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Weaving a Better Winnipeg

Alternative Municipal Budget



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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>

Fiscal framework

Introduction

Financially, the City of Winnipeg is not in a good place. Decades of below inflation property tax increases and the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have left municipal revenue degraded and put municipal budgets in a state of ongoing precarity. At the end of 2022, the City was left with just \$5.3 million in its rainy day fund (the fiscal stabilization reserve), \$66 million below the council mandated minimum threshold.¹ Although the rainy-day fund has been somewhat replenished since 2022, the City is projecting to draw down the fund again this year, bringing the reserve to \$25 million, \$65 million below the minimum threshold.² Since 2022, the City has repeatedly asked departments to cut back on expenditures through vacancy management and other savings programs, compounding years of cuts that have left city services threadbare. As the City of Winnipeg's financial management plan warned in 2020, the tax-supported budget runs an unsustainable structural deficit due to the 14 year tax freeze between 1998 and 2012, and minimal tax increases between 2013 and 2019 — deficits have been offset through depleting reserves and selling municipal assets, however both methods are nearly exhausted.³ Additional revenue losses and costs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic have intensified this unsustainable position, leaving reserves nearly drained.

Placing the City of Winnipeg back on stable financial ground and renewing municipal services and infrastructure requires a long-term plan to raise municipal revenue. In this section of the 2026 Alternative Municipal Budget, we sketch out a series of measures to increase municipal revenue while achieving complementary policy goals. Prior

to reviewing these measures, we provide a more detailed picture of the City of Winnipeg's current financial situation, with a particular focus on municipal revenue, comparing Winnipeg with other major cities in Canada.

Where does the money come from at the City of Winnipeg?

Revenue to pay for City of Winnipeg services and infrastructure comes from a range of sources (see Figure 1). The majority of revenue is levied through property taxes on the assessed value of residential properties (56.4 per cent), followed by grants from federal and provincial governments (14.3 per cent). Regulation fees and the sale of goods and services make up around 10 per cent of revenue, while other sources including frontage levies and business taxes are all in the low single digits as a share of overall revenue.

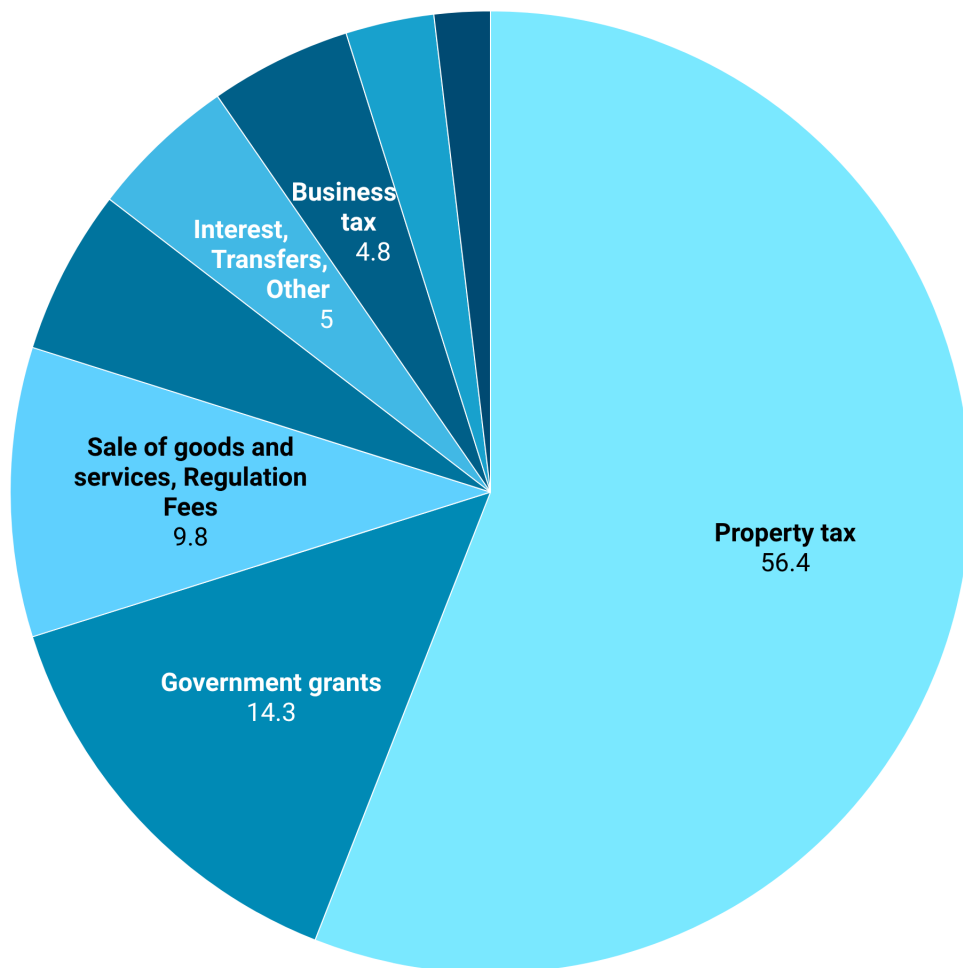
Securing a majority of revenue through property taxes is the standard for municipalities across Canada, however this model comes with drawbacks. First, unlike income or sales taxes, property tax revenue does not automatically grow in lock step with overall economic growth. This means that municipal revenue can lag behind inflation and overall growth of the city economy. Second, because incomes are more unequally distributed than home values, property taxes in Canada tend to be regressive. Although higher income households tend to live in more valuable homes, this relationship is not perfectly linear, meaning that low and middle income households pay a larger share of property taxes relative to their incomes.⁴ While it would be possible for Canadian municipalities to follow the lead of places like New York City and levy income taxes, this would require legislative change at the provincial level.⁵

Looking back over the last decade or so, not all sources of revenue have increased after adjusting for inflation (see Figure 2). Total revenue for the City of Winnipeg has increased by 13.8 percentage points in real (inflation adjusted) terms since 2015. This growth has been achieved through modest property tax growth, frontage levy increases, regulation fees, and increased federal and provincial grants. Grants from higher levels of government increased the most over the last ten years due to exceptional pandemic funding, however the value of this revenue stream has been declining in real terms since 2022. Utility dividends, business tax, and the sale of goods and services have all declined in real terms

Figure 1 / Share of budget by revenue source

City of Winnipeg, 2026

Property tax Government grants Sale of goods and services, Regulation Fees Street renewal frontage levy Interest, Transfers, Other Business tax Utility dividends Other taxation



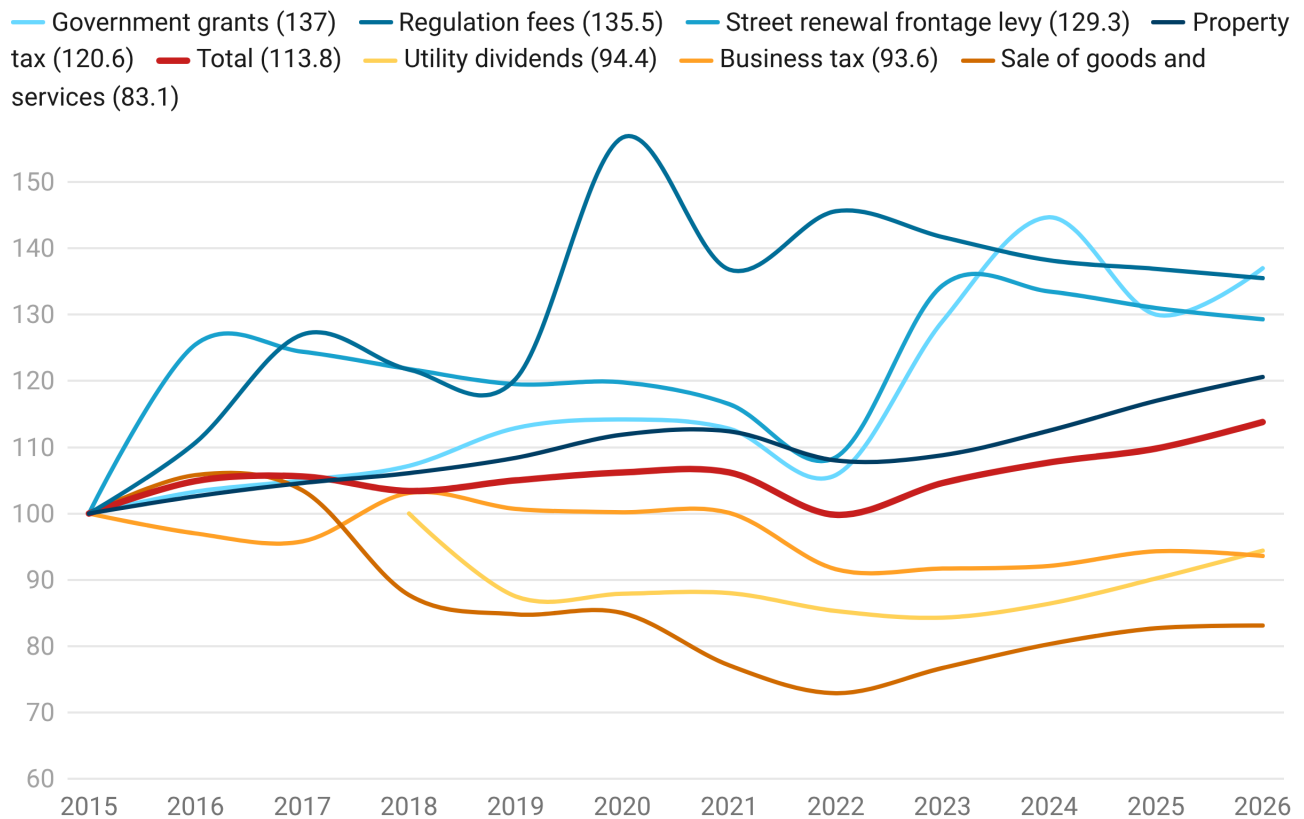
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Source 2026 Adopted Budget: Operating, Reserves, and Capital; Authors calculations

over the last ten years. Winnipeg has cut its business tax rate in half over the last 20 years, eroding revenues.⁶ Declines in the revenue from the sale of goods and services has been driven by a decline in Transit fare revenue since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Looking back to 2001, Winnipeg's revenue problem comes into sharper relief (see Figure 3). While the City of Winnipeg's total revenue has increased by 118 percentage points in nominal terms since 2001, this increase has been entirely eaten up by inflation and population

Figure 2 / Real growth in City of Winnipeg revenue sources 2015-2026

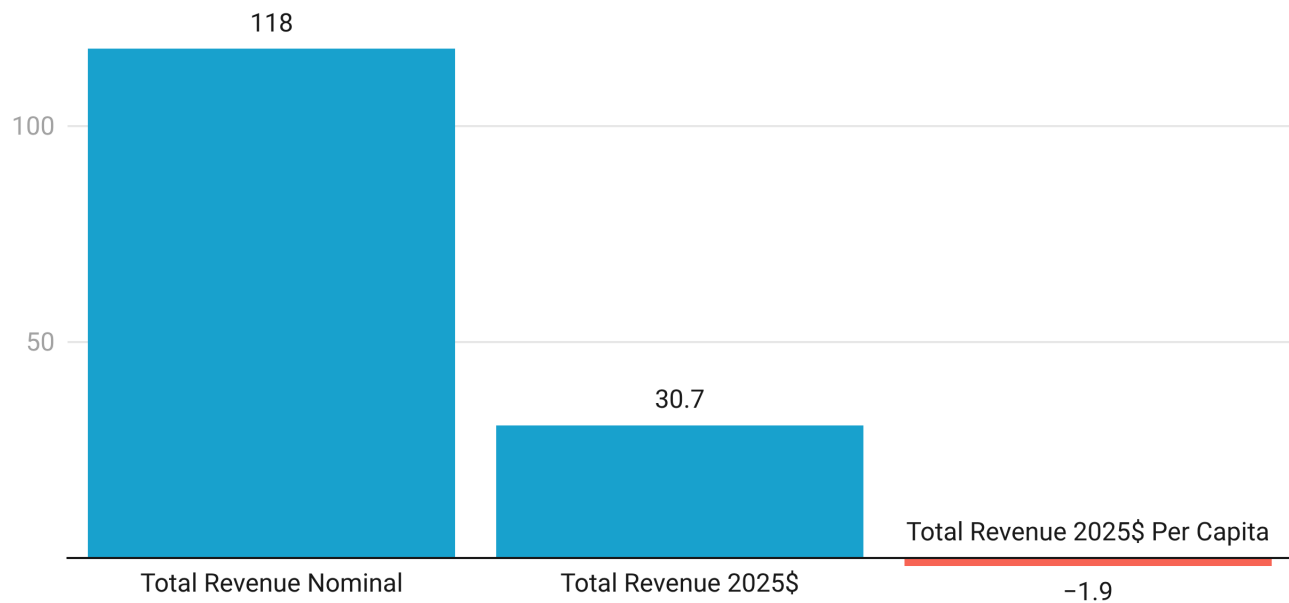


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Source City of Winnipeg Adopted Budgets 2016-2026, Statistics Canada Table 18-10-0005-01

growth. After adjusting for inflation and population increase, Winnipeg's total revenue has actually decreased over the last 25 years. As a result, Winnipeg has fewer resources per person for services and infrastructure than it did in 2001 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 / Change in total revenue, 2001-2025



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Source City of Winnipeg Adopted Budget 2002, 2025; Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0155-01 and Table 18-10-0005-01

Where does Winnipeg stand?

Investing in services and infrastructure will require a significant and long-term increase in revenue. But just how much Winnipeg should raise revenue is a more complicated question. Comparing Winnipeg's taxation levels to other Canadian municipalities can provide some insight.

For decades, the City of Winnipeg has promoted the fact that Winnipeg's average municipal property tax rate is the lowest of any major Canadian city. As the 2026 Winnipeg Budget states "Winnipeg continues to maintain the lowest municipal property taxes and collect the lowest per-capita revenue of any major Canadian city."⁷ This ultra-low tax environment has been created by a 25 year austerity program at Winnipeg City Hall. The City's 2024 budget press release notes that while other western Canadian cities raised their compounded property taxes by between 129 and 189 percent between 1998 and 2024, Winnipeg has only levied a 35 percent increase.⁸ The same press release goes on to note that if Winnipeg were to collect property taxes at the same rate as cities like Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, or Ottawa, municipal revenue would be between \$700 and \$800 million higher annually (total revenue

today is \$1.49 billion). On a per capita basis, Winnipeg's residential taxes are around 40 per cent lower than the average for Canadian cities, while non-residential taxes are around 50 per cent lower.⁹

Over the last four years Mayor Scott Gillingham has increased property taxes by 3.5, 3.5, 5.95, and 3.5 per cent annually. While these increases were above the trend set by previous mayors (Mayor Bowman raised property taxes by 2.33 per cent per year while in office), only the 2025 increase of 5.95 per cent surpassed the average annual property tax increase for Canadian cities, which is typically around 5 per cent.¹⁰ Just to become an 'average' jurisdiction when it comes to taxation, Winnipeg has a long way to go.

Bottom of the basement municipal revenue levels predictably translate into bottom of the basement expenditure and service levels. In a 2025 pre-budget press release, the City of Winnipeg was again quick to note its position at the bottom of Canadian city rankings: "Winnipeg's operating expenditures per person are among the lowest in Canada at \$2,463 per capita, compared to \$3,209 in Edmonton, \$3,302 in Calgary, \$4,107 in Vancouver, \$4,324 in Ottawa, and \$4,945 in Toronto."¹¹

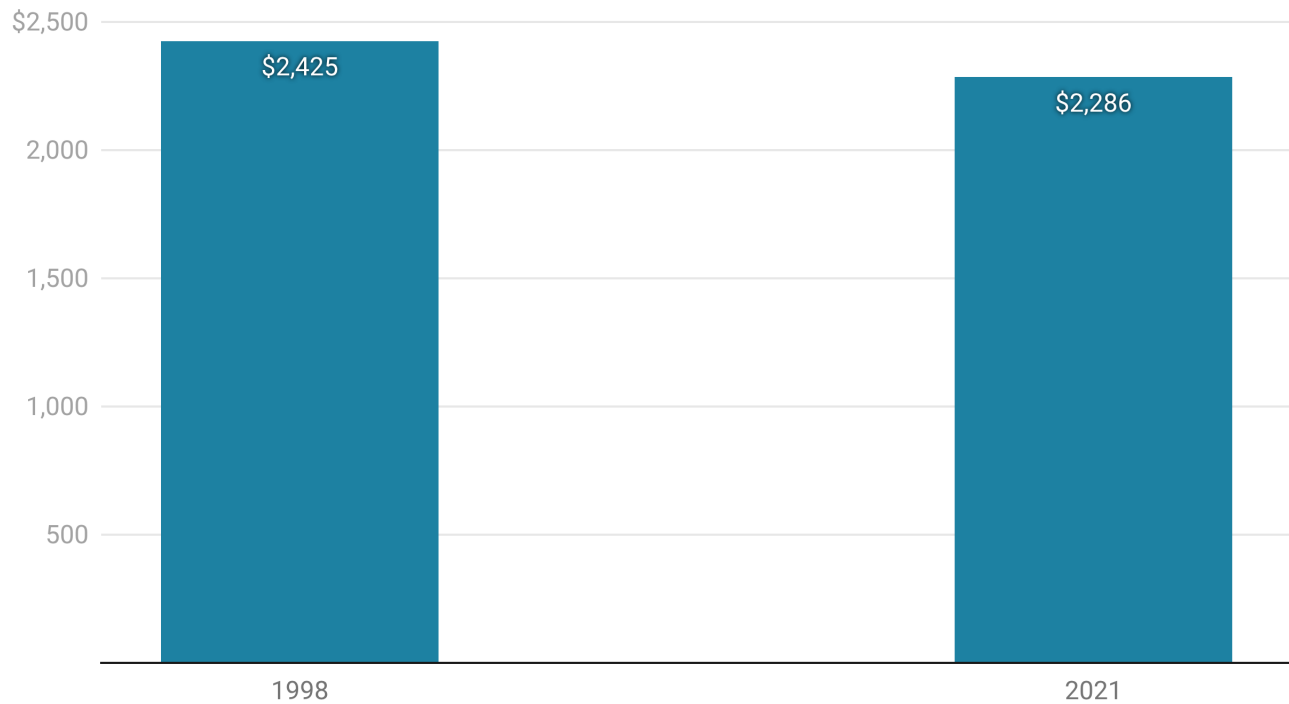
Again, viewing Winnipeg's overall per-capita expenditure levels from a longer term perspective we find that overall expenditure has actually declined since the late 1990s (see Figure 4). This expenditure decline has not been evenly spread across City of Winnipeg departments. While police, public works (road renewal), and fire and paramedic services have secured gains since the early 2000s, departments covering community services, planning, and administration have experienced major cuts after adjusting for inflation and population growth (see Figure 5). This has translated into staff erosion in these areas, reducing services and capacity to respond to emerging issues. A quick glance at the change in staff headcounts across departments underlines this inequity; Community Services, the department that manages recreation, libraries, aquatic programming, along with items like the city's poverty reduction strategy, has seen their staff count reduced by 149 positions since 1999 despite considerable population growth since then.

Conclusion

For nearly three decades, policy makers at the City of Winnipeg have implemented an austerity program that has starved the city of revenue and reduced resources available for programming and infrastructure. The

Figure 4 / Consolidated expenditure per capita

2021 Dollars



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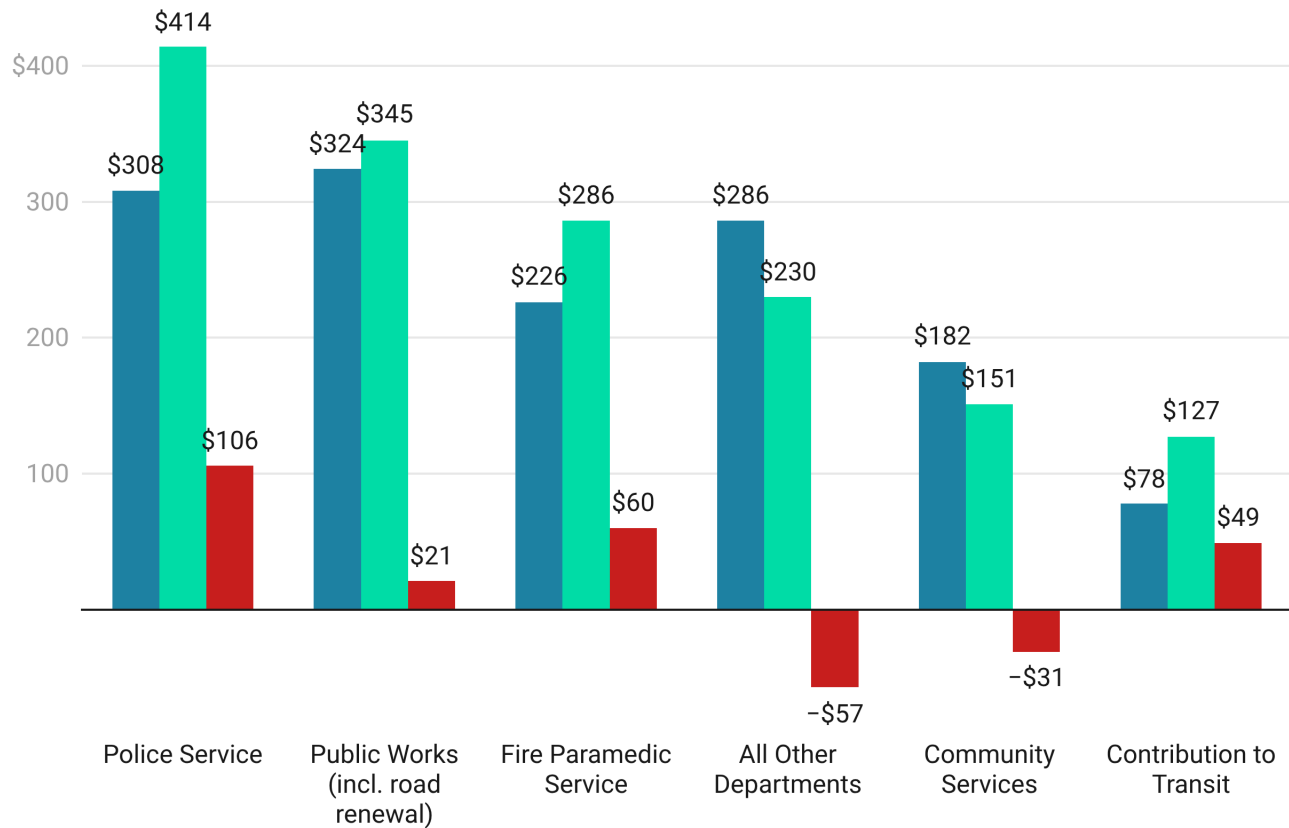
Source City of Winnipeg, Community Trends and Performance Report Vol. 1, 2023

result is a city teetering on the edge of financial disaster, with financial reserves almost depleted. This raises the question whether Winnipeg can be expected in future to deliver annual balanced budgets, as per the municipal charter. At the same time, municipal services in the areas of libraries, recreation, planning and administration have been cut to the bone. If Winnipeggers want improved services and infrastructure on par with other Canadian cities, a strategy to raise municipal revenues will be required.

Figure 5 / Change in real per-capita expenditure by department

2004 vs. 2022

■ 2004 ■ 2022 ■ Net Change, 2004 to 2022



Created with Datawrapper

Source City of Winnipeg, Community Trends and Performance Report Vol. 1, 2023

Table 1 / FTE counts across City of Winnipeg departments**1999 vs. 2022**

Department	1999	2022	Change	% Change
Police	1,477	1,942	465	31%
Fire Paramedic	1,070	1,402	332	31%
Transit	1,362	1,619	257	19%
Water, Sewer & Land Drainage	715	874	159	22%
Corporate Support Services*	203	309	106	52%
Planning, Property & Development	283	321	38	13%
Parking Authority	25	62	37	150%
Public Works (streets & parks)	992	1,007	15	1%
Office of the CAO ¹	29	35	6	19%
Animal Services	20	27	7	36%
Legal Services	24	34	10	40%
Mayor's Office/Policy & Strategic Initiatives	13	16	3	20%
Council	15	15	0	0%
Audit	10	7	-3	-34%
Solid Waste Collection & Disp.	141	98	-43	-30%
Golf	28	24	-4	-15%
Museums	17	3	-14	-82%
Glacial Sand & Gravel	19	0	-19	-100%
City Clerks	71	52	-19	-27%
Corporate Finance	129	88	-41	-32%
Municipal Accommodations	322	283	-39	-12%
Fleet Management Agency	196	109	-87	-44%
Assessment & Taxation	230	130	-100	-44%
Community Services (restated) ¹	844	695	-149	-18%
Total FTE Count	8,235	9,151	916	11%

Source City of Winnipeg, Community Trends and Performance Report Vol. 1, 2023

Summary of revenue changes (\$ millions)

From revenue section

Property tax \$32 million

Impact fee \$16.57 million

Commuter charge \$29.61 million

Parking lot levy \$17.06 million

Business tax increase \$7.2 million

From chapters

Neighbourhood benefits investment reserve \$313,000

Public tree fund \$375,000

Total new revenue AMB 2026 \$103.1 million

Revenue changes for 2026 AMB

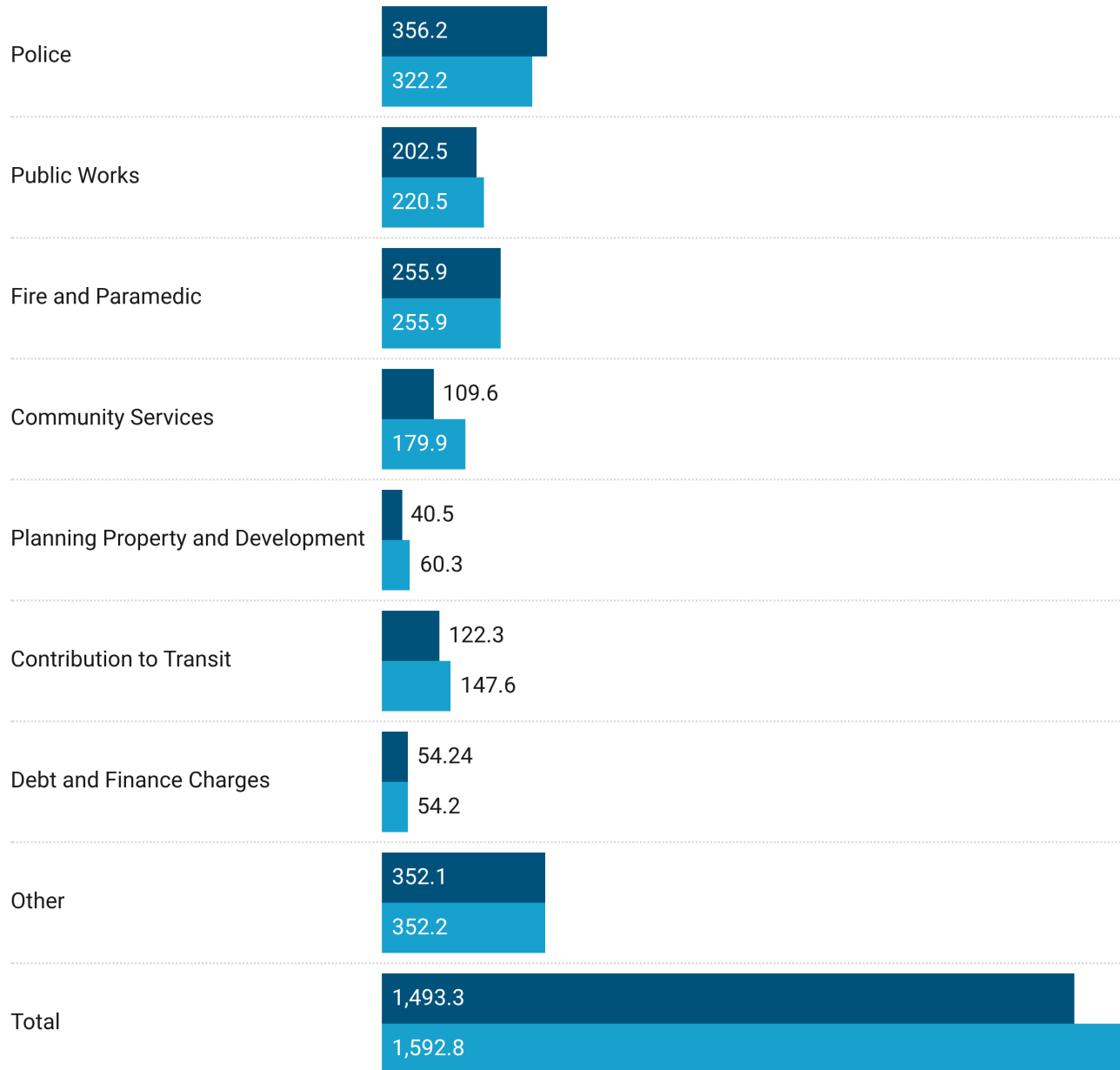
Across all chapters, the 2026 AMB raises spending by \$133.5 million relative to the 2026 City of Winnipeg Budget. All spending increases are in *addition* to the official 2026 City of Winnipeg Budget (with the exception of police services). Further, spending increases are spread across departments, including Public Works, Community Services, and Planning Property and Development (See Figure 6 for details). The AMB's spending increase is partially offset by a 10 per cent decrease to the Police Service budget, amounting to \$34 million. For a more detailed breakdown of spending increases in each chapter, see Table A1 in the Appendix.

Additional spending in the AMB is compensated for by progressive increases to municipal taxes and fees. Together, the five revenue measures outlined below, alongside those from individual chapters, raise a total of \$103.1 million. Below we outline the details of each revenue measure, along with an explanation of the ways in which revenue measures achieve additional policy goals set out in the AMB introduction, including increasing income equality and environmental sustainability.

Figure 6 / Change in spending by department

2026 Projected budget vs. 2026 AMB, millions of \$

■ 2026 (Projection) ■ 2026 (AMB)



Created with Datawrapper

Source City of Winnipeg 2026 Adopted Budget Operating, Reserves and Capital

Property taxes

In addition to the City of Winnipeg's 3.5 per cent increase, the AMB will increase property taxes by an additional 4 per cent for a total of 7.5 per cent. This increase goes a small way to reverse the long-term stagnation of real (adjusted for inflation) City revenue. As noted in the "where the money goes" section, municipal property taxes have on average increased by around 4–5 per cent per year across Canadian major cities, a benchmark Winnipeg has not kept pace with for close to 30 years. To achieve expenditure and service levels on par with other Canadian cities, property taxes must increase above the Canadian average for at least a decade. If we take the median \$2,128 City property tax bill for 2025,¹² the total 7.5 per cent increase would increase property taxes by \$159, or around \$13 per month, and \$85 above the City's 3.5 per cent increase for 2026.

However, to alleviate the negative income effects of this tax increase on low-income homeowners, the AMB will refund the entire 2026 (City and AMB combined) residential property tax increase for those on low incomes. In 2022, Statistics Canada estimated that 5.1 per cent of Winnipeg homeowners are in core housing need, about 10,700 households.¹³ Assuming that these households pay the average property tax, refunding the full \$159 increase for 10,700 households would cost \$1.7 million.

- Property Tax Increase of 5 per cent: \$33.7 million
- Property Tax Refund for Low Income Homeowners: \$1.7 million
- Net Property Tax Revenue Change \$32 million

Impact fee

Since 2014 the AMB has argued in favour of a growth fee based on the recognition that in slow-growth cities such as Winnipeg the new infrastructure required to service new developments tends to drain resources to service mature neighbourhoods. At the same time, there are environmental and public health benefits to encouraging denser development in mature neighbourhoods. The growth fee would help offset these additional costs while encouraging development in mature neighbourhoods and upgrades to existing housing stock. Below we

outline the recent history of Winnipeg's growth fee and outline the revenue such a fee could raise in 2026.

In 2017, the City implemented an impact fee that applied to residential developments in new and emerging communities. The initial charge was around \$500 per 100 square feet (\$54.73 per m² or \$508 per 100 square feet) and rose to nearly \$650 per 100 square feet by 2019 (\$59.48 per m² or \$641 per 100 square feet). For a 1,900 square foot home, this fee amounted to just under \$10,000 in 2017 and just over \$12,000 in 2019 for a new home. From 2017 to 2020, the City collected almost \$37 million in impact fees on the construction of more than 3,500 new homes in greenfield developments. The City had been sliding this money into an Impact Fee Reserve Fund, from which it planned to fund infrastructure needs in the growth areas of the city. It had not yet spent the money collected, pending the decision of a court case on the constitutionality of the fee.

In July 2020, however, the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench ruled that the impact fee "imposed a constitutionally invalid indirect tax and is not saved as a valid user fee or regulatory charge."¹⁴ The court decision ordered the City to immediately halt impact fee collection and refund the \$37 million it had collected in fees and interest since 2017 from homebuilders, developers, and homeowners.

While the 2020 court decision struck a fatal blow to this iteration of the impact fee, the decision did not close the door entirely on the impact fee. The City of Winnipeg Charter gives Council the powers to "establish fees, and the method of calculating and the terms of payment of fees" in order to maintain and develop sustainable communities within the city and to promote the welfare of its citizens.¹⁵ It was on these grounds that the City justified passing a by-law to begin collecting impact fees in 2017. The fact that the court ruled that the impact fee was actually a tax, rather than a fee, and was therefore invalid, shows the limitations of the City to introduce new fees to generate revenue. To generate more needed income, an argument, then, could be made to either better define what constitutes a fee under the City Charter, to better link the fee to the increased cost of development, or to expand the City's ability to collect taxes to include a tax on new residential developments in new and emerging communities.

The promising takeaway from the 2020 verdict was that, in fact, the judge's ruling outlined that the City was fully within its right to charge for the outsized cost of suburban development, but that it did not properly link the impact fee to the cost of development in its initial iteration, hence why it was ruled unconstitutional. Therefore, the 2026 AMB would

reintroduce the impact fee with the stipulation that revenue raised be earmarked for development costs.

A fee discouraging urban sprawl would help recoup some of the expenses associated with infrastructure development in new areas, while simultaneously incentivizing more compact urban development that creates the conditions for greater use of active and public transportation. A US study that examined the association between infrastructure costs per capita and urban sprawl found that all of their measures of costs (which included not only total direct expenditure, but also subcategories like capital facilities, roadways, police protection, and education) were positively related to urban sprawl.¹⁶

Urban quality of life is also greatly impacted by urban form. More sprawling cities are associated with more driving miles, higher vehicle emissions, less walking, more obesity, and even higher rates of hypertension.¹⁷ Cities can take a number of actions to promote more liveable, “smart” urban areas. Zoning is perhaps the most obvious measure, but pricing incentives can also play an important role in reshaping the city’s structure. Taxation can be used to achieve important public policy objectives and to generate much-needed civic revenue.

From the introduction of the original impact fee in May 2017 to the court ruling in July 2020, 21 per cent of all new housing starts in the city occurred in new and emerging communities that were charged the fee. In 2025, 4,179 new homes broke ground in Winnipeg.¹⁸ Housing starts in 2025 were far below the average of the previous four years, at around 5,500 new homes per year. In 2026, Winnipeg is on pace for 40 per cent more home starts than in 2025.¹⁹ If we use the average annual residential construction starts between January 2021 and December 2024 as a baseline (5,542 per year), which seems a somewhat conservative assumption based on market expectations, and we assume the same proportion will be in new and emerging communities as was the case between 2017 and 2020, we can expect to charge an impact fee on 1,163 new homes. The AMB would set the new impact fee at \$750 per 100 square feet, an increase from \$650 in 2019. For a 1,900 square foot home which would sell for over \$500,000, this would amount to \$14,250 (about 2.85 per cent). This would generate \$16.57 million, and would help to recuperate some of the expenses associated with infrastructure development in new areas, while simultaneously incentivizing against continually building outward, rather than improving existing neighbourhoods and infrastructure closer to the city centre.

Additional revenue:

- Impact fee: \$16.57 million

Commuter charge

One of the challenges facing Winnipeg is tax competition from municipalities within a very easy commuting distance of the city, such as Headingley or East St. Paul. If people live in these communities and then commute into Winnipeg for work or leisure, they are, in fact, using Winnipeg infrastructure (most obviously roads) without paying for them. This free-riding on city services allows outlying communities to charge lower taxes than in Winnipeg. It also constrains the amount that Winnipeg can increase its property taxes because it has to worry about the incentive to construct new homes outside the perimeter.

The manner in which property taxes are currently structured creates a disincentive for new construction within the city limits. A study conducted by MNP found a substantial difference in property tax rates between the City of Winnipeg and its surrounding communities in the census metropolitan area (CMA) in 2011.²⁰ For a house valued at \$350,000 in 2016, a resident of Winnipeg could expect to pay \$2,010.65, while property taxes on a home of the same value in the surrounding municipalities ranged from a low of \$1,061.24 in Rosser to \$1,477.35 in Springfield in the surrounding municipalities.²¹

The regions outside the city limits are growing more rapidly than the city itself. Between 2001 and 2021, the population of Winnipeg increased by 25 per cent, while the CMA as a whole grew by 27 per cent. Some of the commuter municipalities have grown much more rapidly. For example, from 2001 to 2016 Headingley grew by 88 per cent. Between 2016 and 2021, the bedroom communities of Niverville and West St. Paul were Manitoba's fastest-growing municipalities, growing 29 per cent and 25 per cent respectively over 5 years.

The City and the Province need to find some way to address the incentive problem caused by this cost differential. This could be done in a variety of ways, either by equalizing property taxes between the municipalities in the CMA or by attempting to solve the free-rider problem caused by commuters.

One potential mechanism that might address this issue is a commuter charge. This could be administered in a variety of ways. Until 1999,

New York had a commuter tax that was 0.45 per cent of the earnings of a suburbanite working in New York and was collected from their paycheck. Another option, which might discourage single-vehicle commuting, might be to charge people outside the city per trip into the city. This could be structured in many ways, but one option is to offer a set number of free trips into the city during a given period (perhaps one free trip per week) and then charge per trip after that.

Cities including London, Stockholm, and New York charge a toll to enter their city centres. As of August 2026, it costs between 11 and 45 Swedish Krona (SEK) to enter Stockholm by personal car, depending on the time of day, up to a maximum of 135 SEK per day.²² The city uses an automatic camera identification system to check license plates and charge accordingly. The toll proved to be very successful in Stockholm. Traffic in the area with the congestion charge was reduced 22.1 per cent from 2005 to 2013.²³ Further, the tax generates a good deal of revenue. In 2013, the municipal government in Stockholm generated 850 million SEK, with variable costs of 250 million SEK.²⁴ Eliasson also found that the negative effect on economic activity in the taxed zone was “very small or non-existent.”²⁵ In London, the congestion charge generated 200 million pounds in the 2013–14 fiscal year and between 2003 and 2013 it “reduced traffic levels by 30 per cent.”²⁶

Winnipeg could levy a commuter fee that would help pay for Winnipeg’s road infrastructure on a beneficiary-pays principle and help to mitigate the free riding/tax competition issue with surrounding municipalities. This could take one of two forms — either as a payroll charge, taken as a portion of an employee’s income if they work inside the city but reside outside of it, or as a tolling system around the city, which would use license plate recognition software to charge non-Winnipeggers who commute into the city for work, per entry. A 2019 report commissioned by the CCPA Manitoba office and authored by Riley Black weighed the pros and cons of these two options. The appeal of a payroll charge lies primarily in its ease of application, but it does not do much to discourage lone vehicle commutes over options such as carpooling, bussing, or cycling into the city. Further, it has the potential to run into legislative roadblocks. On the other hand, a per-trip fee monitored by license plate recognition would be more costly to implement and continually operate, but would do a much better job of directly addressing the marginal costs of driving by charging commuters per trip, and might therefore incentivize them to consider other options or at least force them to pay their fair share per commute.²⁷ It is for these reasons that the latter is preferable.

According to the 2021 Census, 834,678 people live in the Winnipeg CMA, while 749,607 live in the City of Winnipeg, meaning there are around 85,000 people who live in the Winnipeg metro area but not within city limits. If we assume that even 50,000 of those 85,000 commute, plus at least 15,000 more who live around the CMA commute, using their own cars, into the city for work five days a week and once on the weekend, and we allow for one free trip per vehicle per week, that would result in around 325,000 chargeable trips per week, or 16.9 million trips per year. If we charged \$3 each time a vehicle entered the perimeter from outside the city, whose license plate was registered to an address outside city limits, after allowing for one free trip per week, this would generate \$50.7 million. A regular commuter making five chargeable trips per week at \$3 per trip would pay \$780 per year. In Stockholm, the automatic camera identification system cost approximately 1,900 million SEK, or \$250 million to implement, and costs 220 million SEK, or \$29 million per year to operate.²⁸ Given that Winnipeg has around half of the entry points — or potential toll stations — that Stockholm's city centre does, we can assume the total start-up capital costs and yearly operational costs would also be cut in half, totalling around \$125 million to initially implement and \$14.5 million to operate annually. If we assume a 5.5 per cent interest rate and a 20-year payment term, the capital costs associated with start-up for one year would be \$6.59 million. Therefore, deducting annual capital and operational costs, the commuter charge would generate \$29.61 million.

Additional revenue:

- Commuter fee: \$29.61 million

Parking space levy

Although lack of accessible parking is often seen as a deterrent, it is entirely possible that Winnipeg has too much parking, not too little. This is especially true of surface-level (single-story) suburban parking. Massive parking lots take up land that could be used for retail or housing. It makes active transportation more difficult by increasing the distance between destinations. Free parking in suburban malls acts as a disincentive to go downtown. Generally, it facilitates the use of more vehicles and the expensive infrastructure required to support them.

In 2017, Mexico City became a trailblazer for North American cities when it changed its parking regulation policy to put a maximum on parking spaces at a new development as opposed to a minimum. The law states that there be a maximum of one parking space for every 30 square meters of business space (Kopf, 2011). Once a business reaches half of this maximum, they are required to pay a fee. There is also a maximum of three parking spaces per housing unit for multi-family dwellings. The laws are too new for there to be any meaningful results yet, but in the coming years, we will see the effect of these new parking regulations in Mexico City.

Outside Winnipeg's downtown and Exchange District, parking is largely governed by zoning. Generally, in Winnipeg, the zoning rules lay out parking minimums, presumably to allay nearby residents' concerns about on-street parking congestion. The result is massive parking lots that blight the city. The AMB would impose a parking space levy on all surface-level parking spots that are not currently metered by the city. For new developments, it would also convert the current zoning regulations from a minimum number of parking spots to a maximum.

There are some noteworthy benefits to using a parking space levy. Because parking lots are property, the amount of the levy can easily be added to a business' property tax bill. This means there will be relatively low additional administrative costs to implement the tax.²⁹ Another consideration is that the levy could incentivize businesses to convert existing parking spaces into productive office, residential or retail space, thereby increasing the property's value. This means higher property tax revenue for the city.

Calculating the net revenue for a city-wide parking space levy is difficult. Unfortunately, no data exists for how many parking spots are in the entire city. Consequently, the following results are therefore quite broad and represent estimates with a high variance. However, there is some public data on which we can base a general estimate. Data exists on the number of offices and retail stores in the city, and the size of these establishments in square feet. These two categories of buildings would have the most parking spots.

According to the City's 2006 zoning by-law, the minimum parking requirements in Winnipeg are one parking spot for every 750 ft for offices and one spot for every 250 ft for retail stores. The minimum number of parking spaces provides a conservative estimate for the number of parking spots actually constructed. We can also use the data from Tables 2 and 3 on the different types of office and retail buildings. Since building size is given as a range, an average was chosen for each category.

Based on these numbers, there are around 93,473 retail and office parking spots in Winnipeg. If the parking lot levy were set at \$182.5 per space per year (\$27,375 for a 37,500 square foot retail space requiring 150 spots), it would generate approximately \$17.06 million.

Additional revenue:

- Parking lot levy: \$17.06 million

Business tax

Over the past thirty years, the City of Winnipeg has significantly reduced its municipal business tax rate. The rate was 9.75 per cent in 2002, falling to 7.75 per cent in 2007, 6.39 per cent in 2010, and 5.9 per cent in 2012. It continued to decline through the 2010s, reaching 4.97 per cent by 2019 — a reduction of almost half the 2002 rate. This long-term reduction in business taxation has contributed to the erosion of Winnipeg's municipal revenue base and limited the City's capacity to fund essential services and infrastructure that businesses rely upon. At the same time, these reductions have shifted responsibility for funding municipal services and infrastructure more heavily onto households. The AMB will take a first step towards reversing this by raising municipal business taxes by 10 per cent.

Additional revenue:

- 10 per cent Business tax increase: \$7.2 million

Appendix

Table A1 / AMB revenue and spending changes

AMB Chapter changes

In millions of \$

Department	Chapter	Revenue change	Spending change
Police	Safety		-34
Public works			
	Organic waste		2.8
	Active transportation		15.25
Community services			
	Safety		20.59
	Libraries		3.9
	Newcomer inclusion		0.45
	Recreation		7.55
	Public art		0.62
	Housing		15.05
	Indigenous relations		17.4
	Poverty reduction		4.77
Planning property and development			
	City planning		1.815
	Greenspace and Urban forestry	0.69	11
	Climate		7
Contribution to transit			25.25
Debt and finance charges			
Other			
	Water (H2O Help for others)		0.052
	Water (combined sewer upgrades) ¹	-15	-39
Total		-14.31	99.45

¹ Since water and sewer are managed as a public utility, this increase is accounted for as a reduction in the annual dividend paid from municipal utilities.

Table A2 / Office buildings, average sizes, and total spaces

Size in square ft.	Number of office buildings	Parking spaces required	Total spaces
<5,000	454	$3,000 / 750 = 4$	1,816
5,000-15,000	361	$9,750 / 750 = 13$	4,693
15,000-30,000	109	$22,500 / 750 = 30$	3,270
>30,000	180	$37,500 / 750 = 50$	9,000
Total	1,104		18,779

Source City of Winnipeg Valuation of Income-Producing Properties 2027 General Assessment.

Table A3 / Retail stores, average sizes, and total spaces

Size in square ft.	Number of retail stores	Parking spaces required	Total spaces
<5,000	1,162	$3,000 / 250 = 12$	13,944
5,000-15,000	470	$9,750 / 250 = 39$	18,330
15,000-30,000	148	$22,500 / 250 = 90$	13,320
>30,000	194	$37,500 / 250 = 150$	29,100
Total	1,974		74,694

Source City of Winnipeg Valuation of Income-Producing Properties 2027 General Assessment.

Notes

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Active transportation

The rising cost of transportation combined with rising costs for housing and food have pushed more and more people into transportation poverty, defined as a lack of transport options that are available, reliable, affordable, accessible or safe that allow people to meet their daily needs and achieve a reasonable quality of life.

Walking, cycling, and rolling offer an affordable, healthy, sustainable way to travel to jobs and education, health and social services, recreation, shopping, dining, and entertainment. But to unlock their potential to alleviate transport poverty, walking and cycling need to be **affordable, available, accessible, safe** and **reliable**. Failure to include proper infrastructure for people on bike or foot has left major gaps in the city's walking and cycling networks, putting key destinations out of reach for many.

Our next budget needs to provide staffing and funding needed to build out our planned walking and cycling networks within a reasonable timeline of 15 to 20 years.

Overview

In a car oriented city such as Winnipeg, a lack of transport options puts people at risk of losing their job or preventing them from accessing work, education, health and care services.

Investments in our walking and cycling networks make the city a more equitable place by providing people who may have limited or no access to a vehicle with safe, reliable access to employment, education, shopping,



St. Boniface walking bridge / Alanna Yuen

services, and recreation opportunities that are currently outside of their reach. At the same time, making walking and cycling more attractive and convenient by enhancing and expanding networks encourages more people to get out of their cars and walk or bike to their destinations. Any shift from driving to walking or cycling reduces greenhouse gas emissions, may improve people's health, cuts transportation costs, and helps build social networks.

Improvements to the walking and cycling networks can also reduce the risk of injury causing collisions. Sadly, 23 pedestrians and 6 people on their bikes were killed or seriously injured on our streets in 2023. It's a preventable tragedy stemming from a car culture and street designs that encourage excess speed in the absence of safe walking and cycling facilities. That's unacceptable, but also preventable. On busier streets, we can build better cycling infrastructure to separate people on bikes from traffic. On less busy streets we can reduce traffic speeds to a much safer 30 km/hr suitable for mixed traffic cycling. Intersections can be improved to reduce potential conflicts.

Adopted in 2025, the City of Winnipeg's Pedestrian and Cycling Strategy outlines the estimated cost of building out Winnipeg's cycling



Assiniboine Ave. bike path / Alanna Yuen

network will be \$1.742 billion dollars for pathways and bike lanes. The estimated cost to complete the pedestrian network sits at \$194 million.¹ An additional \$214 million will be required to build structures to get people on bikes safely across rail lines, rivers, and major roadways.² With a forecast budget of just \$6.7 million devoted to the Pedestrian and Cycling Program in 2027,³ the timeframe to build out the City's planned pedestrian and cycling network will stretch into hundreds of years. As both the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies, and OurWinnipeg 2045 point out, we need to accelerate the enhancement and expansion of our walking and cycling networks.

To be built in a cost effective manner, it will be critical to ensure that improvements to walking and cycling facilities are included in regional and local street renewals as a default case. This is by far the cheapest way to add infrastructure, as projects benefit from scale and costs to add features are often incremental. Dedicated AT staffing to oversee the inclusion of walking and cycling facilities in road renewal projects is key to the success of this recommendation. Any needed public engagement or design work needs to be scheduled in advance of roadway renewals.

Beyond the need for a safe, comfortable, and convenient network of pathways, sidewalks, and bike lanes, there is also a need to provide people with a secure space to store their bikes. In particular, the lack of long term bike parking (bike rooms, bike sheds, bike lockers, ...) in residential buildings and at places of employment is a barrier to getting more people riding to their destinations.⁴

Ensuring equity

The need for better walking and cycling facilities is especially acute in areas of the city identified as higher needs. Residents of these areas often have less access to private vehicles, and less income that they can (or that they would like to) dedicate to transportation.

For transportation projects, an equity lens that better addresses both the burdens and the benefits generated by transportation projects (whether AT related or not) is needed. Affected communities need to be fully engaged throughout project development, measuring support for or opposition to projects, soliciting weighting for criteria, and identifying and evaluating alternatives early in the process.

Equity also affects people with mobility challenges and those with reduced or no vision. This may result in barriers related to curbs, to the placement of street furniture, lack of audible signals, right of way, or grades. Guidelines need to be updated to ensure new facilities are accessible, and that they are backed with funding to upgrade existing infrastructure to meet those guidelines.

Encouraging the shift to active transportation

To complement the expansion and enhancement of the City's walking and cycling network, it will be important to build awareness and enthusiasm for the improved networks. Educational and encouragement programs build community knowledge about the growing network while providing opportunities to develop skills and build confidence by experiencing routes first hand.

Programs that provide instruction and assistance on bike repair and access to affordable bikes are also key, especially for those with limited budgets and limited space to manage repairs on their own.

Actions

- **The AMB will** reallocate \$2.8 million in forecast capital funding within the Regional Street Renewals program so that the scope of the ongoing Rapid Transit — Downtown Corridors — Preliminary Design project can be extended to include preliminary design work for the Northern Corridor between Sutherland Ave and Smithfield Ave. This will ensure that a planned rehabilitation of Main St between Sutherland Ave (the southern limit of the Downtown Corridors project) and McAdam Ave forecast to occur between 2028 and 2031⁵ will incorporate modifications needed to implement rapid transit along Main St as recommended in the Transit Master Plan.
- **The AMB will** add two additional FTEs to help implement the recommendations of the Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies (\$250,000):⁶
 1. A bicycle and pedestrian design engineer.
 2. A bicycle and pedestrian education and outreach coordinator
- **The AMB will** advance capital funding of \$500,000 to complete functional design work for rehabilitation of the Osborne Underpass, including functional design alternatives for an active transportation grade separation, from its currently forecast date of 2027 to 2028. Funding can be reallocated within the regional street renewals program, using funds currently allocated to regional street renewals — various locations to be identified.
- **The AMB will** increase capital funding for the Pedestrian and Cycling Program in 2027 to \$20 million (triple the 2026 budget projection) to accelerate development of the walking and cycling networks. The additional funding will include:
 - Construction of new pedestrian and cycling facilities.
 - Enhancement of existing pedestrian and cycling facilities.
 - Studies to plan new pedestrian and cycling facilities as part of planned street renewals.
 - Capital funding of \$500,000 to retrofit pathway intersections and crossings to better accommodate cargo bikes and trikes, as well as adaptive bikes used by people with reduced mobility,

- Increase funding for the bike rack rebate program to encourage installation of secure bike parking in residential and employment sites.
- Increase funding for THE WRENCH to help lower income individuals obtain and maintain bikes.
- Increase funding for the Bicycle Education and Skills Program to increase the number of students provided with cycling skills instruction.
- **The AMB will** provide an additional \$5.5 million in capital funding to the Road Safety Improvement Program to replace \$2.5 million in funding removed from the 2025 Adopted Budget in response to a provincial request for funding to be re-prioritized,^{7 8} and to increase funding for the implementation of the Road Safety Strategic Action Plan.

Notes

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- 4** Views on Cycling and Driving in Winnipeg, September 2022 Probe Research Omnibus Poll, CAA Manitoba/Bike Winnipeg , pg. 6.
- 5** City of Winnipeg Supplement to the 2026 Capital Budget, City of Winnipeg, pg. 63.
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City planning

The City of Winnipeg's strategic plans focus on good governance, environmental resilience, community well-being, and equity. While these goals have the potential to improve quality of life in the city, they are often undermined by decisions that do not acknowledge the long-term costs of different types of development and limited revenue sources. There is also eroding public trust in local government, which is exacerbated by limited opportunities for meaningful public participation. The Alternative Municipal Budget proposes several strategies aimed at addressing these issues, including:

- Making planning decisions based on the full costs of development
- Increasing trust and transparency through participatory budgeting
- Using taxation strategies to support policy goals

These strategies are designed to (1) ensure that financial resources and benefits align with the vision set out in planning documents, (2) increase transparency and fairness in how communities participate in planning processes, and (3) develop more sustainable and equitable revenue sources.

Make planning decisions based on the full costs of development

While the City's official plan (*OurWinnipeg 2045*) and strategic plans are guided by principles of environmental and financial sustainability,



Portage and Main / Alanna Yuen

this is often at odds with the types of development and infrastructure investments that are permitted. A lack of consistency between capital improvement plans and official plans is seen as an endemic problem, requiring immediate attention.¹ While low-density growth may temporarily add to the City's tax rolls, the long-term costs are not being fully accounted for. The implications can be significant, with the need for new schools, recreation, and emergency services, while existing facilities suffer from deferred maintenance and underutilization. The impact on infrastructure is even clearer. While the immediate costs of infrastructure expansions are budgeted for, the long-term operating and maintenance costs are not.

Critical safety issues can come from not accounting for the long-term maintenance and replacement costs for the development of new infrastructure. An independent review of the disastrous 2024 Bearspaw watermain breaks in Calgary found that the rapid pace of low-density growth stretched capacity and exacerbated infrastructure issues.² The long-term costs of maintenance and replacement are also apparent in Winnipeg, such as with the emergency closure of key infrastructure like the Arlington Bridge due to critical safety issues. Other public facilities

also suffer from the impacts of deferred maintenance, leading to the closure of pools, arenas, and other recreational facilities. More than 20 years ago, the City noted the high costs of deferred maintenance and argued that new projects should be budgeted on a life-cycle basis — not just the initial cost of the project.³

As argued by others, before building new infrastructure, municipalities must “clearly identify how future generations will afford to maintain it.”⁴ Given the long-term financial, safety, and maintenance issues, it is crucial that the City account for the full life-cycle costs of different types of development. At the minimum, approval of new development should account for the operating, maintenance, and replacement costs of infrastructure and public facilities over the full life cycle of these facilities.

Increase trust and transparency through participatory budgeting

Increasingly, there is distrust of government agencies and the work that they do, including for planning strategies that aim to tackle critical issues like reducing car dependence and addressing climate change. Public trust is essential to good governance and is often related to how people engage with government agencies. Recent surveys have found the greatest differences in levels of trust are related to whether people feel that the political system allows them to have a say.⁵ In Winnipeg, participation is limited to municipal elections, which have very low turnout, or through legally-mandated consultation processes that offer little transparency in how decisions are made.

One strategy to address this is by allowing more direct control over decision-making, such as through participatory budgeting. In this model, community members brainstorm ideas for how money should be spent and vote on preferred options, which are then implemented by the municipality.⁶ Critically, participatory budgeting has the potential for direct participation in decisions that affect them.⁷ By allowing direct and meaningful control over decision-making, participatory budgeting has the potential to strengthen relationships between governments and communities, and can lead to more transparency and greater trust in governments.⁸ Participatory budgeting processes also allow for democratic participation beyond elections, and can increase who participates in these processes.⁹ While there may be challenges in ensuring diverse and inclusive involvement, the potential for participatory

budgeting to allow citizens more control over decisions and restore trust in government agencies makes it an ideal strategy for the City of Winnipeg.¹⁰

Since being developed in Brazil, participatory budgeting programs have been successfully implemented in many cities worldwide and in Canada. Many cities, including Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Boston have used participatory budget processes to allocate millions of dollars to community-designed projects. Since 2002, Toronto Community Housing, the largest social housing provider in Canada, has allocated a portion of its capital budget for community-identified projects through a participatory process.¹¹ While the nature of these programs vary, when these processes are designed to ensure equity, ensure accessibility, and give control over significant budgets they can improve government trust and transparency.¹²

Use taxation strategies to support policy goals

Taxes and fees are used to raise revenue but can also be used to either encourage desirable economic outcomes (such as encouraging investment) and reduce undesirable ones (such as greenhouse gas emissions or pollutants).¹³ The City of Winnipeg has waived fees or charges to encourage some types of development, such as to encourage development downtown.¹⁴ Yet, there are many fiscal strategies that can both reduce unwanted harms and raise revenue. Eco-fiscal tools — in the form of taxes, fees or regulatory charges, can be used by municipalities to achieve environmental goals, and are particularly appropriate when the impacts are local, such as traffic congestion, canopy cover, soil pollution, and fine particle emissions.¹⁵ In Canada, Québec municipalities are the leader in applying eco-fiscal tools, including charges for parking spaces, vacant commercial space, and canopy loss. In addition to raising revenue, charges such as these can be successful in changing behaviours, such as reducing waste through volume-based pricing or reductions in commercial parking spaces through parking taxes (see Fiscal chapter for more info on how AMB revenue align with eco-fiscal policy goals).¹⁶ Revenue from these types of charges should be used to address related issues. For example, in Montréal, vehicle registration charges are dedicated exclusively to public transportation and have grown from \$59 to \$150 to keep pace with transit investments.¹⁷

While there are many types of taxes and charges to improve environmental outcomes and raise revenue, those that have low administration costs, are transparent in application, and can be fairly applied should be prioritized. Vehicle registration taxes, which are common outside of North America and have been used effectively in Québec, are one tool that can provide revenue to help shift away from unsustainable travel patterns.¹⁸ Implementing a similar vehicle registration tax in Winnipeg could provide a dedicated revenue source to support public transit and active transportation. A 2022 estimate of Manitoba vehicle registrations found 1,182,792 cars registered across the province, with 62 per cent (733,331) registered in Winnipeg.¹⁹ At just \$60 per car, a vehicle registration fee paid by Winnipeg car owners could raise \$44 million per year for public and active transit. Implementing such a fee would require collaboration with Manitoba Public Insurance and the Province, however this would be a significant additional revenue source for public and active transportation.

Actions

- **The AMB will** allocate funds to analyze the full cost of different development patterns, including long-term operating, maintenance and replacement costs.
 - Staff to assess long-term costs of existing capital plans and consistency with strategic plans (1 FTE): \$105,000
 - Staff to examine costs of different development patterns (1 FTE): \$105,000
- **The AMB will** allocate funds for community-identified projects through a participatory budgeting process:
 - Budget allocated for participatory budget projects: \$1,500,000 (100,000 amount per ward x 15)
 - Staff to administer program (1 FTE): \$105,000

Notes

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Climate

The City of Winnipeg has committed to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, an emissions reductions target that is shared by both the government of Manitoba and the Canadian federal government.¹ The City has also committed to a more immediate 2030 target of 20 per cent reduction in emissions relative to 2011, below the federal target of 40–45 per cent reduction by 2030.² Despite these commitments, emissions continue to rise in Winnipeg and in Manitoba as a whole.³

Transitioning to a society that produces net zero emissions is a profound challenge as virtually every sector of our economy utilizes fossil fuels. Effective emissions reductions plans must be transformational in nature, reflecting the scale and urgency of the climate crisis. The most effective way for the City of Winnipeg to reduce emissions is to focus on transportation and buildings, accounting for 50 per cent and 42 per cent of emissions in Winnipeg, respectively.⁴

Winnipeg's current net zero strategy is guided by a climate action plan from 2018 and a climate roadmap from 2022.⁵ These documents reflect the level of political comfort the City has with climate action and suggest a series of policies to embrace. While there are some promising ideas in these documents, achieving climate targets will require ratcheting up ambition, firm commitments, and following through with actions.

Economic modeling

A limitation of the City's current climate approach is a heavy reliance on economic modelling in both the 2018 climate plan and 2022



Bumblebee pollinating a shrub rose / Alanna Yuen

climate roadmap. Economic modelling uses computer programming to quantitatively evaluate future policy scenarios taking factors into consideration such as emissions reductions, employment, GDP, etc.

Economic modelling has been widely criticized by climate scientists for distorting climate action priorities.⁶ By assigning a numerical value to the breakdown of complex ecological and social systems, modelling reduces climate action to a cost-optimization exercise.⁷ Rather than critically evaluating how energy is used in our society and building public capacity to enact structural changes, modelling tends to rely on hypothetical technological advancements.⁸ Alternative climate frameworks would prioritize structural energy demand reduction.

Transportation

The most important focus for the city's climate plan is transportation because it is the highest emitting sector in the city and because the City of Winnipeg has direct authority over central aspects of the transportation

system: land use planning, public transit operations, and active transportation infrastructure. Advancing complete communities (mixed-use neighbourhoods including places to live, shop, work, learn, and play) that facilitate a large-scale shift away from car use and towards active and public transportation is central to climate action. Beyond emissions reductions, complete communities generate wide-ranging benefits across society, including health, safety, cost savings, mental well-being, and economic activity. Please see the transit and active transportation chapters for AMB actions in these areas.

The City's climate documents highlight complete communities as a key element of transportation emissions reductions, as do the City's key planning documents.⁹ These plans emphasize strategic investment in active transportation, public transit, and transit-oriented development.

Municipal climate action plans must articulate firm, measurable commitments that directly constrain sprawl and reduce car dependence. Without clear targets tied to land use, infrastructure spending, and transportation outcomes, policies that support complete communities risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative. Sharply reducing car ownership and creating mixed-use communities must be priorities.

Buildings

Buildings must also be a major focus of the city's climate plan, as they account for approximately 42 per cent of city-wide emissions. This sector presents challenges for municipal action, as building codes fall under provincial jurisdiction and energy efficiency upgrades like Deep Energy Retrofits (DERs) require major upfront funding.

Several ideas identified in the City's Community Energy Investment Roadmap (CEIR) can be scaled up into effective policy. The proposed City-wide Zero Emissions Buildings coalition could coordinate stakeholders, while a dedicated municipal office could streamline permitting and approvals for deep energy retrofit projects. The City could also demonstrate leadership by committing to DERs for city-owned buildings. Large-scale retrofits of municipal buildings, including the deployment of ground-source heat pumps, would invest in the local building efficiency industry, creating spin-off benefits for households and the wider municipal economy.

More ambitious plans could reduce buildings even further. The city could provide loans needed to launch a GSHP industry, for e.g.

drilling equipment. Cities such as Montreal and the province of British Columbia are moving forward with banning natural gas installation in new construction, which would also support a shift away from fossil fuels.

The City can leverage its public capacity to enable buildings decarbonization policy by streamlining permitting, coordinating approvals, and using its own building portfolio to support the local DER and ground-source heat pump industry. These actions require relatively modest public expenditure but can significantly reduce project costs, accelerate deployment, and attract senior-government and private capital into Winnipeg's building sector.

Funding climate action

Winnipeg is currently struggling with an \$8 billion infrastructure deficit, driven in large part by long-standing land-use patterns that fail to account for the full lifecycle costs of infrastructure costs.¹⁰ Car-centric suburban sprawl involves large upfront and ongoing infrastructure. Analysis of urban growth dynamics in the Greater Golden Horseshoe region surrounding Toronto has found that many low-density neighbourhoods cost more to service than they generate in municipal revenue.¹¹

By carefully evaluating infrastructure costs and municipal revenues across neighbourhoods, Spatial Fiscal Impact Assessments show that compact, mixed-use development reduces car dependence and emissions while delivering higher fiscal returns.¹² Shifting toward complete communities would therefore reduce emissions and strengthen the city's fiscal position. The decision to expand Kenaston Boulevard (Route 90) is a costly example of increasing reliance on fossil-fuel infrastructure instead of investing in quality public transit. A future City Council can reverse or alter this decision as the project is still in its early stages and its massive \$757 million price tag is heavily contingent on uncommitted federal and provincial funding. While Winnipeg City Council approved \$5 million in the 2026 budget to begin property acquisitions, heavy construction is not slated to begin until 2027 or 2028, there are several pathways where the decision could be overturned or scaled back.¹³

City public works staff have already proposed a fallback plan to focus strictly on replacing and rehabilitating the aging St. James Street bridges instead of widening the entire corridor. Due to the high costs, environmental impacts, and alternative investments in public transit,

cancelling the expansion should be a priority of progressive City Councillors.

Climate adaptation

Adapting to a changing climate is also a critical part of climate action. An increase in the number of days with extreme heat as well as an increase in intensity of precipitation are some of the key impacts of climate in Winnipeg.¹⁴ The City is currently in the process of developing a climate adaptation strategy.

There are several key adaptation investments that the city could make. Utilizing public spaces like libraries, leisure centres and community centres as cooling centres can also serve as useful tools for those requiring relief from extreme heat events. Maintaining and expanding the city's tree canopy would help to keep urban spaces cool in heat waves. Flooding mitigation efforts such as rainwater harvesting can be cost-effective ways to help manage water in the ground rather than overwhelm the stormwater system.

Actions

- **The AMB will** increase funding for complete communities by investing in planning capacity, community councils, and neighbourhood-scale capital projects that repurpose road space for public use. \$4 million dollars per year will be allocated to a capital reserve fund for projects that further the creation of complete communities.
- **The AMB will** establish a City-wide Deep Energy Retrofit (DER) Program with a dedicated municipal office to streamline permitting and approvals for deep energy retrofit projects; a commitment to undertake deep energy retrofits of City-owned buildings, including the deployment of ground-source heat pumps where appropriate; and a revolving loan or financing program to support capital investments by local retrofit and ground-source heat pump contractors, including specialized equipment required for installation. \$4 million dollars per year will be allocated to a capital reserve fund for Deep Energy Retrofits.

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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>
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- 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>
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Housing

Introduction

Despite a rise in homeownership costs, our city remains a place where middle-income earners can afford a home, with prices far behind almost all other mid-size Canadian cities.¹ The greatest and deepest housing needs in Winnipeg are those of the over 2,469 people who are unhoused and the one-in-ten Winnipeggers living on low or very low incomes who struggle to find and maintain good housing.^{2 3} Some groups are harder hit than others, including Indigenous people, racialized communities, people with disabilities, youth, seniors, and newcomers.

Safe, appropriate, accessible housing that people can afford is the foundation of a healthy, vibrant, and more socially just city. It supports equity and increases safety for Indigenous women and children. City housing policy and spending must reflect the nature of our housing crisis and prioritize those most in need.

Overview

Housing is city business

The City has funded community-led housing initiatives through the Housing Rehabilitation and Investment Reserve (HRIR) fund for over 25 years, supporting Indigenous housing providers to maintain their units and Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations to develop local housing plans and for local projects such as housing rehabilitation. Recently the City has taken a more active role in housing policy, capitalizing



Houses in St. Boniface / Alanna Yuen

on Federal funding through the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) and CMHC funding streams like the Rapid Housing Initiative. The Housing Accelerator Fund provided the City with \$122.4 million over three years and required the City to permit increased density through zoning and to boost the supply of housing, including affordable housing.⁴ HAF funding allowed the City to hire more staff and increase capacity to plan, facilitate, and deliver affordable and rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing. With the final installment of HAF funding and fees collected under the Vacant Buildings Bylaw, the City created a one-time Vacant Building Grant which aims to increase affordable housing by funding repairs, renovations, or purchases of vacant or underutilized buildings.⁵ Unfortunately, the end of HAF funding in 2027 threatens to derail the City's recent progress unless the City's own resources are devoted to maintaining staff capacity and strengthening these efforts.

Increasing the supply of new social housing

Between 2022 and 2026, the City supported the creation of 3,930 units of housing: 1,406 renting at market rents, 1,592 renting at affordable rents, and just 932 units where rents are geared to tenant incomes, where rental

subsidies were provided by the Province.⁶ It's a start, but much more must be done. The City's own 2025 Housing Needs Assessment suggests that almost 21,000 units of RGI and 12,500 units of affordable housing are required over the next ten years to eliminate homelessness and core housing need.⁷ Many City-supported projects have involved market housing developers who offer below-market housing for a limited time. This may achieve units in the short term but can lead to displacement following 10 or 20-year affordability periods. Housing initiatives should be restricted to, or heavily prioritize, non-market social housing projects with a mandate to preserve affordability over the long-term. Subsidy agreements with the Province could enable the units to be rented at RGI rates.

The City should continue to use tools such as fast-tracking developments, reducing zoning requirements, offering tax incentives, and providing City-owned land for social housing. Private developers have also greatly benefited from some of these tools. City policy should be fine-tuned so that more affordable or below-market units are required when private developers access benefits such as reduced parking requirements or density bonuses. Financial benefits such as tax incentives and grants should be restricted to social housing providers. City staff expertise should be dedicated to provide increased technical assistance to social housing providers to successfully plan, develop, and deliver new housing.

Building on the success of HAF and RHI, the City should establish a program funded through its own revenues and restricted to social housing, Indigenous housing, and RGI unit development, providing predevelopment funding and grants to cover development fees. Following the example of Calgary, the City should include office or non-residential conversions to social or Indigenous rental housing within the program.

Protecting affordable rental housing

In addition to supporting the creation of new social housing, the City must prevent the loss of existing lower-rent units. Between 2011 and 2021, we lost 24,095 units renting under \$750/month; most through rent increases.⁸ In a recent study, ninety-five per cent of Winnipeg condominiums that were not purpose-built as condominiums had been converted from rental housing, contributing to a loss of 10,684 rental units.⁹ Ninety-four rooming houses and 367 rental apartments were lost to demolition between 2011 and 2025.¹⁰ Vacant properties in the City's registry have grown from 543 in 2021, to 783 in the fall of 2025.¹¹ Many of these homes soon become uninhabitable, decreasing neighbourhood safety.

The City should develop and fund a permanent program to identify and support the acquisition and rehabilitation of multi-unit rental housing for non-market social housing, Indigenous housing providers, housing co-ops, and community land trusts, building on and improving the one-time Vacant Building Grant in line with Toronto's successful \$20 million Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition Program. Winnipeg's lower property-value market, and large number of distressed properties would allow for a smaller investment to realize significant gains in non-market units, and prevent the loss of rental housing through disrepair and demolition.

The City should also devote increased resources to community-designed housing initiatives, including protecting existing housing, by doubling the Housing Rehabilitation Investment Reserve, which supports the repair of approximately 150 units annually in at-need neighbourhoods and increasing the proportion of funding dedication to Indigenous housing providers from twenty per cent to at least thirty per cent.¹² Landlord recipients should be required not to raise rents above the provincial rent guideline.

The City should use its bylaw powers to address the loss of low-rent housing by implementing a 'No Net Loss' rental replacement bylaw, such as the one in Toronto, which requires a developer to replace the same number of units and at similar rents when they demolish or convert a rental property.¹³ The City should also introduce bylaws to protect tenants from being evicted when a landlord seeks to renovate a unit like those existing in New Westminster,¹⁴ Hamilton,¹⁵ and Toronto.¹⁶ While introducing new bylaws are a no-cost measure, enforcing such policies requires dedicated staff.

The City should also help keep rental homes safe and habitable through enforcement of the Neighbourhood Liveability bylaw through proactive inspections of rental housing. Similar programs, like RentSafeTO in Toronto, regularly audit multi-residential rental housing, quickly addressing disrepair.¹⁷ Inspections could also be used to identify potential properties for the acquisition fund program, to prevent units becoming vacant through disrepair or landlord neglect.

Actions

- **The AMB will** hire two new full-time staff to bring total Housing Division staff to ten FTE (\$200,000). This will increase the capacity of

the City to plan, support, and deliver new social housing as well as protect existing rental housing.

- **The AMB will** preserve low-rent housing and expand social housing by creating a fund to support the acquisition of existing at-risk or recently vacant rental housing by social and Indigenous housing, which is deeply affordable (\$10 million).
- **The AMB will** fund grants to support the creation of new non-market, rent-geared-to-income units and Indigenous housing (\$2 million).
- **The AMB will** support community-designed housing initiatives and preserve affordable and lower-rent housing by doubling funding for the Housing Rehabilitation and Investment Reserve, including a dedicated stream of rehabilitation grants for Indigenous and rental housing in Neighbourhood Renewal Zones, to support the rehabilitation of at least 300 housing units, at least two-thirds which should be rental, annually (\$2.5 million).
- **The AMB will** protect and maintain our rental housing by hiring 3.5 FTE to implement a proactive rental housing and vacant property inspection program to prevent disrepair or loss of housing through demolition, identify at-risk properties, and identify potential sites for acquisition (\$350,000).

Notes

- 1 The Canadian Real Estate Association. *National Price Map*. <https://www.crea.ca/housing-market-stats/canadian-housing-market-stats/national-price-map/>
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- 3 City of Winnipeg. *2025 Housing Needs Assessment*. <https://www.winnipeg.ca/media/6267>
- 4 City of Winnipeg. *Housing Accelerator Fund*. <https://www.winnipeg.ca/building-development/housing/housing-accelerator-fund>
- 5 For details of the Vacant Buildings Grant see: <https://www.winnipeg.ca/building-development/housing/housing-accelerator-fund/vacant-building-grant>.
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- 8 Pomeroy, Steve. "Updating analysis on erosion of lower rent stock from 2021 census." *Canadian Housing Evidence Collaborative*. October 2022. <https://chec-ccrl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Updated-Analysis-on-Housing-Erosion-from-2021-Census-Steve-Pomeroy.pdf>
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- 10 City of Winnipeg. *2025 Housing Needs Assessment*, p.170.
- 11 City of Winnipeg. *2025 Housing Needs Assessment*, p.177.
- 12 City of Winnipeg. *2026 Adopted Budget: Operating, Reserves, and Capital*, p.184.
- 13 City of Toronto. *Demolition and Replacement of Rental Housing*. July 2025. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/972b-official-plan-guidelines-rental-replacement-handbook.pdf>
- 14 Crawford, Tiffany. "New Westminster Passes Renoviction Bylaw." *Vancouver Sun*, Feb. 5, 2019. <https://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/new-westminster-passes-renoviction-bylaw>
- 15 City of Hamilton. *Renovation License and Relocation Bylaw*. <https://www.hamilton.ca/build-invest-grow/starting-small-business/business-licences/renovation-licence-and-relocation-by>
- 16 City of Toronto. *Rental Renovation License Bylaw*. <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/permits-licences-bylaws/renovictions-bylaw-development/>
- 17 City of Toronto. RentSafetTO for Tenants. <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/housing-shelter/rental-housing-rights-information/housing-property-standards/apartment-building-standards/rentsafeto-for-tenants/>

Indigenous relations

Indigenous Peoples in Winnipeg continue to live, govern, and relate through systems of law, responsibility, and kinship that existed long before the City of Winnipeg itself. These systems are not symbolic; they are lived, practiced, and carried forward through families, communities, and Nations every day. Within Indigenous governance, responsibility is foundational: to protect the people, to speak truth, and to hold systems accountable when they fail to uphold their obligations.

This chapter is written with that responsibility in mind and reflects lived experience alongside community-informed knowledge gathered through interviews with Indigenous community members, service providers, and leaders. It also reflects direct feedback from community voices who continue to assert that Indigenous participation must not be selective, symbolic, or occasional; it must be continuous, accountable, and rooted in relationships.

Winnipeg has one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in Canada. This reality reflects both the strength and resilience of Indigenous communities, as well as the ongoing impacts of colonial policies that have displaced people from their lands into urban centers. The City of Winnipeg, therefore, holds a direct responsibility in shaping the conditions Indigenous peoples experience daily. Municipal decisions, particularly those related to housing, policing, infrastructure, community investment, environmental planning, and economic development, either reinforce inequities or contribute to meaningful change.



Exterior of Wii Chiiwaakanak / Alanna Yuen

From symbolic reconciliation to structural change

This chapter was written based on interviews with Indigenous community leaders in Winnipeg. Findings from community interviews consistently indicate that, while the City of Winnipeg has taken visible steps toward reconciliation, a persistent gap remains between symbolic action and structural change. Initiatives such as land acknowledgements, commemorative events, renaming efforts, and advisory tables signal awareness, but they have not consistently translated into measurable improvements in the daily realities of Indigenous peoples. These actions, while important, cannot substitute for structural transformation.

Indigenous peoples remain significantly overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness and continue to face disproportionate rates of poverty, food insecurity, and involvement in the justice systems. These outcomes are not incidental; they are directly connected to policy decisions, funding priorities, and governance structures that have yet to shift meaningfully. Reconciliation, in this context, is a structural obligation. It must be reflected in municipal priorities, budget allocations, and measurable outcomes. When reconciliation remains symbolic, it actively

reinforces the inequities it claims to address. The absence of structural change is not neutral; it perpetuates harm.

To address this, the City should establish mandatory reporting, including a Reconciliation Impact Framework across all municipal departments, and require that all budget decisions demonstrate measurable impacts on Indigenous peoples, supported by annual public reporting and accountability benchmarks.

Interconnected systems of inequity: Housing, safety, and well-being

The challenges identified are not isolated issues but interconnected systems of inequity reinforced through municipal policy and practice. Housing is a foundational determinant of well-being. The absence of safe, stable housing increases vulnerability to violence, health challenges, and system involvement. For Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, this vulnerability is intensified within the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The City's reliance on enforcement-based approaches to safety has not reduced the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in policing systems. When safety is defined primarily through enforcement, it overlooks the underlying conditions that produce harm, poverty, trauma, and lack of access to stable housing and supports. Community perspectives emphasize that safety must be understood more broadly. True safety includes access to housing, culturally grounded supports, community connection, prevention-based services, family strengthening, and culturally safe health and wellness supports.

Food insecurity reflects these same interconnected patterns. In many Winnipeg neighbourhoods, particularly in the North End, access to affordable and culturally appropriate food remains limited. Addressing this requires coordinated, long-term solutions, including local food initiatives, urban agriculture, and land-based practices. These realities are interconnected: housing instability intensifies poverty, poverty restricts food access, and both increase exposure to policing and system involvement. A systems-based approach is required: one that prioritizes prevention, long-term investment, and community well-being rather than reactive, short-term responses.

The City must act on its responsibilities to MMIWGTS+ in every department, including waste collection. Following recommendations

from a search feasibility study, the Manitoba government announced it is seeking to install GPS and enhanced video surveillance on garbage trucks and at landfill entrances/exits.¹

Investing in Indigenous-led solutions

Interviews consistently highlight that effective solutions already exist within Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led housing initiatives, community safety models, cultural programming, employment pathways, family support systems, and land-based approaches are producing meaningful outcomes. However, these initiatives remain underfunded, short-term, and constrained by restrictive funding structures.

Land-based programming was identified as essential. These programs support identity, healing, youth engagement, employment readiness, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Despite their demonstrated impact, they are often treated as secondary rather than core infrastructure within municipal funding frameworks.

Indigenous-led housing models integrate cultural safety, community governance, and wraparound supports, addressing broader determinants of well-being beyond shelter alone. These models demonstrate that culturally grounded approaches produce stronger, more sustainable outcomes.

This requires a shift from short-term project funding toward sustained, multi-year investments that recognize Indigenous-led initiatives as core municipal infrastructure. This includes establishing dedicated funding streams, reallocating portions of existing municipal budgets toward prevention-based approaches, and ensuring that Indigenous-led organizations have the stability required to plan, grow, and deliver long-term outcomes. The AMB commits to allocate one per cent of the City's operating budget, totalling \$14.9 million, to support Indigenous-led organizations through a new, dedicated, and multi-year Indigenous Community Grants Fund. This works to ensure the vital contributions of Indigenous-led organizations are recognized and sustained.

Budget decisions must explicitly align with Indigenous priorities identified at the community level, including housing, employment, family strengthening, and health and wellness. Without this alignment, investments risk being fragmented, ineffective, or disconnected from lived realities. Funding must also support land-based education,

cultural revitalization, and youth programming as essential, not optional, components of community well-being.

Indigenous-led governance and accountability

A consistent theme across interviews is the need to move beyond consultation toward Indigenous-led governance and decision-making authority. Current engagement processes often position Indigenous communities as stakeholders rather than rights holders. Indigenous voices are still too often brought in after decisions have already been shaped. This cannot continue. Participation must be ongoing and present at every stage of decision-making, including budget development, policy design, implementation, and evaluation. This includes actively seeking community feedback prior to publication and ensuring that Indigenous voices are accurately and respectfully reflected.

Reconciliation requires a redistribution of power. This includes embedding Indigenous leadership within municipal structures, establishing formalized roles in decision-making processes, and ensuring Indigenous authority is reflected not only in consultation but in final decisions. The City of Winnipeg must also strengthen partnerships with Indigenous leadership across sectors, including housing, health, education, and environmental planning. Indigenous participation must be embedded in climate action strategies, green space development, and land-use planning to ensure that decisions reflect Indigenous knowledge systems and relationships to land.

Accountability remains a significant gap. While commitments have been made, there is limited transparency regarding how Indigenous advisory input shapes policy or how outcomes are measured. The City of Winnipeg must report on its work with Indigenous peoples in a clear and public way. This must include the Indigenous Reconciliation Accountability Framework with annual public reporting tied directly to budget allocations, clear, publicly reported benchmarks for progress, a public dashboard, measurable outcomes linked to Indigenous priorities, and mechanisms for Indigenous-led oversight and evaluation. Accountability must also include consequences. Where commitments are not met, there must be clear processes to identify gaps, respond to failures, and realign actions with stated priorities. Without this, accountability remains symbolic rather than operational.

From commitment to implementation

The path forward is not uncertain. Indigenous communities have consistently identified what is needed: stable housing, community-based approaches to safety, equitable access to food and services, employment opportunities, family strengthening, and sustained investment in cultural and land-based programming. These solutions already exist. What remains is implementation. Reconciliation is not a performance. It is not a statement, a moment, or a role to step into when the room is watching. It is a responsibility. It is a relationship. It is how decisions are made when no one is watching.

A continued failure to act in alignment with these responsibilities will not maintain the status quo; it will deepen inequities, widen gaps in outcomes, and further erode trust between Indigenous communities and municipal systems. The cost of inaction is already visible. The responsibility now is to interrupt that pattern through decisions that are intentional, accountable, and sustained over time. Indigenous knowledge systems recognize accountability through action. Authenticity is not determined by what is said, but by how responsibility is carried: consistently, over time, and in ways that are visible in the lived realities of communities.

Actions

- **The AMB will** establish an arms-length Indigenous Reconciliation Accountability Framework and advisory body. This will include three FTE staff to establish and manage the framework alongside funding for an Indigenous-led Advisory Council: \$400,000.
- **The AMB will** provide funding for annual public reporting on reconciliation framework via a public event and feast: \$20,000.
- **The AMB will** fund Indigenous-led housing development. The Housing Chapter outlines a range of funds, totalling \$14.5 million per year, dedicated to funding the creation of indigenous, social, and non-profit housing across Winnipeg.
- **The AMB will** direct resources toward Indigenous-led outreach, crisis response, and harm reduction (specific allocations made in Safety chapter).

- **The AMB will** fund the implementation of monitoring tools in municipal waste systems (GPS tracking, cameras, response protocols) to enhance safety and accountability related to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, starting by modifying waste disposal contracts to have a pilot on 20 trucks in higher-risk areas. Funding will include \$40,000 in initial capital (cameras, software) and \$40,000 for operating costs.
- **The AMB will** develop an Indigenous Urban Food Security Initiative supporting community-led food systems, urban agriculture, and culturally appropriate food access: \$1 million for four sites via Indigenous-led organizations.
- **The AMB will** fund a multi-year dedicated Indigenous Community Grants Fund for stable operational funding for Indigenous-led organizations at \$14.9 million per year.
- **The AMB will** establish an Indigenous Land-Based Education and Green Space Fund supporting Elders, Knowledge Keepers, transportation, and programming with \$1 million per year with Indigenous-led organizations.

Notes

¹ Sanders, Carol. (2024). "Province eyes GPS tracking of garbage trucks in wake of slayings." *Winnipeg Free Press*. September 4, 2024. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/breakingnews/2024/09/04/province-eyes-gps-tracking-of-garbage-trucks>

Library services

Winnipeg Public Library (WPL) branches are not only places to borrow books; they are welcoming spaces that provide free access to information, technology, education, and social connection. Libraries reflect the communities they serve and function as connectors, community builders, and hubs of democratic life.

WPL consistently outperforms most other municipal services in public satisfaction. According to the City of Winnipeg's 2025 Resident Satisfaction Survey, 91 per cent of respondents reported satisfaction with library services, an eight-point increase from the previous year. This is notable given that overall satisfaction with city services declined to 72 per cent, the lowest level in five years.¹

Despite this strong public support, libraries receive a remarkably small share of municipal funding. In the 2025 City budget, library services accounted for just 0.03 per cent of a property tax dollar.² Winnipeg has the second-lowest operating cost per dollar among comparable cities, according to Winnipeg's own budget research: \$40.90 per capita, compared to \$42.70 for Calgary and \$49.60 for Hamilton.³

Winnipeg's libraries have become more popular places to visit. Annual attendance across Winnipeg's library system has increased 28.3 per cent since 2022 from 1.67 million visits to 2.15 million visits. Over the same period, the number of materials distributed increased by 18.9 per cent.⁴ This disconnect between public value and public investment limits WPL's ability to respond to growing demand, expand access, and ensure safe working and learning environments.



Winnipeg public library / Alanna Yuen

Staffing, safety, and the limits of a security-first approach

Libraries are increasingly expected to respond to social vulnerability. WPL is notable for both its safety challenges and its innovative responses. Increased staffing — particularly staff trained in de-escalation, trauma-informed practice, and harm reduction — improves safety outcomes for both patrons and workers. By contrast, increased reliance on police or private security has not been shown to improve safety and may instead create exclusionary environments.⁵

Safety remains a concern at the Millennium Library. While it is positive that the City has contracted for community safety ambassadors at Winnipeg Libraries, attendance specifically at the downtown library has declined significantly.⁶ At the same time, planned physical improvements to improve safety, including to the lobby are in process but are yet to be completed. Design-based safety measures, including lower shelving and clearer visibility, are well-documented best practices and should be prioritized over punitive approaches.

A new library is needed in Garden City, but existing libraries like Westwood and Fort Garry also need renovations.

An increase in staffing hours would ensure that libraries are open every Saturday all year long. A 2023 major review of Winnipeg library services finds the city needs to hire 12 more full-time positions over the next four years to keep libraries open an average of 250 more hours per year, including Saturdays all summer long. This will cost the city \$3 million in 2026 and would go toward hiring more staff, increasing operating hours, and improving collections, programming and services.⁷

Governance gaps

Winnipeg Public Library is the only large urban library system in Canada without a governance board. Currently the Winnipeg Public Libraries board lacks authority over policy, budgeting, and strategic direction. This limits WPL's ability to advocate for itself, plan long-term expansions, and respond flexibly to emerging community needs.

Other cities have direct governance. Regina Public Library is governed by a board of directors that sets the library's plan and budget.⁸ Hamilton Public Library's board exercises authority over strategy, financial stewardship and advocacy.⁹

Transforming the Winnipeg Public Library Board into a governance board in Winnipeg would give the WPL board authority to govern the library's affairs.

The closure of Community Connections

The closure of the Community Connections space at Millennium Library illustrates the consequences of failing to invest in proactive, community-based approaches. Opened in April 2022 through collaboration with Indigenous leadership and community organizations, Community Connections provided crisis support, referrals, and de-escalation services without additional City funding.¹⁰ After receiving one year of City funding, the program was closed despite strong performance outcomes.

Following the closure, front-line service desks reported significant increases in complex service requests. One department saw customer queries increase from 1,357 in the second quarter of 2024 to 6,469 in

the same period in 2025. Data shows that approximately 76 per cent of interactions involving Community Safety Hosts reduced incident severity and reduced calls to emergency services.¹¹

The Manitoba Library Association has noted that closing Community Connections runs counter to the City's own safety audit,¹² as well as commitments outlined in the OurWinnipeg 2045 Plan and the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy. Removing preventative supports has not reduced demand; instead displacing it onto already overburdened front-line staff.

Community members wrote about the problems with shuttering the Community Connections space and the cut that paid for one librarian, one dedicated social worker, and some part-time library assistants.¹³ It was replaced in 2024 with a service of only 20 hours per week as a joint effort of the province and city.¹⁴ More supports and coverage is needed for all the hours the Millenium Library is open.

Collections

Contributing to information equity by providing access to a wide range of materials across formats is at the core of public library service. Books in other languages are not catalogued in WPL, but this would ensure these collections are accessible/findable and could help with Indigenous language learning and preservation. Cataloging would require professional staffing and staffing hours to accomplish.

An increase of 10 per cent in the materials budget would help bring WPL closer to being able to serve the needs of a city Winnipeg's size.

Access, outreach, and the library as a third space

Libraries are a smart public investment. For every \$1 invested in Canada's urban libraries, \$6 is generated in community economic impact.¹⁵ However, reduced hours, limited outreach staffing, and inadequate collections all restrict who can benefit from library services. Winnipeg Public Library employs only four outreach staff for the entire system, limiting its ability to reach underserved communities.

From the perspective of social capital theory, libraries actively build the relationships and networks that support individual well-being and

democratic participation. They are not peripheral services; they are foundational to a healthy, inclusive city.¹⁶

Public libraries function as vital “third places,” shared, non-commercial spaces outside of home, school and work where people can gather, interact, and build social connections.¹⁷ Declining access to social infrastructure contributes to social isolation and alienation. By contrast, libraries create accessible spaces for connection across differences, helping to strengthen the social bonds that support healthy, resilient communities.

As trusted public institutions, libraries are also uniquely positioned to lead public education efforts about information literacy, democratic values, and the role of shared civic spaces. A coordinated public-facing campaign that highlights what libraries offer can help counter the misconception that libraries are obsolete in the digital age.

Libraries can engage the public by being transparent about how collections are curated and cared for. A public campaign that frames libraries as essential civic infrastructure — spaces that connect people, reduce isolation, and foster shared understanding — would reinforce their role as cornerstones of democratic life and help ensure they are valued accordingly in municipal decision-making.

Actions

- **The AMB will** restore and permanently fund a Community Connections-style program at Millennium Library, including funding for additional social workers, community crisis workers, and outreach staff. \$300,000 per year
- **The AMB will** increase front-line library staffing across the system to improve safety, reduce burnout, and ensure equitable access to services, and ensure all libraries are open on Saturdays year-round. 12 FTEs at \$3,000,000 per year
- **The AMB will** adequately fund the library collections fund, increase Library materials spending and Indigenous languages resources: \$350,000 per year
- **The AMB will** transform the Winnipeg Public Library Board into a Governance Board for Winnipeg Public Library, bringing Winnipeg in

line with governance models used in other major Canadian cities. No cost

- **The AMB will** launch a public education campaign highlighting the value of public libraries, countering misinformation and reinforcing libraries as core public infrastructure: \$250,000

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Newcomer inclusion

Winnipeg's total population has grown by over 71,000 people since 2021, and this expansion is primarily a result of permanent and non-permanent immigration to the city.¹ The most recent official demographics also show that a significant portion of Winnipeg's population is made up of newcomers, as they constitute 27.3 per cent of the city's inhabitants.² Indeed, there is widespread acknowledgment that the process of relocating and forming a community in a novel environment is taxing. Due to existing awareness of this difficulty, in February 2020 the City adopted the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy that aimed to make Winnipeg a more welcoming home for newcomers. The policy recognized that immigrants and refugees have distinct needs and aimed to improve access to City services while promoting public education on human rights, equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that the policy achieves its objective.

The policy's aims center around tackling issues that are unique to newcomer communities. This primarily includes concerns regarding limited access to City resources, the development of education initiatives to promote intercommunal understanding and relationships, and planning reliable consultations with newcomer youth, ethnocultural leaders, and various other stakeholders to facilitate knowledge-building and prioritize their contributions. Through these processes, the core and long-term focus of the policy is to guarantee that the City is welcoming and provides timely and necessary supports for newcomers; that issues of racism, discrimination, and inequity are confronted in all institutions; to improve resource availability and accessibility; and to foster a labour force that illustrates the diverse characteristics of the City's population. The other



An outdoor soccer game in Winnipeg / Alanna Yuen

main commitment within the policy, and arguably the most important, is the process for active implementation. This refers to the strategy for rolling out the policy, as well as the administration of funds to address any required costs.

The Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy was approved without dedicated, sustainable funding for its implementation. Despite ongoing advocacy efforts by Immigration Partnership Winnipeg (IPW) and other settlement organizations since the policy's approval, no implementation of funding has been allocated. Consequently, the City has been constrained in its ability to advance the meaningful, systemic changes necessary for newcomers to fully participate in and contribute to Winnipeg's social, civic, and economic life. Without the necessary resources to implement the policy, little to none of its outlined goals can be realized.

Various municipalities across the country have developed and launched policies and initiatives directed at prioritizing the inclusion of newcomers in their respective regions. For instance, the City of Kingston implemented a Workplace Inclusion Charter in partnership with the KEYS Job Centre.³ Its first phase, which debuted in 2019, focused explicitly on newcomers and was completed in 2020. Its purpose was to facilitate

inclusive work environments, and it did so by linking various organizations and employment entities with newcomer communities to identify concerns, challenges, and potential opportunities. This subsequently produced connections and relationships that translated into valuable social capital for newcomers in the labour force.⁴

The City of Edmonton established the Edmonton Immigration and Refugee Communities (EIRC) grant program specifically targeted at prioritizing the inclusion and integration of newcomers into the social, political, and economic fabric of the City.⁵ It recognizes the systemic and intersectional barriers that newcomers face when they emigrate to Canada and provides the necessary resources to ensure the growth and development of these communities.

In 2020 the City of Cambridge, in collaboration with Kinbridge Community Association, established the Cambridge Newcomer Outreach program. The initiative is funded by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and prioritizes necessary supports for newcomer permanent residents, convention refugees, and Ukrainian Temporary Residents.⁶

In 2025, the Saint John Local Immigration Partnership (SJLIP), alongside Envision Saint John: The Regional Growth Agency, put forth a newcomer focused strategy titled “Pathways to Belonging.” The strategy emphasizes a combined approach from all City sectors to build a welcoming, inclusive, and economically resilient community. It is also a development upon prior strategies, such as the ‘Succeed and Stay’ plan from 2022.⁷

The City of Winnipeg’s current programming and spending disincentivizes forward movement on policies and initiatives that center around the improvement of newcomer inclusion and equity across varying sectors of the economy. This means that immigrants and refugees entering Winnipeg to start their lives in a new environment may encounter preventable barriers which could impede their wellbeing and their integration into the City’s community landscape. This is a disservice both to newcomers, who must endure various obstacles that make settlement more difficult, and to other members of the Winnipeg population who may be limited in their ability to learn alongside newcomers through the education objectives covered in the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy.

We urge the City of Winnipeg to prioritize and fund the recommendations outlined in the City’s own third phase of the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy report. These recommendations are

included in the policy's following strategic priorities: 1) A welcoming city, 2) A city without racism, and 3) Equitable and accessible services.

A funded and coordinated approach between municipal departments and settlement agencies would enable the City to move beyond aspirational commitments and translate the vision of the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy into tangible, measurable, and lasting outcomes.

If the City of Winnipeg is committed to becoming a truly welcoming and inclusive city, its policy commitments must be supported with the resources necessary to implement them. Meaningful inclusion requires sustained investment, and the upcoming budget presents a critical opportunity to demonstrate that commitment.

- **The AMB will** hire a contract-based Funding Development Consultant to support, in collaboration with Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, the implementation of the Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy by identifying, securing, and managing external sustainable sources. Cost: \$115,000
- **The AMB will** incorporate programming in the Indigenous Relations Division to coordinate bridge-building events between Indigenous and newcomer communities. Cost: \$80,000
- **The AMB will** incorporate funding for a newcomer youth employment strategy under the community development division. Cost: \$100,000
- **The AMB will** support the Equity Office and settlement agencies to develop an anti-racism and anti-oppression policy, with funding used for both staff time and community consultations. Cost: \$100,000
- **The AMB will** contribute funding for a welcome fair where newcomers are celebrated and have the opportunity to learn about available resources. Cost: \$50,000

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Organic waste

Organic waste, such as food scraps, yard trimmings, and soiled paper products, accounts for roughly 40 per cent of the residential waste stream in Winnipeg.¹ Under the City's proposed curbside organics collection program, service would be focused solely on single-family homes, leaving a large proportion of residents in multi-family dwellings, such as apartments and condominiums, with organic waste that is uncollected and unaccounted for. By not serving these households, the City endures avoidable economic and social costs. Edmonton's decision to expand curbside organics collection to include apartments and condominiums provides a strong model for Winnipeg to follow, showing that comprehensive, citywide programs can and should overcome logistical and financial barriers. Ultimately, expanding organics collection to all residents reduces climate inequities and those living in multi-family units cannot and should not be left out.

Limited scope, limited impact

Winnipeg's waste diversion efforts have long lagged behind those of other major Canadian cities. When the City eventually launches its curbside organics collection program, residents of multi-family dwellings are currently not planned to be serviced. In 2021, Winnipeg had 330,325 occupied private dwellings, of which 60 per cent were single-detached houses.² This means that as many as 40 per cent of households may fall outside this category, potentially representing a significant portion that could be missed by single family-focused initiatives. Without an inclusive



Compost Winnipeg bins at Corydon and Pembina / Alanna Yuen

organics collection program, the City will never reach its 50 per cent waste diversion goal as set out in its council-approved Comprehensive Integrated Waste Management Strategy (CIWMS).³ Restricted by the City's curbside organics program, these households will have fewer alternatives for diverting large amounts of compostable waste from landfills. This narrow scope leaves out a substantial portion of the City's population and risks undermining waste diversion efforts as well as the program's overall success. Furthermore, the limited scope weakens the credibility of the City's ability to demonstrate meaningful progress toward effective waste management and reduction. Ultimately, the proposed organics collection program will have limited impact and misses an opportunity to establish composting as a standard household practice across Winnipeg.

Environmental and social costs

When organic waste decomposes in landfills, it releases the greenhouse gas methane. Averaged over 100 years, methane is 34 times more potent than carbon dioxide.⁴ By excluding select households from curbside collection, the City will endure preventable environmental costs through increases in emissions, leachate, and landfill expansion. Every unit of compostable material that is diverted represents not just a reduction in waste volume, but a tangible step toward climate mitigation. By limiting organics collection to single-family dwellings, the City is effectively discouraging renters and low-income individuals who wish to make an environmental impact, but are unlikely to be able to access private compost services. While property managers for apartments and condominium boards certainly have the ability to establish their own independent composting programs for their residents, these self-led initiatives are typically uncommon due to barriers such as cost, limited space, lack of signage, lack of infrastructure, lack of interest, and so on. Currently, multi-family dwellings in the City are reported to divert only 14 per cent of their total waste.⁵ This concerning low rate highlights the urgency of prioritizing composting and organics collection in these settings. Overall, the absence of multi-family inclusion in the City's proposed organics collection program makes collaborative participation to tackle climate change virtually unattainable. An inclusive curbside organics program would reduce environmental and social costs while making composting a shared civic practice that is accessible to all Winnipeggers, regardless of income or housing status.

Lessons from Edmonton

The city of Edmonton provides a model for how Winnipeg can implement an effective organics collection program that services both single and multi-family dwellings. Since launching its Green Cart program in 2021, Edmonton has offered citywide organics pickup for nearly all single-family homes while providing online resources to ensure high participation rates.⁶ Edmonton continues to complete a phased rollout to multi-family dwellings that mandates a three-stream waste collection (garbage, recycling, and food scraps) at all buildings by the end of 2027.⁷ A phased approach allows the city of Edmonton to scale this promising initiative at a gradual pace. Edmonton's waste services operate as a self-funded

utility, meaning costs are covered through user fees rather than taxation. Monthly waste utility rates are \$38.95 for single-family dwellings and \$27.92 for multi-family dwellings, and are expected to decline in 2025 as efficiencies improve.⁸ Overall, Edmonton's curbside organics collection program demonstrates that a universal composting program is both logistically and financially feasible. The program has not only been environmentally transformative, but significantly reduces the volume of residential waste sent to landfills. With careful planning and phased implementation, the City of Winnipeg can achieve similar outcomes.

Actions

- **The AMB will** implement citywide organics collection to include multi-family dwellings, ensuring all 330,325 occupied private households have access to curbside composting. This program expands on the City's proposal for single-family rollout and reduces inequities in waste diversion opportunities, while supporting Winnipeg's waste diversion goals.
- **The AMB will** procure and deploy organics carts for multi-family units, estimating costs at \$79.87 per 35-gallon bin plus signage and labels for proper sorting.⁹ Bins will be distributed to shared collection areas in apartment and condominium buildings, ensuring that every resident can participate. Estimated expenditures for bins and signage totals \$600,000 based on municipal procurement data.
- **The AMB will** cover the scaled initial operational budget operating costs of collection and hauling for multi-family dwellings, totaling approximately \$2,000,000 annually for Winnipeg. This estimate is based on the \$5,000,000 estimated Annual Operating Costs for single family dwellings, pro-rated to 40 per cent to reflect the proportion of residents in multi-family dwellings.¹⁰ Winnipeg has not yet published specific cost estimates for multi-family organics collection. However, peer-city utility models that include multi-family organics (such as Edmonton's) provide a useful reference point for estimating incremental operating costs. Winnipeg's Solid Waste Utility Financial Plan is transitioning waste services to a fee-funded model for multi-unit properties; if organics collection is included in the plan, the costs will likely be recovered through utility fees once expanded organics programs are implemented.¹¹

- **The AMB will** fund public education and outreach for residents of multi-family dwellings to encourage participation and reduce contamination, at an estimated \$150,000 annually. Other peer cities such as Edmonton recognizes Waste Education and Outreach as a crucial area to fund for their organics collection plan.¹² Possible expenditures include designing and running waste minimization campaigns and funding community grants to local groups and businesses for composting projects. Supporting education and outreach is a key component to support effective multi-family participation and contamination reduction in expanding Winnipeg's organics program.

Notes

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Poverty reduction

Living in poverty affects every aspect of life. It limits where people can travel when they cannot afford gas or bus fare, and it can force families into impossible situations, like choosing between paying for housing and paying for food. Reducing poverty produces better outcomes in education, employment, and community safety. The City of Winnipeg has many policy tools to address poverty issues in the areas of safety for all, transit, housing, recreation, and more.

Reducing poverty is also a key dimension of reconciliation — the Truth and Reconciliation Commission considers poverty and homelessness as just some of the devastating legacies of residential schools, and Indigenous people continue to be overrepresented among those living in poverty.¹

Since other AMB chapters such as housing, safety, and Indigenous relations address poverty reduction policy, this poverty reduction chapter will focus on areas including living wage, education, social procurement, and community economic development.

Poverty reduction plan

After many community organizations advocated hard for a comprehensive poverty plan in Winnipeg, the City of Winnipeg responded by putting out its first poverty reduction strategy in 2021.² It was created with the help of frontline community members to tackle poverty at its root causes, but was released with no resources or new budgetary commitments. At the time of the four year budget cycle at the City of Winnipeg, Make Poverty



Manitoba Harvest building / Alanna Yuen

History Manitoba's City Working Group advanced several priorities for the City to include in its budget, in the areas of safety, transit, youth programming, and staff training in anti-oppression. Unfortunately, none of these were funded.³ The AMB will resource the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Plan to make a real dent in poverty in Winnipeg. Expenditures related to transit, recreation, and safety are listed in other chapters.

Living wage

All Winnipeggers should have access to an income that enables them to meet all their basic needs and to participate fully in their community and in the economy. The 2025 Winnipeg living wage, as calculated by CCPA Manitoba, is \$19.77 an hour.⁴ The living wage provides a wage sufficient to afford necessities such as food, shelter, childcare, and transportation, but it does not cover the costs of loans, debt payments, or saving for retirement. While the provincial government is responsible for setting the minimum wage and for setting Employment and Income Assistance rates,

the City can play a role in improving income and employment outcomes for Winnipeggers with its own hiring practices, ensuring a living wage for City of Winnipeg employees and contractors. CUPE Local 500 has negotiated wages for the lowest paid employees that are equivalent to a living wage, which is a step forward. However, all service providers and sub-contractors going forward should pay a living wage. The City of Winnipeg has previously estimated the cost of ensuring all contractors pay at least a living wage to be \$1.6 million.⁵

Buy local

The “elbows up” movement began in Canada in response to the threats of tariffs from the U.S. Local purchasing programs ensure that municipal tax dollars achieve a greater economic impact within a given city or region, recirculating within the local economy to promote employment and spending, rather than leaking out to other jurisdictions. Winnipeggers spoke out about this in spring 2026 when a long-standing local contract for food services at several golf courses was granted to an American corporate food contractor, Aramark, over the iconic local restaurant Salisbury House, which had held the contract for 16 years. The City stated this decision was in part a result of local preference prohibitions within North American free trade agreements.⁶

While there are limits in Canadian trade deals to buying local, they are not determinative. Winnipeg can establish a Buy Local policy and identify suppliers with intrinsic characteristics. For example, the city could give preference to unionized workplaces, co-operatives, or certified sustainable or fair-trade goods and services.

Social procurement

Social procurement describes a policy approach which uses municipal procurement of goods and services as a way to boost economic activity and social inclusion simultaneously. The simplest form of social procurement is to find opportunities to directly purchase from social enterprises who make socio-economic inclusion an essential component of their business model.

The City of Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement policy, for example, requires that on projects exceeding 45,000 square meters developers must hire at least 10 per cent of new employees from local, equity-denied groups, purchase 10 per cent of goods and services from social or equity-denied enterprises, and purchase 10 per cent of materials, goods and services locally.⁷ Vancouver's Community Benefits Agreement policy was established in 2018, however the policy was made voluntary in December 2025.

Social Procurement in Winnipeg can contribute to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Recommendation #92, supporting equitable access to jobs, training, and educational opportunities for Indigenous peoples, as well as meaningfully fulfilling the goals of the Indigenous Accord. The AMB will commit one staff person to develop social procurement policy at the City of Winnipeg.

Community grants program

The City of Winnipeg provides community grants to support non-profit organizations that make the city a better, safer, and more vibrant place to live. This funding is distributed through the City of Winnipeg Community and Neighbourhood Grant and other targeted programs to directly address four main community goals.⁸ The stated goals include wellbeing, recreation, environmental sustainability, and promoting arts and culture.

Despite the importance of these goals, the City's Community Grants program has been the subject of austerity measures. The City of Winnipeg made a 10 per cent cut to all community grants in 2020, and another proposed cut in 2024 was met with large protests outside of City Hall, which saved the funding from being cut. The community grant funding was restructured, and community groups that previously received annual grants now have to apply for funding each year. The operating grant is evaluated annually, which can be disruptive to longstanding programming that communities rely on. In 2025, in response to the needs of community-based organizations, the City of Winnipeg created a \$3 million three fund for youth programming and outreach. This funded some of the organizations who were cut with the aforementioned changes to the community grants program.

These programs play an important role in poverty reduction through prevention — increasing community safety, wellbeing, making communities more vibrant, and supporting economic stability. Community

groups are hopeful that city staff will engage with them and welcome a conversation about the impact that the programs funded by community grants can have.

It is essential that any changes to the community grants programs are done in meaningful consultation with community-based organizations leadership. This would ensure any changes enhance and support, and do not adversely affect the good work of these groups. The Indigenous Relations chapter explains how important Indigenous-led organizations are to the City of Winnipeg, and commits to funding a multi-year dedicated Indigenous Community Grants Fund for stable operational funding for Indigenous-led organizations.

Actions

- **The AMB will** allocate \$220,000 for 2 FTE staff to develop the next phase of the poverty reduction implementation plan.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$300,000 for training for City of Winnipeg employees on anti-racism and anti-oppression for all city workers, as well as training for first responders around non-violent crisis intervention, de-escalation, mental health first aid, trauma-informed care, and harm reduction.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$1.6 million to implement a living wage for all subcontractors at the City of Winnipeg.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$10,000 for training for relevant staff on how to establish a buy local policy in Winnipeg within trade rules.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$120,000—One FTE to develop social procurement policy at the City of Winnipeg.
- **The AMB will** allocate \$2,516,000—double funding to the existing community grants program to \$5 million per year, and make this multi-year funding.

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Public art

Introduction

Winnipeg is steeped in public art, with more than 600 murals adorning the buildings of our city. From historic murals and hand-painted ghost signs dating back to the 1930s to Synonym Art Consultation's more recent mural explosion via their ten-year Wall-to-Wall festival, there is a long tradition of free public art for the public good. Beyond Winnipeg's ubiquitous murals, the municipally-funded Winnipeg Arts Council (WAC) has been leading the implementation of major public art projects in Winnipeg since 2004. Public art in Winnipeg tells our stories, brings specificity and identity to our streets, and ultimately acts as a mirror for who we are and what we value.

Overview

Winnipeggers want to inhabit a livable city where we encounter beauty within our urban environment, including a lush tree canopy, green space, bike paths, and vibrant public art. As public art is a reflection of who we are and the history that precedes us, we engage with public art to challenge and educate us. A collaborative WITH ART project with artist Leah Decter and Peace Alliance Winnipeg raised awareness and engagement with members of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, from whom Winnipeg gets our water. Bloody Saturday by artists Bernie Miller and Noam Gonick is a permanent public art installation of a tipped street trolley on Main Street to commemorate Winnipeg's 1919 General Strike.



Natalie Mark's Chinatown banners / Alanna Yuen

More recently, new street-post banners have been installed in the Chinatown neighbourhood by artist Natalie Mark and in Central Park by artist Bîstyek, reflecting their cultural communities and particular histories with these neighbourhoods. All of these projects were conceptualized, supported, and implemented by WAC's Public Art Program. These spaces of cultural convening need to be strategically planned for through continued support of this work.

The City of Winnipeg's Complete Communities 2.0: An OurWinnipeg Direction Strategy document cites the importance of public art, stating that the City:

1. Promote Downtown as a priority location for showcasing performing arts and time-limited or temporary art exhibits and installations.
2. Integrate public art Downtown to create a sense of place.
3. Incorporate public art into Downtown projects and in public spaces.
4. Encourage public art, artistic features, and other streetscaping features at key gateways to Downtown and its districts.¹

In order for this vision to be realized, significant investment needs to be made. WAC manages the City of Winnipeg's Public Art Program, the funding for which has been decimated to zero. Since the adoption of a Public Art Policy in 2004, WAC received an annual grant of \$500,000 from 2004–2018, \$250,000 in 2019, \$325,000 in 2020, \$125,000 from 2021–2023 before being eliminated in the 2024 budget. WAC's website states: "the goal is to insert the work of artists into city life where ideas can be encountered on a daily basis. The program consists of: local, national and international commissions; artist-on-design team in infrastructure approaches; an Artist-in-Residence in City facilities; a community-based program entitled WITH ART; and various partnership endeavours."²

In 2024, the Executive Policy Committee (EPC) and City Council recommended the public service work with WAC to develop a program that would include public art in major capital projects. This recommendation advances what was proposed in the 2022 AMB, which is to implement a percent-for-art program.

Under the percent-for-art model, when the City undertakes a capital project, such as a bridge renovation or new firehouse, a percentage of that project's budget is reserved to create public art as part of the completed project. It could range from an outdoor or indoor sculpture, a mural, an imaginative display of lighting, an interactive educational display, or even a fountain or creative use of water. A percent-for-art model does not introduce a new tax or create a new expense line for the City. It allocates a small, fixed proportion of existing capital project budgets to ensure that public infrastructure incorporates artistic and civic value from the outset. Percent-for-art programs are already present across the country in Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and other Canadian cities.

In April 2025, after extensive consultation and work alongside WAC, the public service came back to the EPC with a proposal to include public art in all major capital projects (the percent-for-art model), and to do this using a multi-year pooled approach. Under a pooled percent-for-art model, all eligible investments include a specified percentage of the construction budget for public art. Instead of being tied to a specific project, funds are pooled. This allows for more strategic planning by arts professionals, rather than public art installations being dictated by where the next build is in Winnipeg. This means that all major capital projects will contribute to public arts funding.

The public service's 2025 recommendation³ was for a .25 per cent public art allocation, capped at a maximum contribution of \$250,000.

This is sorely below the provision of other jurisdictions, all of which have adopted one per cent public art allocations.⁴

The public service also recommended that WAC's Public Art Program Manager's salary and administrative costs be included in the annual operating budget of the Winnipeg Arts Council, effectively removing this budget line from the unpredictability that a pooled method brings.

WAC and City staff put forward these recommendations in April 2025. However, the motion was deferred by EPC without discussion or debate to the Strategic Priorities Action Planning process prior to the 2028–2031 budget process. This delays any action on public art until the 2028 City of Winnipeg budget. Public art continues to be unfunded in Winnipeg today.

Central to the value of public art is its universal accessibility, showcasing communities' cultural values and a sense of identity without the price tag of a ticket. Public art functions as a catalyst for civic engagement and urban vitality, inviting locals and tourists to reinvent urban life, making generic urban landscapes unique, increasing a sense of place with a distinctive character, and offering artists the opportunity to bring different ideas and disciplines together, advancing artistic practice. In the absence of public art, urban environments risk becoming interchangeable and devoid of local character.

Actions

- **The AMB will** allocate \$507,000 annually to restore funding for public art.
- **The AMB will** adopt a multi-year pooled percent-for-art model, adding one per cent with each new capital project to the pooled funding bank for public art projects, to be managed by the Winnipeg Arts Council.
- **The AMB will** include the salary and administrative expenses of the Public Art Program Manager under the annual operating budget of the Winnipeg Arts Council. This will be a \$108,000 addition to WAC's annual operating budget, increasing with inflation.

Notes

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Recreation

Recreation is often thought about as sport; however, a quick look at Winnipeg's Leisure Guide shows how vast programming can be, including arts and crafts, outdoor play, culture and spirituality, as well as sport, physical activity, and exercise. Recreation can be highly structured or less organized games, and these programs are often hosted in third places. Third places are neighbourhood spaces away from home or work that are easy to access and cultivate community connection.¹ Glover and Parry name recreation and leisure activities as the 'sphere of sociability,' meaning that, although we might be motivated to engage in recreation because of the activity, the social connections that arise out of such spaces are paramount; recreation is where we build and maintain supportive friendships and it is where community comes alive.²

In 2024, the Women's Age Lab in Toronto reported on the epidemic of loneliness, stating that one third of older adults feel lonely at least some of the time and that this negatively influences a variety of health outcomes measures. One of their recommendations includes a national strategy to address loneliness.³ Neighbourhood recreation that is hosted in third places is the antidote to loneliness and a facilitator of individual and community health. However, in 2018, the average condition of recreation and leisure centres, arenas, indoor and outdoor pools, was ranked at 'fair' with many amenities in poor condition. Many of these facilities were constructed prior to the 1972 amalgamation of 12 municipalities into the City of Winnipeg and have not received adequate funding to sustain operations and maintenance, even as use increases (e.g., the number of public swim visits to outdoor pools increased 29 per cent from 2014 to 2016).⁴



City of Winnipeg splash pad / Alanna Yuen

Winnipeg's recreation strategy emphasizes developing and maintaining facilities at a small and large scale, from neighbourhood (within 2km of home) to community (2km to 4km), regional (4km to 6km), and city-wide amenities. While regional and city-wide amenities are meant to serve their catchment area, a growing body of research shows a connection between low income and lack of access to recreation services⁵ and the Winnipeg Recreation Strategy acknowledges clear geographic and socioeconomic gaps in facility quality and access. To address this problem, the City of Winnipeg offers free public swims and has a Recreation Fee Assistance Program that includes facility passes (e.g., for pools, arenas, active living) and leisure guide activity credits.

However, there is much criticism about how assistance programs are distributed and accessed, including that community members are not aware of them⁶ and that, once found, applicants need to prove their poverty through processes that are stigmatizing.⁷ Further, a focus on reducing or eliminating program fees does not address other important constraints like transportation.⁸ For example, regional recreation complexes are more difficult to access for individuals and families who rely on transit, and new builds may not be a part of current routes.

Additionally, these larger multipurpose amenities may not facilitate community building or be as welcoming as nearby and walkable neighbourhood amenities, which act as third places.

Recent regional recreation facility development projects have overrun the budget, including South Winnipeg Recreation Campus (construction to begin in 2026, currently over budget by \$23 million and funded through debt)⁹ and the East of the Red RecPlex with current estimates over \$155 million to build (a Class 3 estimate for a 2028 build).¹⁰ These funding shortfalls burden the municipality and divert funds from needed neighbourhood amenity upgrades. As a result of this neglect, the City of Winnipeg decided to close neighbourhood outdoor pools (i.e., Norwood, 2019, Happyland, 2025). These outdoor pools, which could be open from May to September and had subsidized entry fees, were closed against substantial community outcry. Impacted communities were able to mobilize precisely because the pools acted as third places, connecting residents and cultivating friendships.

Recreation is made more accessible to community members who live on low income through, for example, the General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres (GCWCC), who rely on volunteers and offer free or low-cost programs at the community and neighbourhood level. Neighbourhood recreation amenities foster accessible and equitable services, social inclusion, and community connections. The Winnipeg Recreation Strategy¹¹ recommends an “equity-based planning approach prioritizing programs, tools, and resources that remove barriers to participation and achieve successful outcomes for all residents” and the AMB addresses this by focusing on smaller scale amenities.

Actions

- **The AMB will** re-fund recreation infrastructure to invest in Winnipeggers equitably. According to the 2021 Winnipeg Recreation Strategy, the City of Winnipeg’s recreation assets have a \$778 million total infrastructure deficit. Over the next ten years, this infrastructure deficit will be addressed at \$77.8 million per annum. Financed over 20 years at an interest rate of 5.5 per cent the annual cost of debt is \$4.1 million.
- **The AMB will** emphasize maintaining existing walkable neighbourhood recreation amenities (defined as community centres,

recreation and leisure centres, and outdoor pools), particularly in low-income communities. When amenities are decommissioned, they will be replaced. The Association of Physical Plant Administrators (APPA) guidelines for facility maintenance investment, which includes replacement reserves of between 3–4 per cent of current replacement value, at \$56 million per annum. Financed over 20 years at an interest rate of 5.5 per cent the annual cost of debt is \$2.95 million.

- **The AMB will** support volunteer development in community centres. This includes paid staff with a mandate to engage volunteers, as well as volunteer capacity building programs. A study of the 63 General Council of Winnipeg Community Centres is necessary to determine the volunteer engagement requirements in Winnipeg, as well as a comparative study of cities in Canada for their community centre governance and administration models. One full time programming coordinator for each community centre in high needs areas as identified in the General Council study, four staff at \$260,000 per annum.¹²
- **The AMB will** increase the capacity of neighbourhood associations and community groups to lead neighbourhood activities (e.g., walking/running/biking groups, community gardens and gardening clubs, walking or biking school buses). Edmonton's 'Neighbouring for Climate' program offers a toolkit that can act as a model for this initiative. One full time program leader for each community centre in high needs areas as identified in the General Council study, four staff at \$168,000 per annum.
- **The AMB will** introduce third party referral options for Fee Assistance Programs (FAPs) that will serve citizens who are living on low or no income. Third party referral responsibilities should be shared among Winnipeg nonprofit organizations and emergency shelters, school divisions, and mental health and health professionals. One full time programming coordinator to support nonprofit engagement at \$60,000 per annum.

Notes

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Safety

Winnipeg, like many cities in North America, has relied heavily on police agencies to provide public safety through methods of punishment, enforcement, and deterrence. At the same time, investments in services that address systemic inequalities, such as housing, transit, health, and recreation have not kept pace with a growing need, and in many cases have been pared back over the last three decades. This failure to address systemic inequities while relying heavily on punishment and enforcement does not create public safety, but instead can intensify trauma and damage the relationships that are the essential foundation of long-term transformation. By increasing resources for alternative community-based crisis supports and non-police emergency responses, as well as investing in addressing the roots of systemic inequality, we can build a model of public safety in Winnipeg that is trauma-informed, holistic, and focused on promoting health and human rights.

Diverting funds and re-defining safety

This budget begins by diverting 10 per cent of the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) budget (\$34 million) and reinvesting it in a holistic model of public safety that includes outreach, poverty reduction, housing, and harm reduction, among other areas. This is an overall small reduction for the WPS, leaving them with 23 per cent of the municipal budget, down from 28 per cent, but still well above the average of 15 per cent in comparable Canadian municipalities.¹



People hanging out in Central park / Alanna Yuen

Evidence continues to demonstrate that increases to police budgets have little effect on crime rates² and that “crime reduction as a goal does not necessarily have clear benefits to health and well-being.”³ Instead, public safety, crime reduction, and well-being are achieved by improving housing, education, employment, and reducing poverty,⁴ and by ensuring public space and public transportation are accessible.⁵ This involves investing in social housing and the preservation of low-income rental units, affordable transportation, strong recreation services for all Winnipeggers, meaningful harm reduction options, and mobile crisis medical response teams.

Furthermore, we can look beyond crime for other ways in which the City can ensure safety and well-being for residents. Systematic injustices continue to leave Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people targeted by violence and abandoned by the state.⁶ Both provincial and municipal environmental regulations are under-enforced leaving neighbourhoods contaminated with lead and other dangerous pollutants.⁷ Uneven enforcement of building codes leaves vacant buildings burning instead of providing critical housing.⁸ Pedestrians and cyclists are put in lethal situations which police intervention consistently makes worse.⁹

The existing system must start adopting decades of evidence-based recommendations that would directly prevent harm, violence, and death across the city.

Emergency response

A robust emergency response system is central to public safety, but police are not always the most appropriate responders. For example, wellbeing checks continue to be the most common event to which police are asked to respond,¹⁰ despite this consistently leading to criminalization, escalation, and even death for those in distress.¹¹ Police-led solutions like the WPS' Alternative Response to Citizens in Crisis (ARCC) program are insufficient because they still keep police, and police priorities, at the center of emergency response.¹² Instead, we can leverage the decades of community expertise in de-escalation, outreach, social work, and healthcare to implement a well funded civilian-first mobile crisis medical response team. Evidence from initiatives like San Francisco's Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT) show that these teams have had "widespread success in diverting individuals away from the criminal justice system ... [and providing] marginalized communities with access to culturally appropriate resources."¹³

Fund community-based outreach as a component of emergency services

As a June 2026 report to Mayor Gillingham's Office on 'Winnipeg's Community Crisis Response Model' notes, close to 10,000 annual calls to emergency services are related to "mental health challenges, substance use concerns, emotional distress, wellness related issues, and other non-emergent crises."¹⁴ Over the last decade, the number of emergency medical calls related to opioid overdose has increased thirteen-fold.¹⁵ Winnipeg Fire and Paramedic Service staff have repeatedly sounded the alarm over unsustainable workloads due to the volume of opioid related calls.¹⁶ These findings underline the need to fund a 'fourth pathway' of emergency response that directs calls to a robust, community-based set of outreach services.¹⁷

Outreach also 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, connect with culture and ceremony, and secure shelter or permanent housing.

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.

Community experts estimate that a six-fold expansion of outreach is required to meet the demand for services across Winnipeg's neighbourhoods and to create outreach teams with specializations in mental health, housing, harm reduction, and other areas. This would allow outreach to meet those in need, build relationships, and prepare people who are interested in moving into housing to do so. Although the Province can play a role in funding the expansion of outreach services, the urgent need for outreach means the City cannot afford long delays to get this program started.

Given that 80 per cent of the homeless population in Winnipeg is Indigenous, 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.

A human rights approach to encampments

The City of Winnipeg's current encampment protocol treats visible homelessness as a problem to be moved rather than a human rights crisis to be solved. 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.¹⁸

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 must work closely with the Province of Manitoba on permanent solutions: increasing the supply of 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.

Actions

- **The AMB will** reduce the WPS budget by 10 per cent to \$305 million. This would free \$34 million for a variety of evidence-informed measures preventing, reducing, and intervening in harm and violence, including the AMB's Five Point Action Plan on Winnipeg's Toxic Drugs and Homelessness Crisis.
- **The AMB will** invest \$16.3 million in housing, transportation, recreation, libraries, harm reduction, public spaces, and grassroots safety initiatives. Some investments will include:
 - Expand Winnipeg Transit's low-income bus pass system increasing the depth of subsidies from 50 per cent to 80 per cent (\$4.24 million)
 - Provide operational funding for Sunshine House's Mobile Overdose Prevention Site (\$300,000).
 - Provide operational funding for Amoowigamig to operate 24/7 or otherwise expand services (\$650,000).
 - Provide operational funding for community safety groups such as Mama Bear Clan (\$175,000).

- **The AMB will** implement a municipal mobile crisis medical response team independent of the police. This involves revising the ARCC program to align itself with models such as the San Francisco Street Crisis Response Team. This team will prioritize community leadership, Indigenous worldviews, and relational healthcare-based interventions (\$8 million).
- **The AMB will** fund a six-fold expansion of community-based outreach (from \$1.6 million to \$9.6 million) to unhoused people to meet the demand for services across Winnipeg's neighbourhoods. Outreach services will be considered and funded as a component of Emergency Services at the City of Winnipeg in partnership with non-profit organizations. (\$8 million).
- **The AMB will** fund 2 FTE to provide research and analysis on public safety initiatives in Winnipeg with a focus on understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the multitude of private, public, and volunteer sector organizations and co-create a public safety action plan with community. (\$210,000).
- **The AMB will fund** education workshops for City staff on a human rights approach to encampments and revised bylaw (\$10,000).

Notes

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Transit

Winnipeg is often referred to as a 'car city', reflecting the sprawling nature of the city's suburban neighbourhoods. While it is true that the majority of Winnipeggers commute via personal vehicles, a 2025 count shows that over 11 per cent commute to work on public transit, a share that has grown year on year since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Beyond commuting, Transit is an essential service that provides accessible, sustainable mobility to Winnipeggers.

In 2025 Winnipeg Transit embarked on a complete overhaul of its system, transforming its decades old route map into a new 'Primary Transit Network', a proposal laid out in the 2021 Winnipeg Transit Master Plan. This transformation has not exactly been a smooth one. The Winnipeg Transit Master Plan identified the need for complementary investments in staff and infrastructure to ensure a smooth rollout of the new network,² however the transformation was conducted with only the new primary network infrastructure funded over the coming five years.³ Many Winnipeggers have reported less frequent service, more overcrowding, and more pass-ups on busy routes.⁴ While the Primary Transit Network has created a new foundation for expanding reliable, frequent service and a more efficient spine and feeder system, core problems remain; the systemic inadequacy of transit infrastructure and underfunded service are painfully apparent. Additional work and funding is required to ensure frequency and reliability are improved, and to deal with long-standing issues such as a lack of payment options.

Both riders and drivers suffer when the Transit system fails to meet Winnipeggers' needs. To meet their needs for safety, service and convenience we must modernize an antiquated funding model and put those dollars to work. The perceived narrative of Winnipeg as a 'driver



Bus stop on Portage Ave. / Alanna Yuen

city' means there is chronic misalignment of municipal priorities and dismissal of transit. Winnipeg should see itself as a transit city, in identity and investment.

Overview

Investment in Winnipeg Transit provides an efficient means to achieve financial, environmental, and quality of life improvements for Winnipeggers by reducing traffic and providing affordable mobility. Proactive investments are required to ensure the system grows alongside the municipal population and provides a reliable, safe option for transportation.

Finding new revenue sources for transit

As a crucial service, funding must be adequate, consistent, and long term. The Primary Transit Network launch in June 2025 was delivered within the existing operating budget with no new operating funding attached. To make the new system work, new funding is required. Moving forward requires systematic and substantial investment to recover from decades of infrastructure deficits and service cuts.

The 2022 AMB called for the restoration of the 50/50 funding agreement between the Government of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg, and we reiterate this crucial need. By reducing the burden of spending on municipalities, the provincial government can ensure that transit has stable, long term funding that is not subject to the shocks of ridership fluctuations like the COVID-19 shutdown or other service disruptions.

The national report on transit funding, *End of the Line*, recommended municipalities implement vehicle registration fees and parking lot taxes to help fund public transportation.⁵ Montreal has successfully used surface parking levies of \$12/m² to promote the transformation of parking spaces into higher value, dense developments while funding public transit. For more information on the AMB 2026 parking space levy see Fiscal Chapter Part 2.

Vehicle registration fees provide another way to raise revenues for Transit. As outlined in the City Planning chapter, a \$60 addition to annual vehicle registration fees could raise an additional \$44 million in public transit funding. These fees could be further adjusted to the size and weight of the vehicle, advancing climate goals by scaling up fees for inefficient oversized trucks and SUVs as well as recognizing the additional wear and tear on roads by larger vehicles. The AMB calls on the City to work with the Government of Manitoba and Manitoba Public Insurance to develop a plan for additional Transit funding through returning to 50/50 funding, parking lot levies, and/or vehicle registration fees.

The Canada Public Transit Fund is a \$25 billion fund accessible to municipalities for transit infrastructure funding.⁶ However there is a deadline for completion of projects by March 31st 2030. As of August 2026, the City of Winnipeg has not applied for any funding from this Federal resource.

Transit system upgrades

The next phase of the Winnipeg Transit Master Plan outlines crucial improvements to the Transit system such as additional bus lanes, priority signals, and infrastructure upgrades that improve the daily working environment for drivers — allowing them to operate safely and efficiently. These same investments reduce stress and enhance safety for riders.

The expected cost of the next phase of investment is \$449 million, with the City of Winnipeg's share at one third (the others being the Province and Federal Government) costing \$149 million.⁷ These improvements are needed immediately to complement the new Primary Transit Network. Committing this money and financing it through debt means construction can move forward immediately.

In addition, investment is needed to bring the construction of the new Oak Point Garage back on track. The Oak Point Garage is needed to service modern buses and also transition to zero emission buses. The project was originally budgeted at \$200 million in 2019 but is now estimated at \$305M (in 2025 dollars) due to inflation and delays — a \$105 million difference.⁸ The City's share would be roughly \$35 million, with provincial and federal partners funding the remainder. These upgrades are required immediately to ensure that the garage can accommodate parking and maneuvering extended buses.

Furthermore, full funding of the North Garage (Oak Point) is essential not only to address immediate capacity constraints, but to ensure the long-term maintenance and longevity of Winnipeg Transit's fleet. Winnipeg Transit is currently purchasing, on average, roughly 20 new buses per year — well below the approximately 50 buses required each year to maintain a healthy, reliable fleet, and avoid excessive life-extension of aging vehicles. As a result, buses must remain in service longer, increasing maintenance requirements and the need for adequate shop space, lifts, and specialized equipment. According to Winnipeg Public Works Committee discussions and the North Garage update presented in April 2025, the Oak Point facility, as currently planned, lacks sufficient maintenance capacity to meet projected needs, with Transit already anticipating a garage expansion within five years of completion. This risk is compounded by the planned transition to zero-emission buses, which require additional downtime, specialized diagnostics, battery and electrical system maintenance, and on-site charging infrastructure. Building insufficient capacity now virtually guarantees higher future costs through accelerated wear, operational inefficiencies, and construction inflation. Investing fully and correctly at the outset avoids paying twice for

the same infrastructure and ensures the garage can support fleet renewal, electrification, and service reliability for decades rather than years.

Upgrades to Winnipeg Transit payment systems are also required to ensure it is easier to pay in more ways. To add fares on the current Peggo system, riders must line up in person at a Shoppers Drug Mart or limited transit kiosks, or have online access and a credit card. For many riders — particularly low-income residents, those with visual impairments, or limited digital literacy — these barriers make it difficult or impossible to pay. Upgrading to a Gold standard fare system would improve accessibility through multiple payment options (including credit and debit cards), online accounts, fare-capping, and reduced fare evasion. The estimated cost is \$14.4 million (versus \$10.5 million for the Silver option),⁹ with annual operating costs of \$2.6 million (vs \$2.1 million). The additional cost of \$3.9 million in capital and \$0.5 million in operating costs would draw more revenue every year through increased fare revenue and improved payment access.

Main Street is scheduled for rehabilitation between 2028 and 2031.¹⁰ We must fund the \$2.4 million functional design study for the Northern Rapid Transit Corridor (Main St. to Inkster) immediately instead of digging up a brand new street. This ensures the corridor is designed before the road is rebuilt, avoiding millions in future reconstruction costs and traffic disruption.

Reports of violence and harassment directed towards Winnipeg Transit drivers have continued to emerge in recent years. The installation of full shields of driver compartments on Winnipeg Transit buses would help ensure that drivers are safe on the job. A precise cost estimate for installing full body shields across the Winnipeg Transit fleet has not been produced by city staff, however a rough estimate of \$15 million was put forward by Transit's director of operations.¹¹ The City should immediately set aside \$15 million for the implementation of driver shields.

Beyond capital construction, sustained Transit operating funding is equally critical. The previously mentioned *End of the Line* report identified service reliability and frequency as the strongest predictors of ridership growth. Without stable operating dollars, infrastructure investments risk being underutilized or deferred through service reductions. Winnipeg's history of balancing transit budgets through service cuts during fiscal pressure has produced a self-reinforcing cycle: reduced service leads to lower ridership, which then justifies further cuts. Breaking this cycle requires treating transit operations as essential infrastructure, not as discretionary spending, to ensure service levels remain resilient during economic downturns and emergencies.

Finally, aligning transit funding with climate and growth objectives is no longer optional. The Winnipeg Transit Master Plan establishes mode shift as a core strategy for managing population growth without proportional increases in congestion, emissions, and road maintenance costs. Every dollar deferred today compounds future costs as infrastructure deficits widen and vehicle dependence deepens. Strategic, immediate investment — supported by diversified, progressive revenue tools — allows Winnipeg to meet its financial, environmental, and social obligations simultaneously. The question is no longer whether the City can afford to invest in transit, but whether it can afford not to.

Actions

- **The AMB will** allocate \$2.4 million to the Regional Street Renewal Program to fund the functional design of the Northern Rapid Transit Corridor, ensuring a “dig once” approach for the upcoming Main Street rehabilitation. Financed at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent over two years the annual debt servicing cost would be \$1.3 million.
- **The AMB will** immediately fully fund the Transit Master Plan to \$149 million by financing over 15 years.¹² The annual total cost of this debt at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent is \$10.5 million.
- **The AMB will** restore the Oak Point Garage construction to the original standard with an initial payment of \$14.4 million to get the project back on track and funding the remaining \$21.6 million through the Canada Public Transit Fund. Financed at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent over five years the annual debt servicing cost would be \$3.1 million.
- **The AMB will** upgrade the transit payment system from the Silver to the Gold standard to improve accessibility, convenience, and efficiency, and reduce fare evasion by spending an additional \$3.9 million in capital spending and \$0.5 million in annual costs.
- **The AMB will** fund the installation of full driver shields on Winnipeg Transit buses at a cost of \$15 million. Financed at an annual interest rate of 5.5 per cent over two years the annual debt servicing cost would be \$7.9 million.

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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.

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Water

When sewage flows from Winnipeg homes, schools, and businesses into Winnipeg rivers, Lake Winnipeg experiences the consequences in the form of toxic algae blooms that endanger the health of the lake and lake-dependent communities. Ten of those communities, all First Nations, have taken legal action against the municipal, provincial, and federal governments. While the First Nations seek financial compensation for losses due to pollution, they are primarily engaging the legal system in an attempt to protect Lake Winnipeg, or Weenipagamiksaguygun in Anishinaabemowin. Understanding Weenipagamiksaguygun as a living being with a spirit, and water as sacred, the First Nations consider it their duty to speak for the lake, and are undertaking their action on behalf of the lake as well as of themselves.¹

For far too long, municipal budgets have failed to account for the true cost of water and waste services, ignoring the high price paid by Indigenous communities forced to deal with the environmental consequences of the City's decisions. In the water chapter of the AMB, we focus on the need for Winnipeg to heed the call of First Nations to make clean water for all a top priority. We argue that this can and must be done in ways that ensure that the costs of clean water are borne by those who can best afford to do so.



The Red River from Taché Ave. / Alanna Yuen

Historical context

Since the completion of the Winnipeg Aqueduct in 1919, water has travelled 150km west from Shoal Lake, at the Manitoba-Ontario border, to the City of Winnipeg, supplying Winnipeg homes and businesses with a steady source of soft, clean water. Prior to accessing water from Shoal Lake, people living in Winnipeg procured water from private and public wells, from the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and by collecting rainwater.² Building the aqueduct cost the city an enormous amount: skeptics called the plan “implausibly expensive,” yet taxpayers repeatedly voted overwhelmingly in favour of the project, agreeing for the city to take on a debt of \$13.5 million to get the work done.³

But as costly as it was for Winnipeg to build the aqueduct, the benefits for city dwellers have been enormous and ongoing. Access to Shoal Lake water meant an end to worries about how a growing city would meet demands for domestic and industrial water use, as well as the decline of typhoid, an infectious bacterial fever often spread when feces from people carrying the disease enter the water supply.⁴ While Winnipeg did not begin to treat sewage until the 1937 opening of the North End Sewage

Treatment Plant, and sewage flowed into the city's rivers, disease levels went down as the use of river water declined.⁵

Building the aqueduct for the benefit of Winnipeg came at the direct expense of Anishinaabe whose territory included Shoal Lake. Various levels of settler government agreed to the appropriation of almost 4000 acres of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation's reserve without permission from the First Nation.⁶ Winnipeg's mayor Thomas Deacon described the Shoal Lake 40 reserve as "a remote place," but Shoal Lake 40 First Nation Chief Pete Redsky understood the seized area as "the best part of our Reserve," and "very good farming, good timber, good hay land."⁷ The construction of the aqueduct resulted not only in loss of land for the Shoal Lake 40 community, but also in the First Nation being cut off from the mainland and forced to live on an artificial island.⁸ Clearly, the benefits of the aqueduct did not extend to those living at Winnipeg's water source. The activism of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation successfully forced municipal, provincial, and federal governments to end the community's forced isolation and chronic water crisis in 2019 with the construction of the Freedom Road.

Present-day conditions

In cities, tap water and wastewater, including sewage, are closely connected. In Winnipeg, tap water continues to flow from Shoal Lake, where city dwellers use it for numerous purposes, including the essentials of drinking, cooking, and cleaning. Most of the water that enters Winnipeg homes and businesses from Shoal Lake leaves again through the sewer system, where, after treatment, it winds up in the Assiniboine and Red Rivers before flowing into Lake Winnipeg, some 55km north of the city.

In spite of the fact that most wastewater is treated before exiting the city by way of the Red River, Winnipeg's sewage treatment system leaves much to be desired. The North End Wastewater Treatment Plant has not met the provincial government's 2005 requirement that total phosphorus concentration not exceed 1 milligram per liter, or the two additional deadlines to meet these goals.⁹ Capacity for biosolids is projected to run out in four to six years.¹⁰ Billions of litres of untreated sewage enter the rivers each year and the current treatment process is not doing enough to remove harmful bacteria and chemicals that damage ecosystems and threaten human health.¹¹ The 10 First Nations suing the City and other levels of government find it unacceptable for Winnipeg's waste to be harming Lake Winnipeg and the people who depend on it. The City has

been able to drag its heels on major investments in water conservation and wastewater treatment only because tap water comes all the way from Shoal Lake. Unlike Indigenous communities north of the city, Winnipeg doesn't depend for survival on waters fed by the Red River. At both water source and waste outlet, Winnipeg has solved its own problems by creating problems for others. This must stop.

A meaningful commitment to advancing government-to-government relationships between Indigenous and municipal governments means respecting the Indigenous laws that have been in place much longer than Winnipeg has existed. In Treaty #3 territory, where Shoal Lake is located, First Nations have articulated Anishinaabe Nibi Inaakonigewin, or water law principles, in the form of the Nibi (Water) Declaration. These principles include the recognition that nibi is alive, has a spirit and connects everything, and that Anishinaabe have been responsible for the care of nibi and aki (land) since time immemorial. The duty to respect and care for nibi extends to the protection of nibi for future generations.¹²

The Nibi Declaration expresses similar ideas to the First Nations of Lake Winnipeg in their recognition of the lake as a living being with a spirit. Protecting nibi is a moral obligation to future generations, and it is also necessary for maintaining the health of people and the ecosystems upon which we all depend for survival. We call on the City of Winnipeg to recognize Indigenous laws as fundamental to municipal decisions about water.

Actions

- **The AMB** recognizes that Winnipeg's treatment of water affects communities beyond the city limits and prioritizes investment in the city's wastewater treatment and infrastructure.
- **The AMB** calls on the City of Winnipeg to expedite planned changes to the North End Wastewater Treatment Plant. A 2024 report commissioned by the City of Winnipeg identified a three-phase project — power supply and headworks facilities, biosolids facilities, and nutrient removal — and estimated the cost at approximately \$2.38 billion, reflecting 2018 estimates that will likely be higher once adjusted to current rates.¹³

As the Lake Winnipeg Foundation has noted, the estimated costs for biological nutrient removal costs are up a remarkable 80 per

cent from the 2017 estimate of \$795 million.¹⁴ They are not likely to get cheaper. The time for major investment in the city's wastewater treatment facilities is past due. Continuing to pollute the waters of our Indigenous neighbours violates the principles of the City of Winnipeg's Indigenous Accord, first adopted in 2017. The Accord committed to "creating and maintaining relationships and partnerships that recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples," based on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and reiterating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (2015) and the Final Report of the National Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice (2019).¹⁵

Creating a wastewater system that reflects these commitments and works to undo decades of environmental racism will require greater public understanding, political will, and significant investment of public dollars. We have witnessed cities elsewhere, both in Canada and internationally, undertake the work necessary to remake their relationship to the waters they live with. This includes Paris, which undertook a \$1.5 billion USD strategy that made the previously unswimmable Rivier Seine swimmable in 2024. Closer to home, Ottawa undertook a \$232 million dollar sewage overflow reduction strategy,¹⁶ and Victoria built a \$775 million sewage treatment plant in 2020, ending a more than a century of dumping raw sewage into the Pacific Ocean.¹⁷

Change will require support from both provincial and federal governments. In April of 2026, Manitoba's provincial government announced \$500 million for the final phase of the North End Wastewater Treatment Plant and supported the City's request for similar support from the federal government.¹⁸ The issue of Winnipeg's wastewater is not simply a municipal problem, and we encourage the City to continue to seek meaningful commitments from other levels of government.

- **The AMB calls** on Winnipeg to expedite its Combined Sewer Overflow Master Plan (CSO), which works to reduce the amount of raw sewage dumped into rivers during rain and melt events. The City has promised to add an additional \$60 million between 2024 and 2027 to the annual budget of \$30 million per year.¹⁹ The CSO Master Plan is still projected to take to 2045 to complete, and that is simply too long. The AMB will increase annual investment in the CSO Master plan by 50 per cent with an eye to expediting timelines, and providing additional support

for green infrastructure such as rain gardens, permeable pavements, and retention ponds (Cost: \$15 million).²⁰

- **The AMB calls** on Winnipeg to expand equitable and conservation-oriented water pricing and expand options for those who cannot pay water and wastewater bills.

We can and must find ways to support necessary infrastructure projects without adding to the burden currently borne by the poor and lower income households in Winnipeg. Most importantly, we urge the City to undertake rate design that integrates a greater degree of conservation-oriented water pricing and more equitable rate design. This should be an inclining block system with three tiers, the lowest one a “lifeline block” designed to meet a household’s basic needs.²¹

In the short term, there must be more meaningful options for those unable to pay water and wastewater bills. When people cannot pay water and wastewater bills, they can face debt, possible loss of housing, destabilized and separated families, and risks to health. We urge the City to double emergency relief available through the H2O Help to Others program currently jointly run by the City of Winnipeg and the faith-based Salvation Army. We suggest that this program be put under City of Winnipeg control, that the limits for total household incomes be raised, the one-time forgiveness offered to water customers unable to pay their bills until 2017 be reinstated, and that information about the program be better promoted, including among front-line service organizations (Cost: \$52,000).²²

Winnipeg’s water and wastewater system is a product of a century and a half of colonialism and environmental racism. It is past time for Winnipeg to manage its own waste without damaging First Nations and Metis communities downstream. We join a long line of reports calling on the City of Winnipeg to take action, and to do so in ways that distribute the costs among those who can bear them, and provide resources for those who cannot.

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Cover Photo

A snapshot of the Dream Weavers community weaving that took place at Nuit Blanche 2025. Read more about this project on page 6. Photo by Alanna Yuen.



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