

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Looming Tree Ecological Disaster Brings Winnipeggers Together

Winnipeg (November 12, 2019) -- Winnipeg's iconic tree canopy is in crisis due to disease, climate change and chronic under-funding. Every year, Winnipeg loses more trees than are planted - and it promises to get worse unless Winnipeggers all work together to reverse this trend.

Residents Associations, OURS-Winnipeg, and neighbourhood groups have responded to the threat by joining forces to ask the City of Winnipeg to increase the budget for the Urban Forestry Branch to maintain the existing canopy, and plant trees now - for the future of our city.

Last year, in a Parks and Open Space Division 2019 preliminary budget presentation, the Urban Forestry Branch said that it did not have the resources for adequate tree disease management and pruning. Yet, the City of Winnipeg did not approve Urban Forestry's request for \$11.6 million. They only approved \$4 million, less than half of what they need to carry out their mandate -- a \$7.61 million shortfall. As a result, the chronic underfunding that contributes to tree canopy loss continued.

Ronald Mazur, spokesperson for OURS-Winnipeg, explained the need to act at a recent meeting of concerned citizens. "October's unprecedented storm displayed the challenges extreme weather can place on the urban forest and the need for its stable funding and care." The group has launched the "Saveourcanopy.com" online letter campaign for all Winnipeggers to participate in asking the City to invest in trees.

Lisa Forbes of the Glenelm Neighbourhood Association's tree committee is the driving force of gathering the many groups together in calling for action. "Winnipeg's urban elm forest, the largest in North America, is an irreplaceable and international treasure. We must act together to press all levels of government to make trees a priority in our City."

"The time to act is now -- the City's four year budget process is well underway, and I urge all citizens who care about trees to pay attention -- join a local community group, or at the very least - send your City Councillor a letter using the Save Our Canopy online resource before November 27th," Forbes urged.

While noting that multiple community groups across the city access funding and volunteers to implement tree planting projects in their neighbourhoods, significant public investment is needed. She added "The Urban Forestry Branch needs long term funding to implement a sustainable reforestation action plan for the entire City to avoid ecological disaster and mitigate the effects of climate change."

Forbes also pointed out that investing in trees today makes good financial sense. "The urban forest is an essential part of the city's infrastructure and offers significant returns on everything from increased property taxes and reduced energy costs to flood mitigation. Making an investment in trees is just sound economics. And we're hopeful that the mayor and councillors will see that."

The Urban Forestry Branch will be presenting its updated budget on November 16th to the City's Standing Policy Committee that deals with our canopy. Delegations are then invited to present on November 27th.

-30-

This press release is available at <https://www.glenelm.ca/press-release-trees>

For more information, contact:

Lisa Forbes: Tree Project Committee, Glenelm Neighborhood Association
<https://www.glenelm.ca> phone: 204-918-2407 email: trees@glenelm.ca

Ronald Mazur: OURS-Winnipeg (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces)
<https://www.ours-winnipeg.com> email: Ronald_mazur@yahoo.com

(See attached page for some additional fast facts and resources for further information)

Fast Facts and Resources for Further Information on Winnipeg's Canopy

1. Winnipeg has 300,989 park & boulevard trees, almost 60% of them are elm and ash.
Source: November 1, 2019. Winnipeg Open Data. Tree Inventory.
<https://data.winnipeg.ca/Parks/Tree-Inventory/hfwk-jp4h>
2. Within 10 years, Winnipeg is projected to lose 25% of its elm and 100% of its ash trees, which totals more than one third of our forest lost to Dutch elm disease, Emerald Ash Borer and Cottony Ash Psyllid.
Source: The historic loss averages 27% per year. "In the 1970's, there were 275,000 elm trees but due to Dutch Elm Disease, the city has lost about 75,000."
<https://globalnews.ca/news/2254543/winnipeg-is-home-to-the-largest-urban-elm-forest-in-north-america/>
Minutes – Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks February 5, 2018, Item No. 11. Emerald Ash Borer Preparedness, Response and Management Options Report, page 4.
<http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/dmis/ViewDoc.asp?DocId=16788&SectionId=&InitUrl=>
3. Winnipeg's world-class urban forestry department is renowned for staving off complete elm loss to Dutch elm disease. But they need help – in the past five years we've had a net loss of 4268 public trees.
Source: Present-day number: Winnipeg Open Data. Tree Inventory as of November 1, 2019: <https://data.winnipeg.ca/Parks/Tree-Inventory/hfwk-jp4h>
2016-2018 numbers: Community Trends and Performance Report: Vol. 1 for 2020 Budget, p. 3-95:
https://winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2020.pdf
2015 number: Community Trends and Performance Report: Vol. 1 for 2020 Budget, p. 141:
https://www.winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2019.pdf
4. Instead of help, the City budget forecast adopted earlier this year cuts reforestation funding in half by 2022.
Source: 2019 Adopted Budget: Capital Project Detail Volume 3, page 3-10:
https://www.winnipeg.ca/finance/files/2019AdoptedCapitalBudget_Volume3.pdf
5. Industry best practice is to prune 14% of the total canopy every year (equivalent to a tree being pruned every 7-8 years). Yet, in 2014, we were pruning only 8%, and by 2018 were pruning only 4% (i.e., our trees are being pruned every 26 years).
Source: 2020 Community Trends & Performance Report: Volume 1, page 3-96 & 3-97:
https://winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2020.pdf
6. Consider this: after a snowstorm damaged over 400,000 trees in 2014, Calgary invested \$35 million to mostly tree pruning and maintenance. In 2019, with a similar fall snowstorm, they reduced 311 storm-related calls from over 27,000 to just 20.
Source: October 21, 2019: Why Winnipeg's tree canopy might be better off after snowstorm's drubbing (CBC News) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-tree-canopy-damaged-snowstorm-calgary-1.5325944>