

December 5, 2024

To: Mayor Scott Gillingham and Councilors Rollins, Santos, Lukes, Orlikow, Mayes, Duncan, Chambers, Gilroy, Browaty, Wyatt, Dobson, Eadie, Allard, Schreyer and Sharma.

From: Erna Buffie, Trees Please Winnipeg; Pam Lucenkiw, Ours-Winnipeg; James Beddome, Manitoba Eco-Network; Ron Thiessen, CPAWS MB; France Pomminville, Executive Director, Climate Reality Project Canada; Andrea Pelletier, Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition

Dear Mr. Mayor and Councillors:

We are writing to encourage the City of Winnipeg to apply for funding available via the \$1.4 billion Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund (NSCS) recently launched by the federal government. Applications for the fund are open as of Dec. 1, 2024, and ongoing through 2025.

The \$1.4 billion NSCS fund is designed to assist cities and municipalities to “reduce the loss, restore, or improve the management of ecosystems which reduce emissions...and support biodiversity,” and which includes assistance with land acquisition.

We believe that this fund, paired with the Housing Accelerator Fund, will enable Winnipeg to meet its housing targets while honoring its commitment to add an additional 1,000 acres to our parks and greenspace inventory.

You and a majority of Councilors have shown great vision and leadership in your efforts to access matched federal funding from the 2 Billion Trees Fund to secure a future for our urban forest. It is our hope that the city will demonstrate the same leadership and vision, by providing the matched funds needed to access NSCS, to ensure the acquisition, expansion and protection of our few remaining intact forests, riverbanks, wildlife corridors and city center greenspaces.

In addition to demonstrating that Winnipeg is making every effort to honor the promises it made as a signatory of the Montreal Biodiversity Pledge, as well as the council-adopted Parks Strategy, NSCS funds will also ensure that canopy expansion targets set in the 20 Year Urban Forestry Strategy are met.

Essential to that would be the acquisition and preservation of existing intact urban forests such as the Lemay and Sumka properties, as well the creation of much needed additional green space in downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

According to the city's own Parks Strategy, money was to be allocated to the Parks capital budget for parkland acquisition. Specifically, Item 5, Appendix C, suggested that \$12M over a 10-year period be allocated.

Unfortunately no such allocation has occurred to date and, as a result, Parks has no cash on hand in its capital budget to lever NSCS funds for the acquisition of parkland. Moreover the current capital budget for Parks is among the lowest for Canadian cities of comparable size.

That lack of capital funding has serious ramifications.

Not only will the city fail in its commitment to ensure equitable access to greenspace - particularly for downtown and city center residents as promised in the Parks strategy and Centre-plan 2050. It will also fail to take advantage of the critical role additional greenspace can play in mitigating extreme weather, such as heatwaves, reducing emissions, strengthening the city's climate resiliency and attracting and retaining youth.

Most importantly, the failure to allocate money for parkland acquisition means that Winnipeg is currently unable to lever matched federal funds from the NSCS. **Money that would double, and in some cases more than double, any funds allocated by the city.**

Winnipeg simply cannot afford to leave this federal money on the table.

While we appreciate the financial difficulties the city currently faces, we feel that putting our tax dollars toward the acquisition of land for additional greenspace will receive broad community support. We also feel that the urgent need for density must be balanced with the equally pressing need to provide denser neighborhoods with equitable, accessible and biodiverse greenspaces.

We would therefore urge you to consider providing additional money for land acquisition to the Parks' capital budget for 2025 and 2026 - money that would enable Winnipeg to apply for NSCS matched funds for the same two-year period.

There are couple of ways that might be accomplished. There is, for example an opportunity for the city to lever funds currently available in Manitoba Habit and Heritage, specifically earmarked for the purchase of the Lemay Forest, and use it to access additional NSCS funds.

There is also an opportunity for council to earmark a percentage of its Land Dedication and Reserve Fund to the Parks Capital Budget specifically for the purpose of land acquisition, as outlined in the LDR's original statement of intent.

Alternatively, Council could consider assigning a portion of the city's gas tax rebate toward Park's capital budget for land acquisition. It would seem to us to be more than appropriate to use a tax on fossil fuels to fund projects aimed at reducing emissions and increasing resiliency.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Erna Buffie, Trees Please Winnipeg

Pam Lucenkiw and Dave Green, Co-Chairs, OURS-Winnipeg

James Beddome, Executive Director, Manitoba Eco-network

Ron Thiessen, Executive Director, CPAWS MB

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