

March 26, 2025

Dear Winnipeg City Council

Re: Item No. 1 Expropriation and Rezoning of Lemay Forest

Greetings! My name is Ariel Gordon. I'm a Wolseley resident and my background is in science and journalism.

Over the past five years I've written two essay collections about Winnipeg's urban ecosystem, *Treed: Walking in Canada's Urban Forest* (2019) and *Fungal: Foraging in the Urban Forest* (2024), both published by Hamilton's Wolsak & Wynn.

So: I've spent more than two decades writing about Winnipeg's urban forest and walking in its green spaces.

I've led dozens of urban forest walks in Assiniboine Forest, Munson Park, and Omand's Creek, introducing Winnipeggers to their trees, doing public education.

And one of my favourite things is going for a walk in one of our parks or along our tree-lined streets. My favourite is the Wolseley / Wellington loop but I have spent many joyful hours on the trails along Bunn's Creek and on the Harte Trail.

Based on the city's own Urban Forest Strategy, released in 2023, we know that the urban forest doesn't just provide pleasure and comfort to residents, it delivers real, quantifiable ecosystem services including:

Carbon storage and sequestration, avoiding surface runoff, reducing energy-related costs (specifically cooling on very hot days), pollution removal, and oxygen production.

The annual functional value of Winnipeg's urban forest is \$53.68 million.

They've also arrived at a compensatory value of the urban forest, which is to say, the estimated cost to replace each tree in Winnipeg's Urban Forest with a similarly-sized tree, is \$3.31 billion.

Municipalities across the country now consider the urban forest infrastructure. What's more, it's the only piece of infrastructure in the city that doesn't depreciate. As trees age, they provide more services, not less!

Winnipeg's urban forest and the ecosystem services it provides are the envy of our prairie neighbours: 17% canopy cover versus 9% in Saskatoon and 8% in Calgary.

In the Urban Forest Strategy, adopted by City council, it sets out a goal of increasing our canopy cover to 24%.

To put that in context, Nature Canada's definitive 2022 report on urban forest equity recommends 30% for Canadian municipalities.

But our urban forest is at risk: our elms are falling to Dutch elm, our ashes are being infested with the Emerald Ash Borer and the Cottony ash psyllid, and our oaks are succumbing to the effects of climate changed weather at an alarming rate.

To put it bluntly: we will not reach our canopy cover targets if we allow developers to remove the 19,000 trees in the Lemay Forest for an enormous nursing home.

In the two years since the Urban Forest Strategy was completed and accepted by council as a way forward, Urban Forestry planted 6,067 (2023) and 6,484 trees (2024), which is a great improvement over the 2,000 it was planting in the early part of this decade.

But it also removed 5,945 (2,757 due to DED, including my boulevard elm) and 6,508 trees (3,028 due to DED) on boulevards and in parks.

We won't get to 24% canopy cover at this rate and we certainly can't replace 19,000 trees. That's three years worth of planting!

All of which to say: this isn't a St. Norbert issue. This isn't just important for those residents living near the forest, who love to walk there and witness the flora and fauna who live there.

It's a city-wide issue. I live in Wolseley and the Lemay Forest, at risk of removal, are part of my urban forest.

I'm currently working on a third essay collection called *Stumped: Grieving in the Urban Forest*, slated to be published in fall 2026. This collection revolves around the loss of my 112-year-old boulevard elm, but it asks the question:

Why are trees so good for cities? Why are cities so bad for trees?

I'm writing on the threat to the Lemay Forest for *Stumped*. I'm hopeful that the story I tell won't be one where one developer's profit-driven scheme won't trump the public good.

My name is Ariel Gordon. I am in support of the expropriation and rezoning of the Lemay Forest.