

Greenspace

Our home is a City of trees and parks, shady rivers, green corridors, and leafy boulevards. Greenspaces contribute to our well-being, offering vital environmental, social, and economic benefits.

A new era for greenspace planning

Greenspace and natural systems are vital to a resilient, healthy city. They reduce heat, manage storm water, support biodiversity, and strengthen community well-being. These natural assets are not amenities — they are essential infrastructure that underpins Winnipeg's health, safety, and long-term quality of life. Recognizing this, City Council committed in 2021 to creating a Greenspace and Natural Corridors Plan Bylaw and a Biodiversity Policy,¹ along with a pledge to secure 1,000 acres of new greenspace.² These commitments are embedded in OurWinnipeg 2045³ and Complete Communities 2.0⁴ planning documents, with completion targeted for 2026.

This work is being co-developed with Indigenous governments and organizations,⁵ aligning with the Winnipeg Indigenous Accord, UNDRIP, and the Montreal Pledge⁶ for bold biodiversity action. This approach reflects a commitment to reconciliation and shared stewardship — and acknowledges that ecological planning must be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and leadership.



Great horned owl perched on a tree by the Seine River / Alanna Yuen

A necessary commitment to growth

New parks are needed to keep pace with population growth,⁷ development and biodiversity loss. The City of Winnipeg is working to acquire and add **1,000 acres** of new parks, natural corridors, and open spaces over a 25-year period as part of the OurWinnipeg 2045 long-term development strategy. This pledge will increase Winnipeg's total parkland by about 1 per cent. While modest, it echoes the ambition of the 1960s, when civic leaders added 1,000 acres and created seven major parks still cherished today. Only a few large, high-quality natural habitats remain, making land acquisition increasingly urgent.

Higher density development can impact neighbourhood greenspace and trees. Parkland per person will continue to decline as the population grows, a concern identified in the parks strategy. The longer the City waits to acquire land, the higher the cost — and the fewer opportunities remain to protect meaningful greenspace and the essential services it provides.

A history of missed opportunities

Winnipeg's greenspace planning has not always been forward-looking. When Sam Katz was Mayor (2004–2014), the Golf Services Audit⁸ argued the city had “too much” greenspace and predicted a surplus even by 2020. This belief shaped policy for years, making it harder to protect natural areas. Winnipeg remains the only major Canadian city without a biodiversity plan.

Outdated policies, fragmented decision-making, and developer-driven planning have left natural corridors vulnerable. The Waterways Bylaw prioritizes development over ecological protection, exposing river corridors and flood-prone areas to construction pressures. Recent housing-focused bylaws have accelerated high-density development along waterways, often leaving little vegetation to provide flood protection, habitat, or recreation. These decisions undermine climate resilience at the very moment Winnipeg needs it most.

Community advocacy has filled the gaps

Community efforts were required to safeguard bird-friendly bylaws, Lemay Forest, the urban canopy, seven city-owned golf courses, and neighbourhood parks. The Parker Lands was lost — a stark reminder of what weak protections and lack of vision cost. Without citizen advocacy, much of Winnipeg's remaining nature would not be here today. In the absence of strong plans and bylaws, residents have repeatedly stepped up to defend natural areas that should have been protected by default.

The value of natural systems

Winnipeg's greenspaces provide nearly \$91 million in ecological services annually.⁹ Replacing the urban forest alone would cost \$3.3 billion.¹⁰ These natural systems reduce chronic disease, improve air quality, cool neighbourhoods, and strengthen community well-being.

The 2024 Park People Report reinforces that parks are essential public health infrastructure. This aligns with findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Aging,¹¹ which shows that urban greenspaces reduce chronic disease risk, lower air pollution, and moderate extreme

heat. They support mental and physical health, strengthen community connections, and improve equity across neighbourhoods — especially in areas historically underserved by public investment.

A critical moment for council leadership

City Council must now act. The Greenspace Plan and Biodiversity Policy are foundational, overdue, and essential — but without stable funding, land-acquisition tools, and dedicated staffing, they risk becoming plans on paper rather than protections on the ground. Winnipeg can secure the natural systems that will sustain it for generations.

Actions

- **The AMB will** create a dedicated Senior Ecological Coordinator Planner position within the Planning Department to oversee the specialized, cross-departmental work required to implement the Greenspace Plan and Biodiversity Policy. Annual cost: 1 FTE \$105,000.

Currently, greenspace responsibilities are scattered across departments, bylaws, budgets, and political boundaries. This fragmentation slows progress and weakens ecological protection. The Ecological Coordinator will serve as the central hub for ecological planning, ensuring consistent application of environmental standards, alignment across departments, and collaboration with Indigenous partners, community groups, and environmental organizations.

This role will embed ecological considerations into everyday decision-making — from development reviews to long-term planning — ensuring Winnipeg's natural assets are protected, restored, and expanded for generations to come.

- **The AMB will** establish a dedicated Greenspace Investment Reserve Fund with \$2 million in seed funding to drive the implementation of the Greenspace and Natural Corridors Plan, the Biodiversity Policy, and the acquisition of 1,000 acres of new parkland. Winnipeg lacks reliable mechanisms to secure new greenspace or maintain existing natural assets. The budget alone cannot meet these needs, especially as development pressures intensify.

- **The AMB will** establish the Neighbourhood Infill Benefits Reserve currently under consideration.¹² This reserve fund is projected to collect between \$136,000 and \$490,000 per year by setting aside 80 per cent of additional property tax revenue generated from each new two-, three- and four-unit infill project for five years. This fund would be used to improve local parks and greenspace near infill developments. Using an average of the City's projection, we anticipate this fund to collect \$313,00 per year.
- **The AMB will** establish a Public Tree fund.¹³ Each new development on a 25-foot lot will be assessed a fee of 0.2 per cent of the property selling price to be collected towards a public tree fund (~\$1,200 per \$600,000 home). This fund would collect \$375,000 annually.

The Investment Fund will be supported through a mix of innovative and proven revenue tools. Council motions have already identified promising options, including a dedicated tree fund, charitable land donations, and the Neighbourhood Infill Benefits Reserve. Additional strategies — such as converting suitable city-owned land into parkland and increasing land-dedication requirements in new developments — will expand greenspace while reducing reliance on limited budgets.

The urgency is clear: unprotected natural areas are being lost to development. Once gone, these ecosystems cannot be replaced. The Investment Reserve Fund ensures Winnipeg can act decisively rather than reactively.

Notes

- 1** City of Winnipeg. (2025). "State of the Landscape Report." <https://engage.winnipeg.ca/greenspace-plan>
- 2** City of Winnipeg. (2021). Council Meeting Minutes. "OurWinnipeg 2045 Plan – By-law No. 120/2020 File PW 1/2020." Page 7. June 24, 2021.
- 3** City of Winnipeg. (2021). Council Meeting Minutes. Biodiversity Policy, page 9. June 24, 2021.
- 4** City of Winnipeg. (2021). Council Meeting Minutes. Pages 1, 2, 6, 7. June 24, 2021.
- 5** City of Winnipeg. (2024). "City of Winnipeg and Indigenous partners join together to co-develop Greenspace Plan and Biodiversity Policy." June 17, 2024. <https://www.winnipeg.ca/news/2024-06-17-city-winnipeg-and-indigenous-partners-join-together-co-develop-greenspace-plan-and-biodiversity>
- 6** City of Montreal. (2021). "Montreal Pledge Cities United in Action for Biodiversity." May 16, 2024. <https://montreal.ca/en/articles/montreal-pledge-call-cop15-launched-to-worlds-cities-39529>
- 7** City of Winnipeg. (2025). "Population Projections for the City of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)." August 13, 2025. <https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/2025-Population-Projections.pdf>
- 8** City of Winnipeg. (2011). "Golf Services Audit Report 2010." Executive Policy Committee Regular Meeting Minutes. May 2011.
- 9** City of Winnipeg. (2025). "State of the Landscape Report." <https://engage.winnipeg.ca/greenspace-plan>
- 10** City of Winnipeg. (2023). "Winnipeg Urban Forest Strategy." <https://engage.winnipeg.ca/urbanforest>
- 11** Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. (2025). "Urban greenspace a protective lifeline against COVID-19 depression, study suggests." September 3, 2025. <https://www.clsa-elcv.ca/urban-greenspace-a-protective-lifeline-against-covid-19-depression-study-suggests>
- 12** Winnipeg City Council. (2026). "Neighbourhood Growth Investment Reserve." Executive Policy Committee, Item 6. January 20, 2026. <https://dmis.winnipeg.ca/DownloadMeetingDocument/796504/6.%20Neighbourhood%20Growth%20Investment%20Reserve.pdf>
- 13** City of Winnipeg. (2025) "Fee Structure Related to Development for a Public Tree Fund" Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development, Item 3. July 4, 2025. [http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/permalink.asp?id=A20250704\(RM\)PD-11](http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/permalink.asp?id=A20250704(RM)PD-11)