Good morning, everyone. My name is Erna Buffie, and I'm interim chair of Trees Please Winnipeg, an organization composed of more than 20 resident groups from across the city.

For the past 2 years, Trees Please has devoted hundreds of volunteer hours to just one goal – lobbying for the additional city council needs – from both the federal and provincial governments - to save and replace as many of our mature public trees as possible and expand our public tree canopy. Why? Because we know that cities like Winnipeg can no longer go it alone contending with the multiple threats facing our canopy. And also because we believe that our urban trees are among our first lines of infrastructure defence against climate change.

In a nutshell, our public trees are not a "community or social service." They're as much a part of essential infrastructure as roads and sewers, and that's where they belong. Here's why:

Public trees are the only city asset that increase in value over time. **(1)** In fact, according to the State of the Urban Forest Report, our mature canopy saves this city more than $53 million in services, every single year. **(2)** And those dollar values should be reflected in the city's asset management plans and in this budget…. If they're not, then I'm going to be back here every year for the next ten years, begging you for more money - assuming that I, and our mature trees, last that long.

Because without our mature, public tree infrastructure, air pollution levels in this city would skyrocket, as would our air conditioning bills, especially during heatwaves like the one we had this summer**.** Without their shade and protection, grey infrastructure – like asphalt roads - would degrade 40-60% more rapidly**.** And we would, quite literally, be up a creek without a paddle, in terms of storm runoff, flooding and riverbank erosion, without our public trees. **(3)**

Now, if that sounds like essential infrastructure to you, it certainly does to Trees Please. And, as it turns out, the Federal Government agrees. In fact, thanks to the lobbying efforts of dozens of groups like ours, Infrastructure Canada has now included urban forest funding in its infrastructure renewal strategy. In 2021, the Federal budget announced a $200 million Natural Infrastructure Fund. In addition to that, under NRC's 2-Billion Tree initiative urban boulevard and park tree planting projects will also qualify for funding**.**

So, what's on the table? The Natural Infrastructure Fund will match city dollars in amounts up to $20 million and as low as $3 million for projects, and I quote "such as planting and restoring urban greenspace, which includes urban forests… to build resilience to threats associated with climate change, such as urban flooding, extreme heat, and (coastal) erosion." **(4)** And there will be additional millions available from the 2-Billion Tree Initiative for urban tree planting and replacement projects that roll out over a number of years. **(5)**

The question is – will the city take full advantage of those funds? Does our urban forestry department even have the capacity, both in terms of staff and a multi-year budget plan, to access the federal money we lobbied so hard for and that's currently on the table?

My colleague Lisa Forbes will speak to that specifically, but based on our analysis, the short answer is "no." Based on the projections provided in your budget document, UFD does not have the capacity to take full advantage of these additional funds.

And that is a HUGE problem, because we desperately need that federal money to deal with the scope of the crisis we're facing. Every year Winnipeg loses, on average, 5500 public trees**. (6)** In 2020 only 19% of those trees were replaced. **(7)** As a result, we currently have a backlog *of more than 14,000 trees* that need replacement. And that deficit grows by 2000 trees every year. **(8)**

To make matters worse, Winnipeg prunes its public trees every 31 years instead of every 7 – a best practice goal that most other major Canadian cities have already achieved. **(9) And as we discovered after the** October 2019 snowstorm, when it comes to pruning, it's case of pay now, or pay more than $10 million, later**. (10)** The same is true for the spread of Dutch Elm Disease. The staggering loss of more than 30,000 mature elm trees in just 5 years, was due, in part, to lack of pruning, one of the first lines of defence against DED. **(11)**

Based on these facts alone, the $4 million added to UFD's operating budget in 2022 and 2023, while welcome, simply doesn't get us where we need to be now, or in the future, as our canopy faces an inevitable escalation in extreme weather and invasive pests and diseases, thanks to climate change. Nor does it provide the consistent funding needed to lever the federal money that's currently on the table.

What's needed is an infusion of cash into the capital budget over the next 5 years, to deal with the problems and lever federal money. And what we need for the future is a sustainable long term financial plan for our public canopy infrastructure. And if you begin work on that plan now, you'll be well prepared to execute the 20-year urban forestry strategy when it's released in the new year.

But perhaps most importantly, by classifying trees, within public works, as essential infrastructure, funding them sustainably and taking advantage of federal funding, ***now,*** Winnipeg could become a national leader in the kind of innovative, sustainable, natural infrastructure solutions that will increase this city's climate resiliency. **(12)** Something we believe, a vast majority of Winnipeggers would applaud and support.

1. Deeproot Green Infrastructure, and City of Edmonton: Urban Forest Management Plan, and Million Trees NYC, and US Forest Service
2. State of the Urban Forest Report, 2021 (page 8) https://engage.winnipeg.ca/urbanforest
3. All benefits and sources listed at: https://treespleasewinnipeg.com/benefits-of-urban-trees/
4. Purpose of NIF https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/sustainable-development/strategic-environmental-assessment/public-statements/enhanced-nature-legacy.html
   NIF up to $20 million: https://www.canada.ca/en/office-infrastructure/news/2021/06/government-of-canada-announces-new-natural-infrastructure-fund.html
5. https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/science-and-data/funding-partnerships/funding-opportunities/forest-sector-funding-programs/2-billion-trees-funding/23308 https://naturecanada.ca/news/blog/what-is-canadas-two-billion-tree-2bt-program-and-what-is-the-opportunity/

6. State of the Urban Forest Report Summary p.5 https://engage.winnipeg.ca/urbanforest
7. State of the Urban Forest Report Summary p.5 https://engage.winnipeg.ca/urbanforest
8. State of the Urban Forest Report Summary p.5 https://engage.winnipeg.ca/urbanforest
9. State of the Urban Forest Report P.29 https://engage.winnipeg.ca/urbanforpublic est
10. https://winnipegsun.com/news/news-news/winnipegs-fall-storm-tab-expected-to-hit-10-million
11. https://extension.umn.edu/plant-diseases/dutch-elm-disease\
12. https://treecanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Trees-and-Asset-Management_RosenLane-002.pdf