

Urban forestry

Winnipeg's much loved urban forest, composed of more than three million trees on public and private land, represents a key infrastructure asset which saves the City more than \$14 million in yearly services and an additional \$39 million in carbon storage.¹ Those services include cleaning the air, offsetting the impact of superstorms by absorbing runoff, and reducing the heat island effect, thereby reducing energy costs. These services are essential as climate driven extreme weather events continue to escalate.

In a 2025 open letter to COP 30, over 80 scientists observed that “urban forests are among the most effective, equitable nature-based solutions available” to address climate resiliency and biodiversity loss. They also warned that the current situation, in which “mature urban tree loss outpaces replacement amid increasing climate and biological stresses,” does not bode well for many cities.² The solution, they maintain, is to diversify plantings, speed up replacement, and to “sustainably fund long-term operations.”³

Prior to the 2022 civic election, Winnipeg was not sustainably funding its tree canopy. As a result, by 2021, the City had an 80 per cent backlog in replacing public trees, and an average of 6,000 trees were being lost each year. Basic maintenance like pruning was virtually non-existent — conducted every 31 years, instead of on a best practice seven-year cycle.

Much of that was reversed with the 2024–27 Multi-Year Budget projections. The multi-year budget promised a welcomed 45 per cent increase in urban forest funding over four years. As a result, between 2023 and 2025, urban forestry eliminated the 80 per cent backlog in tree



Pileated woodpeckers in Winnipeg / Alanna Yuen

replacements and put us on track to meet a one-to-one replacement goal and achieve a seven to 12 year best practice pruning cycle.

The budget increase was influenced by city council's endorsement of Urban Forestry Division's Twenty Year Urban Forestry Strategy and an election pledge drive launched by the Trees Please Winnipeg Coalition. The drive asked all candidates in the 2022 civic election to sign a pledge committing to three actions, which included: planting two trees for every public tree lost, establishing a seven-year best practice pruning cycle for public trees, and incorporating tree protection best practices into all construction projects to prevent the damage and loss of our mature trees.

Winnipeg's current mayor, and all but one of the newly elected council members, signed the pledge and honoured their promises in the four year budget.

A significant portion of the multi-year budget's 45 per cent increase was made possible as a result of funding from the federal government's 2 Billion Trees Program. The more than \$7.3 million provided over five years was targeted for tree planting and replacement. It also helped to establish urban forestry's Home Grown program, which offers grants to

community groups to help expand the canopy by planting trees on public land.

The total operating and capital funds indicated in the preliminary urban forestry budget for 2026 stands at \$32.4 million.⁴ The AMB urges the City to honour that figure in the final budget, and maintain and increase that amount as projected when the federal government's 2 Billion Trees money terminates in 2026.

Given an average tree loss of 10,000 trees per year between 2022 and 2025, and in view of the termination of federal funds in 2026, additional contributions from the City will be essential to maintain a sustainable budget for tree replacement and the continuation of the Home Grown program.

Additional future funds will also be needed to administer a proposed consolidated public and private tree by-law to protect the City's mature trees. In order for those by-laws to be successful in preventing unnecessary tree loss, the City will need to invest in additional personnel for monitoring and enforcement.

A private tree by-law also has the potential to generate a revenue stream via the permits required to fell trees on private land. In addition, construction and development companies could also be compelled to compensate Winnipeggers for the mature trees they destroy on private property, either by replanting those trees or paying compensation to the City for their replacement in a manner that reflects the size and age of the trees removed.

Winnipeg has taken important first steps in providing a sustainable budget for the maintenance, replanting, diversification, and expansion of our urban forest infrastructure. That commitment and level of funding should not only be maintained but increased in 2027 and beyond, to expand and protect the canopy and address future threats and losses as a result of new diseases, pests, and increasing climate stresses.

Actions

- **The AMB will** call on The City of Winnipeg to honour its commitment to preliminary funding of \$32.4 million for the urban forest budget for 2026. We also call on the City to maintain funding levels when the 2 Billion Trees money terminates in 2026.

- **The AMB will** increase the urban forestry budget by \$8.8 million to support a two-to-one tree replacement goal for public trees as well as park trees and to expand the Homegrown program.
- **The AMB will** fund a policy analyst position (1.0 FTE @ \$105,000) to research and recommend to council a public and private tree by-law to protect the City's mature trees.
- **The AMB will** work toward generating additional revenue with the private tree bylaw.

Notes

- 1** City of Winnipeg. "State of the Urban Forest at a Glance." Winnipeg Comprehensive Urban Forest Strategy. <https://engage.winnipeg.ca/10550/widgets/67282/documents/56613>
- 2** Plants, People, Planet. (2025). "Urban forests as essential infrastructure for climate resilience and biodiversity: A call to policymakers." Open Letter to COP 30. October 7, 2025. <https://movium.slu.se/media/bbibevt1/plants-people-planet-open-letter-to-the-cop-2025.pdf>
- 3** Plants, People, Planet. (2025). "Urban forests as essential infrastructure for climate resilience and biodiversity: A call to policymakers." Open Letter to COP 30. October 7, 2025. <https://movium.slu.se/media/bbibevt1/plants-people-planet-open-letter-to-the-cop-2025.pdf>
- 4** City of Winnipeg. "Multi-Year Budget 2024-2027." <https://www.winnipeg.ca/city-governance/budget-finance/multi-year-budget-2024-2027>