



Greenspace Master Plan for Winnipeg

OURS-Winnipeg (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces)

Parks are essential to making Winnipeg an attractive place to live, work, and visit. Greenspace and natural areas near where we live contribute to our wellbeing. With good planning and investment they will be there for generations to come. The economic benefits of greenspace are multifaceted and complicated to measure but we know they are significant. For example, our urban forest alone has been valued at \$1 billion,ⁱ an amount equal to the total amount of Winnipeg's operating budget. A desirable image for our city leads to improved tourism, incentives to locate here, increased real estate values, clean air, health and recreation opportunities and overall quality of life.

Land development and urban sprawl are rapidly consuming urban wilderness, connecting corridors and putting pressure on existing green space. According to the OurWinnipeg development plan, Winnipeg's population is nearing 700,000 and is growing by more than 10,000 per year.ⁱⁱ As we develop the last parcels of land there must be careful planning and respect for these resources.

The City of Winnipeg needs an overarching infrastructure plan to preserve, protect and enhance its forest, green space, urban wilderness and connecting corridors. In 2011, the OurWinnipeg plan took effect as the City's official municipal development plan, guiding growth and change for the City. "A Sustainable Winnipeg", an accompanying document to the OurWinnipeg plan calls forⁱⁱⁱ a City of Winnipeg Parks, Places and Open Spaces Sustainable Management Plan to "Recognize and preserve Winnipeg's parks, green spaces and riverbanks as green oasis in our urban setting". With the current pace of development it is disappointing and unacceptable that there is still no plan. This is especially so when Winnipeggers spoke so passionately about their natural environment at the Speak Up Winnipeg consultations.^{iv}

The lack of a master plan for our urban green space infrastructure is resulting in piecemeal consultation and planning, particularly within the current developer-lead process for project based land development. Continuous greenspace corridors are particularly threatened as the emphasis for development is on one neighbourhood or another. Too often, urban spaces in new communities are designed at the expense of natural ecosystems and landscapes. This need not be so.

The old idea that cities are only for people and that experiences with nature are only possible outside the city is no longer pertinent. Like rivers and streams, hydro corridors and unused rail lines, nature corridors do not stop or start at the city limits. Continuous green space and corridors are highly desirable for passive recreation and active transportation, and Winnipeggers are keen to see their city embrace a holistic strategy to ensure preservation of green spaces. These green corridors have potential to provide recreation and nature opportunities. This potential is being squandered by the lack of a plan.

There is widespread enthusiasm among citizens to enhance Winnipeg's natural assets. The City's own Ecologically Significant Natural Lands (ESNL) Strategy states that "Since 1992 over 80 community partners have invested thousands of volunteer hours. The value of grants has an estimated value of about three quarters of a million dollars annually." "The City's Public Works webpage lists stewardship groups and other organizations involved with naturalization in the City of Winnipeg. In addition to these groups there are countless other citizen groups advocating for greenspace such as OURS-Winnipeg's successful petition in 2012 to protect greenspace, Charleswood Habitat Protection, Parker Wetlands Conservation, residents' associations, naturalist groups, elm tree groups such as TAG, Nature Summit Manitoba, and student groups putting native plants in their school grounds. A master plan for parks, forests, green space, urban wilderness and connecting corridors could further support the work these citizen groups engage in to protect green spaces.

Toronto, Edmonton and Halifax provide current examples of cities that have adopted multiyear urban parks and forest management plans. In May 2013, Toronto's City Council approved a Parks Plan 2013 to 2017, with a vision of "a city within a park". It states "Parks are essential to making Toronto an attractive place to live, work, and visit"^{vi}. Toronto residents value parks and natural spaces. For example, in their Parks Plan survey, 93%^{vii} of respondents said that parks are an indispensable part of the city.

In 2012, the City of Edmonton adopted an Urban Forest Management Plan for sustainably managing and enhancing its urban forest. The urban forest includes all trees from city owned to those on private property to roof top gardens. The report recognized that collectively, Edmonton's trees represent an irreplaceable asset. Its 2010 Corporate Tree Policy tree assessment guidelines estimated the value of the publicly owned portion of the urban forest at more than \$1.2 billion^{viii}. Unlike other municipal infrastructure, trees increase in value over time. The urban forest also makes a quantifiable contribution to the long-term livability of the city. Using modeling programs developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and Forest Service, City staff measured the urban forest's ability to clean the air, reduce storm water runoff and sequester carbon. Edmonton's forest removed an estimated 531 Tonnes of pollutants in 2009 alone, a feat worth more than \$3 million^{ix}.

In 2012, Halifax Regional Council approved the Halifax Regional Municipality Forest Master Plan. A guiding principle of the plan states the HRM urban forest is a complex natural resource system, and managing a public resource in the face of great future uncertainty requires a management system that fosters continual learning and refinement. The report goes on to say that public involvement is fundamental to the long-term success and, public participation encourages a sense of ownership among the citizens^x.

Conclusion

Planning must be done by the City of Winnipeg to prepare a multiyear master infrastructure plan to manage Winnipeg's green space, forest, urban wilderness and connecting corridors. Also required is a commitment to a transparent urban planning process. This need not be a costly endeavour. The city has many tools at its disposal and with smart planning can reconfigure resources. The least challenging and most unimaginative "solution" would be for policy makers, planners and developers to parcel out the natural areas and green space as real estate, dismantle the connecting corridors, and relegate the memory to a few street names.

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ⁱ Trees Action Group. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/slgz3l1qq3skvq/TAG%20Public%20Letter.pdf> Accessed on November 8, 2013.

ⁱⁱ OURWinnipeg, Page 7 <http://winnipeg.ca/interhom/CityHall/OurWinnipeg/pdf/OurWinnipeg.Jul15.2010.pdf> Accessed on December 16, 2013

ⁱⁱⁱ A Sustainable Winnipeg, An Our Winnipeg Direction Strategy, Page 37 <http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/OurWinnipeg/pdf/aSustainableWinnipeg.July15.2010.pdf> Accessed on December 16, 2013

^{iv} Our Winnipeg – A Sustainable City, Page 36. Available at: http://speakupwinnipeg.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/OurWinnipeg.Jul13.2011.WEB_.RGB_.pdf Accessed on December 16, 2013.

^v Ecologically Significant Natural Lands (ESNL) Strategy, Page 20 <http://winnipeg.ca/publicworks/Naturalist/ns/esnl.pdf> Accessed on December 2, 2013

^{vi} Parks Plan 2013-2017, Page v http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/parks_forestry_recreation/community_involvement/files/pdf/parksplan.pdf Accessed on May 14, 2014.

^{vii} Parks Plan 2013-2017, Page v http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/parks_forestry_recreation/community_involvement/files/pdf/parksplan.pdf Accessed on May 14, 2014.

^{viii} Edmonton's Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), Page 7 http://www.edmonton.ca/environmental/documents/PDF/Urban_Forest_Management_Plan.pdf Accessed on December 2, 2013.

^{ix} Edmonton's Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), Page 7 http://www.edmonton.ca/environmental/documents/Urban_Forest_Management_Plan.pdf Accessed on December 2, 2013.

^x Halifax Regional Municipality URBAN FOREST MASTER PLAN, Page VIII <http://www.halifax.ca/property/UFMP/documents/ADOPTEDUFMP.pdf> Accessed on August 18, 2014.