

City of Winnipeg Council delegation re: Property and Planning Committee Agenda No. 1 re: Lemay Forest

Council date: 27 March 2025

Submitted by: Ann Loewen, MD

Date of submission: 25 March 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to express my opinion to Council regarding the status of the lands known as Lemay Forest. I am in favour of re-zoning the land as a Park that is open to the public.

There is urgent need to preserve and protect this land for many reasons directly related to the health of the City of Winnipeg citizens, for whom City Councillors and the Mayor bear direct responsibility.

- Heat-related deaths are increasing rapidly. In British Columbia's 2021 heat dome, 600 people died in their homes of heat stroke in 30 days. That's 20 people a day. Imagine if 20 people a day died of cold exposure in Winnipeg? The urban heat island effect is well documented. Trees are essential infrastructure to mitigate, and the City must protect its citizens from this threat.
- Lemay Forest is especially prone to flooding. It is 12 feet lower than Pembina Highway and surrounded by an enormous primary dike. Even with thousands of trees and other vegetation to absorb water, adjacent lots have lost their basements to overland flooding and sewer backup during heavy rainfalls. Removal of the vegetation and paving over the land would make this problem worse. This damage has great personal impact, from grieving to financial hardship to indoor mold, that the City must protect its citizens from.
- Free access to natural spaces is essential to mental and physical health. In the pandemic people flocked to places where greenery grew in abundance, for relief from their anxiety and disappointment, for a chance to be safely with others, to learn and understand and be at peace with the life forms in a forest. Physicians prescribe nature to their patients for this reason through PaRx, Walk With A Doc and other programs. The City must provide its population with ready access to natural spaces. Lemay Forest is a jewel in our midst – why would we destroy it?
- We are in a time of great grieving – of the losses of the pandemic, the devastation of the opioid crisis, climate change harms, fear and divisiveness accelerated by social media and isolation. The losses of the 3383 children in the Asile Ritchoy Orphanage Cemetery represent the additional harm of separating children from their mothers, the primary attachment and object of their love in early life. Those 3383 children did not only die of infectious disease and lack of advanced medical care: they died of neglect because there was no one to love them. Babies and young children will wither if they do not achieve immediate, constant secure and loving attachment to a single individual – this was well documented among orphans after the World Wars in Europe. Canada ignored this lesson and continued to separate infants and children from their mothers. We know so well now the tragic outcomes of not just orphanages, but also forced and coerced adoptions, Residential schools, the 60s scoop and what passes for child protection. Our

ranks are replete with these survivors, many of them are homeless on the streets of Winnipeg.

- The Asile Ritchot cemetery grounds and surrounding woods represent a place of both historical, and current, societal sadness and grieving. At the same time it is a place of regeneration and abundant life. A place that deserves stewardship and recognition. To preserve this space gives all of us the opportunity to grow, gain knowledge and express our empathy. The City of Winnipeg can give us a way to take those losses and let them be transformative in their power. In this way we can recognize and honour the ability to care that we all have within us, an ability that is so necessary to survival.