Submission to City Council – May 26, 2022

Re: Winnipeg Parks Strategy

Pam Lucenkiw / Ron Mazur
Co-Chairs
OURS-Winnipeg

Currently, the City of Winnipeg does not have a formal Council-approved parks strategy to guide the future operations, management, growth and development of our parks system. The last parks plan was written about 40 years ago. The City of Winnipeg will finally have a Parks Strategy to provide necessary guidance to city planning.

OURS-Winnipeg submission is in support of the Public Service recommendation for the Parks Strategy but with the requirement for some revisions. The current draft Parks Strategy is a good start but will have to be revised when the Master Greenspace and Natural Corridors Plan By-law and Biodiversity Policy are in place. The current draft Parks Strategy does not adequately reference the greenspace amendments to Our Winnipeg 2045 and Complete Communities 2.0 that were approved by City Council in 2021.

It must be made clear that the Parks Strategy is an evolving document and will have to be reviewed and revised as the Master Greenspace Plan, Natural Corridor Plan and Biodiversity Policy are implemented. The greenspace amendments to the planning documents must be more fully integrated into the Parks Strategy.

The cost of this strategy is by no means excessive. The provision level of 50 m^2 per person of parkland is average for Canadian cities according to the 2020 Park People Report. Winnipeg's operating cost of parks per capita (Community Trends and Performance Report 2018) is below average. It is $44.03 per person compared to the average of $64.38 per person for other major Canadian cities.

The budget proposal of $12 million over 10 years is not nearly enough to acquire natural areas and greenspace to meet the Council approved target of adding 1000 acres of parkland within the city. Without an adequate budget and timely action, land that is now greenspace will be developed and the city will be left to restoring

parking lots. Restoration of lands is much more expensive and difficult to do, and land prices will only increase over time. We commend the reference to downtown parks and suggest the parking lots located at The Forks be designated as priority sites for conversion into parks.

Community voices should be included to participate in the identification of parkland for acquisition.

The Parks Strategy contains a methodology of Park Rationalization for how to dispose of Parkland just as the planning documents have done for disposal of Major Open Space land. The strategy is not structured to acquire parkland yet it includes a general criteria structured in a way to identify parkland for potential sale.

Parkland is acquired through the parks department. Acquisition policies now need to be reviewed with a biodiversity lens and natural corridor lens. Currently biodiversity is included in the plan in an overarching way as seen in the Benefits of Parks section. (page 12)[i]. "Support Biodiversity by providing important habitats for wildlife and vegetation". When it comes to specifics there is not guidance.

Some items in the document run counter to protecting biodiversity. For example the Strategy provides that parks generally should be free of encumbrances such as hazardous or excessive slopes that could impact leisure uses. These slopes and hazards could be slumped riverbanks that are valued for providing specialized wildlife habitat.

River corridors are important wildlife corridors and are inherently connected, making riverside lands of value even if they may be isolated parcels. Employment lands may have wildlife corridors and habitat but are not usually considered for parkland.

The Parks Strategy requires baseline indicators to enable the City to monitor if the amount of parkland and natural area has increased or decreased. The % of land area that is parkland and the % of land area that is natural within the city are needed indicators to measure progress. The use of square meters of greenspace per capita and the number of natural areas, rather than the total size of natural areas do not meet baseline indicator requirements.

We appreciate the addition of the concept that parks are places for ‘quiet reflection or passive observation’ to the previous draft statement ‘people gathering with family and friends to socialize, participate in cultural activities, and celebration as well as other activities outlined that included outdoor sport, outdoor play, nature experience, and trail based recreation. (page 19)

In summation, OURS-Winnipeg supports the broad objectives of the long-overdue Parks Strategy but with strong reservations regarding the inadequate budget available to acquire the additional 1000 acres of greenspace as approved by Council. We have a firm request that the Parks Strategy be reviewed and revised to fully support the vision and goals of the planned Master Greenspace Plan, Natural Corridor Plan and Biodiversity Policy. The Parks Strategy is a work in progress and the current draft is a good beginning. The Parks Strategy highlights the benefits of parks and that guiding principle highlights the importance of the Parks Strategy.

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[i] March 9, 2022 Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks Regular Meeting Agenda Item 11 Appendix B Winnipeg Parks Strategy
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