

Weaving a Better Winnipeg: 2026 Alternative Municipal Budget

Municipal budgets are more than financial documents. They reflect a city's priorities and values, revealing what we choose to invest in—and what we choose to neglect. Decisions about taxes, transit, roads, parks, recreation, housing, and public safety shape the daily lives of Winnipeggers and determine how resources and opportunities are distributed across the city.

Winnipeg's municipal budget operates on a four-year cycle, which begins again in 2027, with a four-year operating budget and a six-year capital investment plan. Each year, the mayor, city council, and public service administration update and refine these plans, while residents and community organizations participate in public hearings. These decisions have tangible consequences: property taxes affect household finances and services, transit funding determines access to work and school, and investments in community services shape neighbourhood wellbeing and equity.

The Alternative Municipal Budget (AMB), shows what is possible when the city's budget is guided by community priorities for social inclusion, human rights, Truth and Reconciliation, equity, and sustainability. Each

chapter is developed with local organizations and community leaders who bring firsthand knowledge of what works and what is needed to address the challenges facing Winnipeg.

A moment for bold choices

The 2026 AMB finds Winnipeg at a moment of enormous risk and potential. The toxic drug and homelessness crisis is denying people their human rights to dignity and basic needs while making life more complex for local neighbourhoods and the downtown. Public safety is top of mind for many, and there is increasing recognition of the need for community-based solutions to help all achieve a good life, while addressing the root causes of poverty and crime. The major overhaul of the City transit system in 2025, without any increase to stagnant operating funding, left many transit riders angry as their commutes are much longer than before. Strategic investment in active transportation, public transit, and transit-oriented development is essential to Winnipeg's quality of life and climate goals, yet the City continues to invest in low-density, car-dependent infrastructure.

For decades, Winnipeg's municipal leaders have responded to financial pressures by keeping taxes low and directing new revenues primarily toward roads and policing, while other programs and infrastructure have seriously deteriorated. Since 2012, almost all new property tax revenue has been directed to roads and policing. Spending cuts have further weakened public spaces and community programs that help the health and wellbeing of Winnipeggers, such as the closing of Happyland Pool in 2025. The 2023 closure of Community Connections at Millennium Library, for example, removed important crisis-support and de-escalation services from the downtown core.

This approach is not sustainable. If Winnipeg is serious about its commitments to reconciliation, poverty reduction, community well-being, and climate action, it needs a new financial and policy strategy — and the courage to invest in it.

The 2026 AMB provides a realistic, fully-costed blueprint for doing just that. It proposes progressive approaches to raising revenue, placing a greater responsibility on those with the greatest ability to contribute while creating incentives that support broader policy goals.

Importantly, the AMB demonstrates that these investments can be made while balancing the budget. The choice is not between fiscal



Dream Weavers: Connecting people to weave a better Winnipeg

The 2026 Alternative Municipal Budget took a new approach this year. We connected with textile artists Jess Klassen (MRA Coordinator) and Chantel Mierau on an interactive art installation at Nuit Blanche Winnipeg in September 2025. Located at the Forks with the Winnipeg skyline as the backdrop, the installation titled Dream Weavers invited people to weave their priorities for the city into a communal tapestry loom. The collective art that was woven acts as a mirror for the priorities of hundreds of Winnipeg citizens who engaged in the art installation. A strip of yellow fabric for housing all relatives, purple for fully funding transit, and green for maintaining our mighty tree canopy. With each strand, people added their dreams to a growing tapestry of many hands and shared demands.

responsibility and better public services. The choice is whether we are willing to raise sufficient revenue to build the city Winnipeggers need now and into the future.

Educating, challenging and inspiring

Municipal budgets are complex. Money is divided among operating budgets, capital expenditures, and reserve funds, while departments and agencies organize spending in ways that do not always correspond to how residents experience public services.

The AMB makes the budget more accessible and gives residents a clearer opportunity to engage with the choices behind it. We focus primarily on the operating budget—the annual spending that supports the vast majority of municipal services—while incorporating the annual debt-financing costs associated with necessary capital investments.

The 2026 AMB is organized around 17 chapters that reflect the issues and services that matter to communities, from water and river management to waste diversion, public safety, recreation, and libraries.

Each chapter is developed by community leaders, academics, and experts who have worked on these issues over many years and incorporated public input into their priorities. While the AMB reorganizes the budget around community concerns rather than municipal departments, it maintains connections to the City's existing governance structure so its proposals can be implemented by city council.

In this way, the AMB is both a statement of community priorities and a democratic tool. It shows residents that the municipal budget is not simply something to be accepted after decisions have already been made. It is a set of choices that residents can debate, challenge, and change.

Challenging the status quo

The current approach is not working for too many Winnipeggers and our environment. Alternative budgets have always challenged the idea that cutting spending and keeping taxes low are responsible approaches to public finances. Creating an alternative financial plan is more demanding than simply criticizing individual decisions: it requires us to identify

specific levels of spending and revenue and demonstrate how they can work together.

By showing that alternatives exist, we create room to expect and demand more from our elected leaders. As Winnipeg approaches the October 2026 civic election, the AMB provides an alternative vision that residents can use to evaluate candidates and demand better from the next municipal government.

One of the City's persistent narratives during budget season is that Winnipeggers must accept "tough choices" and "pain" because of revenue shortfalls. Winnipeg's finances are undoubtedly under pressure. But those pressures are not inevitable. They are the result, in significant part, of decades of choices to keep taxes low while allowing public infrastructure and services to fall behind.

Property tax rates were frozen between 1998 and 2012, and since 2012 property taxes have increased by a minimal amount annually, with increases targeted toward infrastructure and rapid transit. Adjusted for inflation, the City's revenue remains lower than it was three decades ago.

Yet the assumption that Winnipeggers will not support higher taxes is not supported by public opinion. A March 2022 Probe Omnibus survey found that more than two-thirds of Winnipeggers were very or somewhat willing to pay an additional \$100 per year in property taxes for better roads, more trees and more affordable housing. More than half were willing to pay \$100 more for improved parks, transit, recreation, municipal sustainability upgrades, and active transportation.

It is time to challenge the assumption that the City cannot raise revenue and that new revenues must flow primarily to roads and policing. The AMB progressive revenue tools include a parking lot levy, commuter fee, renewed impact fees, an increased business tax, and property tax increases. These measures can generate revenue for neglected services while reducing incentives for sprawl and car dependency.

Enlisting the province as a partner

The City cannot meet Winnipeg's challenges alone. The Manitoba government has too often been an unreliable partner, limiting Winnipeg's ability to address climate change and its infrastructure deficit.

The cancellation of the provincial 50/50 transit operating grant and City scaling back of the Oak Point Garage project to reduce electrical bus charging capacity have delayed investments needed to modernize transit

and reduce emissions. The province has now committed to fund phase three of the North End Water Pollution Control Centre, taking one more step towards ending decades of delay to this project. Winnipeg's largest sewage treatment facility has failed to meet provincial pollution standards for almost two decades, while sewer failures contribute significant phosphorus pollution to Lake Winnipeg.

These problems require provincial leadership and cooperation. While the City's ability to influence provincial decisions is limited, Winnipeg must continue to demand that the province meet its responsibilities to municipalities, climate action and environmental protection.

A human rights approach to Winnipeg's toxic drug and homelessness crises

The toxic drug crisis and homelessness crisis in Winnipeg have reached a boiling point due to years of government underfunding and inaction. Media articles daily cover the impacts of this human rights crisis — overdose deaths, human suffering, communities dealing with needles and homelessness encampments, and more. Despite hundreds of news stories underscoring the scale and urgency of these interconnected crises, the scale of government response is inadequate.

In Spring 2026, first responders reported 66 opioid calls in one day.¹ Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Services responded to 810 opioid patients this past April 2026, more than triple the 240 it responded to in April 2025. Additionally, outreach and community-based organizations report administering naloxone to revive people multiple times per day. Many people can be seen affected by toxic drugs on the streets all over Winnipeg. This risks their health and impacts the neighbourhoods, communities, and businesses surrounding them.

According to End Homelessness Winnipeg's (EHW) 2024 point in time of homelessness count, 2,469 people were experiencing homelessness, and that 68 per cent or 1,679 met the definition of 'chronically homeless'.² Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, have spent at least half of the past year living without a stable home or cycling through shelter spaces.

The number of people entering homelessness is outpacing those able to secure stable, affordable housing. Advocates continue to push for structural changes, and the provincial government has set a target to end chronic homelessness in Manitoba by 2031. The City must push

the province to do more, faster and hold the province to account to this commitment.

The AMB proposes a five-point action plan for what the City of Winnipeg can do immediately to address this human rights crisis. This action plan will house 2,500 Winnipeggers, based on the number EHW estimates are homeless, in order to get ahead of the crisis, in partnership with the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada.

Five-point action plan on toxic drug crisis and homelessness

The 2026 AMB's five-point action plan acts on Winnipeg's escalating toxic drug and homelessness crises. The plan recognizes that these crises are interconnected and require sustained investment, coordinated government action, and community-led solutions — not enforcement alone.

1. Increase supply of new social housing in Winnipeg

The City will work with the province to fund new construction, purchase vacant hotels and apartment buildings for conversion, acquire licensed rooming houses to preserve affordability, renovate vacant buildings, and support people to live in private market housing.

End Homelessness Winnipeg estimates that 2,500 people in Winnipeg are experiencing chronic homelessness. The AMB will lobby the province of Manitoba to work with the City of Winnipeg to create 3,000 units of social housing with supports over four years. Wherever possible, this will be developed with Indigenous governments and community organizations, with a target of 50 per cent owned and operated by Indigenous-led organizations.

The AMB will preserve Winnipeg's low-rent housing and expand social housing by dedicating \$10 million a year to support the acquisition of existing at-risk or recently vacant rental housing by social non-profit and Indigenous housing providers (see housing chapter for more details).

2. Substantially increase outreach supports

Outreach to people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg has become increasingly challenging over the past year because it is now taking place alongside the City's expanded encampment enforcement policy.

Outreach serves as a critical bridge to housing and health care. Workers can help people obtain identification, apply for income assistance, access medical and mental health services, connect with addiction treatment, and secure shelter or permanent housing. They

conduct wellness checks during extreme weather, distribute food, water, clothing, and harm reduction supplies, and respond to emergencies before they become crises.

The challenge is that there are not enough outreach services or housing available.

Currently, the City of Winnipeg minimally funds Main Street Project's mobile outreach program to conduct wellness checks on people experiencing homelessness, distribute essentials and connect people to health and social services. The Downtown Community Safety Partnership is funded by the City to connect with homeless people downtown, and this funding was expanded by the Province of Manitoba with a one-time grant for summer 2026 to respond to the toxic drug crisis.

Community experts estimate that an expansion of outreach sixfold is needed to meet the demand for services across Winnipeg's neighbourhoods and to create outreach teams with specializations in mental health, harm reduction, trauma and housing. This would allow outreach to meet those in need, build relationships, and prepare people who are interested in moving into housing to do so.

Over the last decade, the number of emergency medical calls related to opioid overdose has increased thirteen-fold.ⁱ Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service staff have repeatedly sounded the alarm over unsustainable workloads due to the volume of opioid related calls.ⁱⁱ By providing another point of contact, trusted community outreach workers can reduce the volume of calls to other emergency services by administering naloxone in overdose cases, providing drug testing services, and offering other harm reduction measures.

Given that 80 per cent of the homeless population is Indigenous,ⁱⁱⁱ the expansion in outreach services should be done in close partnership with Indigenous-led organizations. Outreach services to connect individuals with Indigenous-led healing programs are an essential component of holistic support. More on this can be found in the Indigenous relations and safety chapters.

3. A human rights approach to encampments

The City of Winnipeg's current encampment protocol treats visible homelessness as a problem to be moved and does not adequately approach it as a human rights crisis to be solved. This summer community organizations pointed out that the current bylaws

ⁱ Blunt, Marney. (2026). "Winnipeg opioid-related calls nearly 13 times higher than a decade ago: WFPS." January 30, 2026. <https://globalnews.ca/news/11645509/opioid-related-calls-nearly-13-times-higher-than-a-decade-ago-wfps/>

ⁱⁱ Billeck, Scott. (2026). "WFPS stretched to limit by city's around-the-clock drug OD crisis, retiring chief says." *Winnipeg Free Press*. May 27, 2026. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2026/05/27/wfps-stretched-to-limit-by-citys-around-the-clock-drug-od-crisis-retiring-chief-says>

ⁱⁱⁱ End Homelessness Winnipeg (2024). 2024 Winnipeg Street Census: Point in Time Count. <https://www.endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/2024-winnipeg-street-census>

preventing encampments on all public spaces and resulted in homeless people being pushed out and losing connection with outreach and help.^{iv} Restricting where people can shelter, issuing fines, or dismantling encampments without providing adequate housing does not end homelessness—it simply pushes people from one location to another, often making people less safe and harder for outreach workers to find. These actions can also result in the loss of personal belongings, medications, identification, and community connections, making it even more difficult for people to access housing and services. Research from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Office of the Federal Housing Advocate emphasizes that encampments are a symptom of the failure to provide adequate, affordable housing, not the cause of homelessness.^v

A human rights approach begins with recognizing housing as a fundamental human right. It prioritizes meaningful engagement with people living in encampments, respects their dignity and autonomy, and ensures that any actions taken are guided by the goal of securing safe, adequate, permanent housing. The City of Winnipeg should work directly with people experiencing homelessness before making decisions that affect them. Encampments should not be dismantled unless residents have access to safe, appropriate social housing or shelter that meets their needs. If encampments remain, cities would provide essential services such as clean water, washrooms, garbage collection, harm reduction supports, outreach workers, and emergency health services to protect people's health and safety.

The solution requires the City of Winnipeg to work closely with the Province of Manitoba to ramp up permanent solutions: increasing the supply of deeply affordable social and supportive housing, strengthening eviction prevention programs, raising income assistance to adequate levels, expanding mental health and addictions supports, and ensuring Indigenous-led housing solutions that recognize the disproportionate impact of homelessness on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

4. Allocate at least one percent of the city budget to support Indigenous-led organizations

Indigenous organizations should play a leading role in addressing homelessness in Winnipeg because Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by homelessness as a direct result of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, systemic racism, and the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma. While Indigenous people make up

^{iv} <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/map-winnipeg-encampment-by-law-enforcement-homeless-community-9.7212756>

^v Canadian Human Rights Commission. (2022). "Overview of Encampments Across Canada: A Right to Housing Approach." Office of the Federal Housing Advocate. <https://homelesshub.ca/resource/overview-encampments-across-canada-right-housing-approach/>

approximately 13 per cent of Winnipeg's population,^{vi} they represent 80 per cent of those experiencing homelessness. This requires solutions designed and led by Indigenous communities.

Indigenous-led organizations are uniquely positioned to provide culturally safe, trauma-informed, and holistic supports that recognize the strengths, identities, and experiences of Indigenous peoples. They integrate housing with cultural connection, Elders, ceremony, language, family reunification, harm reduction, healing, and community support — approaches that have been shown to build trust and improve long-term housing stability.

Many Indigenous organizations have decades of experience serving people experiencing homelessness and have established relationships within communities that mainstream service providers may not. They are often the first point of contact for people who have experienced discrimination or who are reluctant to access government or institutional services.

Increasing investment in Indigenous-led organizations is not only a matter of equity — it is an evidence-informed strategy that recognizes those closest to the challenge are best positioned to develop lasting solutions. Empowering Indigenous leadership will improve housing outcomes, strengthen communities, and help reduce homelessness across Winnipeg as a whole.

5. Actively partner with the Province of Manitoba for action on mental health and housing

The AMB calls on the province to more strongly actively partner with the City on support for problematic substance use, mental health supports, and creating and maintaining social housing with supports.

Ending homelessness requires sufficient Rent Assist, Employment and Income Assistance, accessible health care, and building thousands of housing units — all policy areas where the province leads, not the City.

The City of Winnipeg can be a strong advocate for higher income assistance rates, expanded Rent Assist, more supportive housing funding, and mental health and addictions services.

^{vi} Government of Canada. (2021). "Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population." Statistics Canada. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/Page.cfm?lang=E&topic=8&dguid=2021A00054611040>

Decolonization central to acting on homelessness

The AMB recognizes the impacts of colonization on Indigenous people, who represent 80 per cent of those who are unhoused. Winnipeg is morally, ethically, and politically required to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Calls on the systemic impacts of colonization that contribute to homelessness. The MMIWG Inquiry's Calls for Justice call on governments to address homelessness and invest in Indigenous-led shelters, housing, and supports for 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasizes Indigenous leadership in decision-making and the improvement of economic and social conditions, including housing. Together, these documents assert the rights of Indigenous people and the importance of Indigenous leadership, ownership and control over housing. To move forward with more than words on Truth and Reconciliation, the AMB will decolonize housing programs and allocate 1 percent of the City of Winnipeg's budget to Indigenous-led organizations, including 50 per cent funding for housing capital and outreach programs to Indigenous-led organizations.

Acting on poverty reduction

In 2021, Winnipeg took an important step by adopting its first Poverty Reduction Strategy after extensive community pressure. The strategy reflects many priorities long advanced by Make Poverty History Manitoba and other community organizations.

But a strategy without resources cannot deliver meaningful change. The City adopted the strategy without providing the staffing and sustained funding needed for implementation. The AMB makes concrete investments in the strategy's priority areas and increased staff capacity to ensure that implementation becomes an ongoing municipal responsibility.

Building safety through community

Winnipeg spends a larger share of its budget on policing than any of Canada's other top 10 major cities: 28 per cent. The police budget has grown substantially over the past decade, even as concerns about police

violence and the effectiveness of policing responses to poverty, mental health, and homelessness have intensified.

The 2026 AMB proposes a 10 per cent reduction in the police budget, approximately \$34 million, with those resources redirected to community services and the root causes of crime in the Five Point Action Plan on Toxic Drug and Homelessness Crisis.

Community safety is strengthened when people have access to stable housing, food, healthcare, education, transportation, recreation, and opportunities for connection and self-expression. The AMB therefore links public safety to investments in housing, recreation, public art, transit, and poverty reduction.

Weaving a better future for Winnipeg

The 2026 AMB offers an alternative to the tired status quo that has dominated Winnipeg's municipal politics for decades. Rather than accepting that climate change, poverty, housing insecurity, and deteriorating infrastructure are inevitable, it asks what Winnipeg could become if we chose to invest in solutions.

We can have a city where high-quality public services provide mobility, connection, opportunity, and a sense of belonging. Where public spaces bring people together. Where housing and food are accessible to those who need them. Where young people have opportunities to participate, play, and thrive.

Investing in youth recreation, paying all workers a living wage, electrifying transit and creating a rapid bus network, protecting urban forests, expanding affordable housing, and building safe active transportation networks are not simply expenditures. They are investments in the city we want to live in.

Budgets are ultimately about choices. The 2026 Alternative Municipal Budget challenges Winnipeg to make different ones — and shows that a better future is not only possible, but within reach.

Notes

- 1 Kristin Annable, Michelle Allan, Joanne Levasseur. (2026). "66 opioid calls in 1 day. This is how bad the overdose crisis is, Winnipeg first responders say." June 4, 2026. CBC Manitoba. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/overdoses-opioids-winnipeg-emergency-services-9.7221765>
- 2 End Homelessness Winnipeg (2024). 2024 Winnipeg Street Census: Point in Time Count. <https://www.endhomelessnesswinnipeg.ca/2024-winnipeg-street-census>