Trees Please Winnipeg Coalition Submission to Executive Policy Committee, May 13, 2021

Trees Please Winnipeg is coalition of resident groups lobbying all levels of government to make long term sustainable infrastructure investment available to cities like Winnipeg for the maintenance, diversification and expansion of urban forests.

Our coalition represents citizens from Winnipeg neighbourhoods, residents' associations and various organizations working together to call attention to our urban forest crisis and the need for sustainable investment strategies for urban forests.

We recognize the City has struggled to allocate enough resources to address the immense challenges faced by our urban forest - much of which has been well documented by the recent release of the City's *State of the Urban Forest* report.

So, Trees Please Winnipeg calls on all levels of government to help address the challenge through a reimagining of how our urban forest can be protected and developed in the future. The aim is to encourage all levels of government to treat trees as infrastructure, assigning an asset value to this valuable resource in our City, and investing accordingly for the long-term sustainability of our urban forest.

Our submission to the EPC review of OurWinnipeg 2045 and Complete Communities 2.0 provides *specific* suggestions for insertions into your documents, based on our published information on our website at treespleasewinnipeg.com.

The wording is a suggestion to help move "Trees as Infrastructure" forward in a proactive way.

We are pleased to see the laudable goals in both documents on creating a liveable City dedicated to green space, social equity, walkable communities and adaptation to climate change.

We sincerely hope our specific recommendations are helpful to the process. Our suggestions are designed to ensure that the City of Winnipeg is well prepared to execute the actions recommended in the upcoming 20 Year Urban Forest Strategy and ready to take advantage of federal and provincial green and natural infrastructure funds that may assist in providing sustainable infrastructure funding for the maintenance, protection diversification and expansion of our threatened urban forest.

Our coalition proposes the following policy additions to Our Winnipeg 2045 draft:

Under *OurWinnipeg goal: Environmental Resilience:*

2.21a Leverage Urban Forests as Green Infrastructure
Declare urban forests essential municipal infrastructure, classify urban forests as "assets" and include urban forests in the City's asset management plan.

Under *OurWinnipeg goal: City Building*:

6.42 Include urban forests in asset management plans.
Natural infrastructure, like urban forests, increase in value and urban forest maintenance and expansion must be eligible for infrastructure funding for the long-term benefit of citizens.

6.43 Identify intergovernmental investment opportunities for green infrastructure investment
Work with provincial and federal funding agencies to identify natural (green) infrastructure funding to sustain and grow our urban canopy;

6.44 Urban Forestry Priority in Planning
Include Urban Forestry in consultations on all public infrastructure planning to ensure tree protection and canopy enhancement

Our coalition also proposes to differentiate between **Green Infrastructure** and **Natural Infrastructure** within OurWinnipeg2045.

It is important that City plans distinguish the two, because the term "green infrastructure" has come to include green technology and materials, such as solar panels and permeable surfaces, but does not always include the natural assets such as trees, soils and watersheds. We therefore suggest that natural assets be identified as "natural infrastructure."

The following definitions are used in the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment report: "Natural Infrastructure Framework: Key Concepts Definitions and Terms" (2020).

Natural Infrastructure (NI)
NI refers to the use of preserved, restored or enhanced elements or combinations of vegetation and associated biology, land, water and naturally occurring ecological processes to meet targeted infrastructure outcomes (CCME 2018), such as coastal hazard protection, riverine flood control, local stormwater management and mitigation of the effects of extreme heat. It can be differentiated from the related category of Green Infrastructure based on its composition exclusively of natural ecosystem features and materials (e.g. water, native species of vegetation, soil, sand and stone, etc.), and from grey infrastructure because it provides a range of ancillary benefits to the environment, the economy, community health and well-being that grey infrastructure usually cannot.

Green Infrastructure (GI)
GI refers to the natural vegetative systems, engineered features and green technologies that collectively provide society with a multitude of economic, environmental and social outcomes (GIO 2020; Stanley *et al.* 2019). Some experts from different backgrounds describe GI as mainly enhanced natural assets, incorporating land, water and vegetation features alongside human-made elements to sustain ecosystem functions and services. Others may use the term interchangeably with Natural Infrastructure, or in a more global sense to discuss natural assets and capital of all kinds. Across most usages, GI is distinguished from grey infrastructure based on its ability to emulate many of the functions of NI.

Our coalition proposes the following additions to Complete Communities 2.0 draft:

Under *E3. Major Open Space: Goal 2:*

> **1.2 Urban Forestry Priority in Planning**
> Include Urban Forestry in consultations on all public infrastructure planning to ensure tree protection and canopy enhancement

Under *G3. Parks and Recreation: Goal 4:*
(our proposed additions to existing policy are noted in red)

> **Urban forest**
> 4.5 Protect and enhance the urban forest in accordance with a comprehensive Urban Forest Strategy that addresses:
> a. Preservation of natural forests within the City;
> b. Expanding the number of trees on public and private lands lands through 10- and 20-year canopy cover goals;
> c. Diversifying the variety of trees; and
> d. Retention of existing trees in new developments.
> e. Maintenance and protection of existing public trees;
> f. Prioritize the integration and protection of public trees in all aspects of infrastructure planning;
> g. Include public trees in asset management plans.

Under *G4. Urban Design: Goal 4:*

> 4.8a Prioritize the development and public review of the proposed *Tree Protection and Preservation By-law* to ensure our canopy is protected and enhanced on both public and private property, treating trees as valuable assets.
>
> 4.8b Encourage the use of green materials and methodologies in the construction of surfaces (roads, road renewal, parking lots and other surfaces like playgrounds) to create more permeable surfaces that are more amenable to tree growth.