to adopt an urban forestry budget that is truly transformative.

Sincerely,

Glenelm Neighbourhood Association	Luxton Residents Association
OURS Winnipeg	West Alexander Residents Association
South Osborne Residents Group	Centennial Community Improvement Association
Norwood Flats Residents Association	Wolseley Residents Association

Balmoral Spence Residents Association	Bishop Grandin Greenway
Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation	Winnipeg Trails
Central Neighbourhoods	Artbeat Studio
Point Douglas Resident Committee	
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg	<i>and counting...</i>

^a Media Release Oct. 18, 2019. City of Winnipeg Launches Multi-Year Balanced Budget Process. Quotes attributed to Councillor Scott Gillingham. https://winnipeg.ca/cao/media/news/nr_2019/nr_20191018.stm

^b October 24, 2019. 1,700 tonnes of branches, downed trees collected so far in Winnipeg after storm. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/landfill-branches-wood-winnipeg-storm-1.5333788>

^c November 1, 2019. Winnipeg Open Data. Tree Inventory. <https://data.winnipeg.ca/Parks/Tree-Inventory/hfwk-jp4h>.

^d November 1, 2019. Winnipeg Open Data. Tree Inventory. <https://data.winnipeg.ca/Parks/Tree-Inventory/hfwk-jp4h>

^e The historic elm loss averages 27% per year. In the 1970s, there were 275,000 elm trees but due to Dutch Elm Disease, the city has lost about 75,000. <https://globalnews.ca/news/2254543/winnipeg-is-home-to-the-largest-urban-elm-forest-in-north-america/>

Minutes – Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks February 5, 2018, Item No. 11. Emerald Ash Borer Preparedness, Response and Management Options Report, page 4. <http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=16788&SectionId=&InitUrl=>

^f Present-day number: Winnipeg Open Data. Tree Inventory as of November 1, 2019: <https://data.winnipeg.ca/Parks/Tree-Inventory/hfwk-jp4h>.

2016-2018 numbers: Community Trends and Performance Report: Volume 1 for 2020 Budget, page 3-95: https://winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2020.pdf

2015 number: Community Trends and Performance Report: Volume 1 for 2020 Budget, page 141: https://www.winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2019.pdf

^g 2019 Adopted Budget: Capital Project Detail Volume 3, page 3-10: https://www.winnipeg.ca/finance/files/2019AdoptedCapitalBudget_Volume3.pdf

^h 2020 Community Trends & Performance Report: Volume 1, page 3-96 & 3-97: https://winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2020.pdf

ⁱ October 21, 2019: Why Winnipeg's tree canopy might be better off after snowstorm's drubbing (CBC News) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-tree-canopy-damaged-snowstorm-calgary-1.5325944>

^j November 12, 2015: Seeing our forest for the trees (Brent Bellamy – Number Ten Architecture) <https://www.numberten.com/blog/26-urban-design/brent-bellamy/274-seeing-our-forest-for-the-trees>

^k October 2, 2015: Winnipeg is home to the largest urban elm forest in North America (Global News) <https://globalnews.ca/news/2254543/winnipeg-is-home-to-the-largest-urban-elm-forest-in-north-america/>

^l <https://www.deeproot.com/blog/blog-entries/is-a-tree-landscape-or-infrastructure>
[https://www.edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/PDF/Urban Forest Management Plan.pdf](https://www.edmonton.ca/residential_neighbourhoods/PDF/Urban_Forest_Management_Plan.pdf) – page 7

^m Urban Street Trees: 22 Benefits Specific Applications: http://www.walkable.org/download/22_benefits.pdf

ⁿ The Benefits of Trees (Canopy.org): <http://canopy.org/tree-info/benefits-of-trees/>

^o How trees fight climate change in your community (Arbor Day Foundation):
<https://www.arborday.org/trees/climatechange/fightcommunity.cfm>

^p “Why trees are important in an urban setting” Halifax Urban Forestry: <https://www.halifax.ca/transportation/streets-sidewalks/urban-forestry>

^q Urban Street Trees: 22 Benefits Specific Applications: http://www.walkable.org/download/22_benefits.pdf

^r https://winnipeg.ca/cao/media/news/nr_2019/nr_20191018.stm

^s Return on Investment: New York City has calculated that trees provide \$5.60 in benefits for every dollar spent on planting and care: https://www.milliontreesnyc.org/html/about/urban_forest_benefits.shtml

McPherson, E. Gregory; van Doorn, Natalie; de Goede, John. 2016. Structure, function and value of street trees in California, USA. Urban Forestry & Urban Greening. 17: 104-115. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/pubs/50951>

^t Source: Parks & Open Space Division 2019 Preliminary Operating Budget – Presentation to SPC on Protection, Community Services & Parks, March 8, 2019 page 11 and 17.
<https://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/Budget/2019Budget/pdfs/2019PublicWorksParksOpenSpacesDivisionPreliminaryOperatingBudgetPresentation.pdf>

^u Source: 2019-2024 Capital Budget Presentation – Parks & Open Spaces Division to Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services & Parks, March 8, 2019.
<http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=17715&SectionId=&InitUrl=>

^v source: [RFP#404-2019 page 19](#). Total distance of Munroe (Raleigh to Henderson) roadwork measured with Google Maps

^w Source: 2020 Operating and Capital Budget: Public Works Department and Street Lighting, November 13, 2020
https://www.winnipeg.ca/interhom/Budget/2020Budget/pdfs/2020-Multi-year-Budget-Presentation_Public-Works_20191113.pdf