

Council Meeting September 26, 2024**Agenda Item 16. Amendments to the Real Estate Policy Framework in Support of Affordable Housing****Pam Lucenkiw****Co-chair****OURS-Winnipeg**

Good morning

My name is Pam Lucenkiw, Co-chair of OURS-Winnipeg a city-wide greenspace advocacy organization. I am here today in opposition to Agenda Item 16 regarding the declaration of city owned surplus land.

To be clear we are not opposed to affordable housing.

To begin I acknowledge that Winnipeg has made strides in protecting greenspace, especially since 2022 with the Master Greenspace and Natural Corridors Plan Bylaw and Biodiversity Policy, commitment to acquire 1000 acres of additional parkland and the 15 Actions of the Montreal Pledge for Biodiversity.

Last November at EPC I told the story about CBC Winnipeg's Up to Speed radio host asking the question "What is your vision for Winnipeg, and anything goes? The listener's response was "A nature corridor along the Assiniboine River from the Forks to Assiniboine Park where you never have to stop to cross a road." That is a vision we could all appreciate.

Sadly, we know that once land is developed it is hard if not impossible to get back.

The city has been unable to acquire parkland by purchasing it.

The easiest most economical way for the city to acquire parkland is by converting land it already owns.

We are extremely concerned that the city is missing out on this opportunity by declaring city-owned land along waterways and natural areas as surplus to be used for development.

Two properties of concern are 45 Archibald Street (declared surplus April 2024) and 825 Tache Avenue on today's agenda.

City Council made a commitment to acquire 1000 additional acres of parkland.

These two riverside properties could count toward the 1000 acre total.

Declaring 825 Tache Avenue in its entirety would add just over an acre.

Taking 45 Archibald off the surplus list could add 0.9 of an acre. There may be other properties that we are not aware of that should be added.

Acquiring river side and natural area land to create corridors requires a steady, long range, big picture approach. Land must be acquired piece by piece. Opportunities must be taken advantage of as they arise and the city must be ready. A fund must be set aside 825 Tache and 45 Archibald are two pieces of the missing links of the Red River natural corridor. It makes sense to acquire these lands from a parks planning perspective.

It is short sighted to convert riverside and natural areas to surplus for development when new and broader plans are imminent.

The city is on the cusp of having a Master Plan for Greenspace and Natural Corridors Bylaw and Biodiversity Policy that has indigenous inclusion and reconciliation at its core. It could become a model for the rest of the country.

The proposed National Urban Park Plan fits with the Master Plan. The proposal although not yet accepted by the city provides strong support for acquiring riverside parkland. The city will be hiring someone in the next couple of months to staff a position for a National Urban Park.

Winnipeg continues to this day to make decisions that fail to protect riverside land.

Edmonton, Calgary and Saskatoon, our prairie neighbours have plans for protecting their natural areas and corridors and are reaping the benefits including federal funding while Winnipeg is continuing to let its go.

Waterways are the most biodiverse areas we have because they include a variety of habitats. Winnipeg signed the Montreal Pledge - Cities United in Action for Biodiversity. The action that goes with the commitment is expected.

Degraded property is not a rationale to turn riparian land over to development. Both properties would require some restoration. We are in the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, that acknowledges that land in urban areas is degraded and requires restoration.

Converting city owned land is a much more cost effective way to acquire parkland than purchasing it. Riverside land and natural areas are the easiest to restore as they have existing forest which greatly decreases cost and increases success for regenerating vegetation. Land acquired does not have to be developed immediately. Costs can be spread over time, as was done with La Barriere and Little Mountain Parks.

We ask that the entire property of 825 Tache from Tache Avenue to the Red River remain park keeping in line with surrounding park corridor.

Imagine having a condo in the middle of Lyndale or Churchill Drive Parks. It would ruin the vista

There has to be a way that money is set aside to acquire parkland, even land the city already owns.

Although some of the following requests may be beyond the scope of this meeting today they are relevant. We ask City Council to

- 1) not put 825 Tache on the surplus properties list
- 2) remove 45 Archibald from the surplus properties list
- 3) Set aside a fund for the Parks Dept to purchase city owned surplus land to become parkland
- 4) review the criteria/process for assessing city-owned surplus land on natural areas and corridors to consider the following
 - the long range, big picture the city committed to
 - Master Plan for Greenspace and Natural Corridors Policy and Biodiversity Plan
 - Acquisition of 1000 acres of additional parkland
 - 15 Actions of the Montreal Pledge

The need for housing is great. So too is protecting the accompanying natural environment that is essential for climate resiliency, public health and wellbeing, biodiversity and image as a city.

Pam Lucenkiw
Co-chair
OURS-Winnipeg

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