

Minutes – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – December 2, 2025

REPORTS

**Item No. 10 Tree Carving in Bois des Esprit and on Public Property
(St. Vital Ward)**

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION:

The Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and received the report as information.

Minutes – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – December 2, 2025

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Allard,

That the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in.

Carried

Denis De Pape, Board member Save Our Seine, Board Member Trees Winnipeg, submitted a communication in support of the matter.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 2, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Riel Community Committee and directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 120 days on City of Winnipeg current practices and options to consider surrounding the carving of trees on public property.

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE DECISION:

On June 25, 2025, the Riel Community Committee passed the following motion:

WHEREAS concerns have been raised by the Royalwood Neighbourhood Association (RNA) in regard to the preservation of Bois des Esprits Park;

AND WHEREAS the practice of tree carving and erecting plaques has been highlighted to be of principle concern by the RNA in their efforts in promoting preservation of Bois Des Esprits Park;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Riel Community Committee recommend to the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services be requested to direct the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on City of Winnipeg current practices and options to consider surrounding the carving of trees on public property.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Tree Carving in Bois des Esprit and on Public Property

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Community Services

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
D. Domke	J. Berezowsky	N/A	J. Dunford

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tree carvings in Bois des Esprits have been a unique feature of the forest since 2004. Residents have raised concerns over the number of carvings. They are also concerned about disruption to the natural setting.

There are no active permissions for anyone to carve trees in Bois des Esprits or other park areas in the City of Winnipeg.

The City previously granted permission for several professional and voluntary carvings in the forest, including the prominent “Woody” carving. The City allowed these carvings only on dead wood.

As the popularity of these carvings grew, more carvings began to appear in the forest.

There is no existing policy or direction regarding carvings. The Public Service is open to allowing carving under certain conditions in the short term. In the long term, the Public Service will consider:

- if more carvings will be allowed and, if so;
- if greater restrictions are required for carving; and
- if a permitting or approval process is required for carving.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On July 2, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Riel Community Committee and directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 120 days on City of Winnipeg current practices and options to consider surrounding the carving of trees on public property.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no implications associated with receiving this report as information.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

The history of tree carving in Bois des Esprits began in 2004 with the carving of an American elm tree located deep in the forest which was marked for removal due to Dutch Elm Disease. In response to interest from Save Our Seine and community members, the tree was cut higher than normal, and the bark was stripped to both prevent Dutch Elm Disease transmission and allow for carving. This tree became the most notable tree carving of our park spaces and was known as “Woody.” Woody’s story is featured on Save Our Seine’s website. In 2021, Woody succumbed to the elements and portions of the carving were moved to Le Musée Saint-Boniface.

In 2009, another tree carver approached the Public Service requesting to carve an American elm tree which was marked for removal and to produce a series of smaller carvings on dead branches and other dead wood in the forest. The Public Service agreed to his request, and the carver completed an owl carving on the elm. The carving is still present as a notable feature along a high point of the trail in Bois des Esprits. Several small wood spirit carvings were also made throughout the forest, many of which are no longer present.

Very little carving occurred from about 2011 until 2020. After 2020, more carvings were completed, and plaques or dedications appeared. In response to the presence of plaques and a request to install more, the Public Service adjusted permission to restrict plaques, words or symbols related to the carvings.

The first carver who had received permission passed away in 2023, and following his passing, there were no authorized carving activities taking place in Bois des Esprit until September 2024. Another carver approached the Public Service and requested to finish an unfinished carving by the previous carver, as well as completed two additional carvings. Permission was granted to this new carver under conditions, including no plaques and that all carvings must be preapproved for content and location.

Carving activity under this new permission is now complete, and there is no authorized carving activity occurring in the forest.

However, there have been some occurrences of unauthorized carving taking place in Bois des Esprits and at other sites along the Seine River. These have included carvings on both live and dead trees. In fact, some carvings were done off-site and then placed along trails within park areas.

An inventory of known carvings is included as Appendix A.

The early carving activity in Bois des Esprits could generally be characterized as very voluntary, somewhat hidden within the forest and needing to be found. This has transitioned into carvings which are often commissioned and found more regularly along the trails.

The carving of dead trees within Bois des Esprits is something which may be viewed as an enhancement and a destination (such as the case with Woody). Carvings can be interesting to come across in the forest but can also quickly detract from the forest if they are not done well or if they are widespread. There is certainly interest in carvings from the community, and it is known as a feature of the community noted by the carving images found on the homepage of the Royalwood Neighbourhood Association's website. Tree carving can also be contentious, and complaints have been received that there are too many carvings, and that carving should not be allowed.

Authorized carving within Bois des Esprits has only been permitted on dead wood, which includes either dead trees or branches. This has also generally meant that carvings do not have longevity. Woody lasted less than 20 years, and many of the original carvings done in 2009 and 2010 can no longer be found. In most cases, the present carvings are on the trunks of dead trees near or adjacent to the trails within the forest. As these trees slowly decay and eventually fall, the carvings will go along with them.

Currently, there are many dead oak trees along the trails of Bois des Esprits. A relatively small number of these have been carved, but all need to be assessed for potential risk of failure and hazards. A risk assessment is underway and may result in the marking and removal of a significant number of the dead trees occurring along the pathway in the near future.

Tree carvings in parks, whether authorized or unauthorized, become City property. They can be kept or removed along with any associated plaques or acknowledgments. At this time, the Public Service has adopted an approach that existing carvings are generally left in place pending any removal of trees required due to safety concerns. The Public Service will not maintain or attempt to preserve any carvings from planned removals or natural processes. Pre-existing acknowledgment plaques have also been "grandfathered in," allowing them to remain in place until they fall to decay. New plaques are not being permitted, nor is the replacement of old plaques which fail.

Unauthorized carving within parks has generally been very limited and is not known to be widespread in natural forest areas. The Public Service will continue to restrict these activities by stopping known activities where possible and potentially removing any carvings done without permission.

There is currently no recognized policy for the carving activity in City of Winnipeg parks. As a result, no decision has been made about how to respond to carving requests or what conditions to put in place for future requests. There are currently requests to add more carvings in Bois des Esprits, and there has been interest shown to include carvings in other park areas though very limited.

The following options may be considered for future carving requests:

1. No carving permitted. This may be to maintain the uninterrupted nature of the park setting or potentially to avoid future maintenance or safety concerns related to carvings.
2. Carving permitted only as a special community project such as Woody. The potential carving project should be presented and reviewed by Community Committee to determine if it is supported prior to approval and permission.

3. Carving permits issued as a business activity within a park. Carvings could be commissioned by professional carvers working for profit.
4. Carving activity allowed on a limited basis by the City subject to permission being granted based on the ability of the carver, conditions related to the image to be carved being a likeness of nature, no acknowledgements or symbols, preapproved for location and image and on dead wood only.

At this point, the Public Service does not have clear direction on how to handle requests for carving in parks and is balancing the aspects of carvings as a unique and attractive feature with the alternate view that carvings can detract from nature and lead to more unauthorized carving activities.

The ideal scenario is likely represented by the original carving activity in Bois des Esprits from 2004 and 2009 where carving is very limited, and somewhat subtle, needing to be found in the forest rather than being forward facing and obvious. In a very limited occurrence, the presence of carvings by a skilled and experienced carver does create a unique and interesting feature.

The Public Service advises that, subject to the following conditions, carving may be permitted within Bois des Esprit:

- Carvers will only be approved based on their portfolio demonstrating their ability to produce a professional quality image.
- Carving on dead wood only with the location and image pre-approved. Images must be nature or forest related and shall not include any symbols, text or messages.
- No recognition or plaques will be permitted. Pre-existing plaques will not be removed but replacement will not be permitted
- Carving will become property of the City of Winnipeg and the City will not accept responsibility for maintaining the carving or for its continued presence in the forest.
- Only limited carving will be allowed and, at this time, only in Bois des Esprit area along the Seine River. Carving will not be allowed in other City of Winnipeg parks.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement Date: October 21, 2025

Project Name:

Tree Carving in Bois des Esprit and on public property

COMMENTS:

As this report is for information purposes, there are no financial impacts.

J. Ruby, 2025-10-22

J. Ruby CPA, CA

Manager of Finance & Administration

CONSULTATION

N/A

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

Our Winnipeg Goal: Environmental Resilience

2.24 Low-Impact Ecosystem Management Prioritize sustainable, integrated plant, pollinator and pest management, that achieves humane, safe, low-carbon, and low-chemical solutions to support the health of local ecosystems. EP, HW

Complete Communities 2.0

G3. Parks and Recreation

Ecological function

4.3 Design and manage open space and park areas for their highest environmental and ecological performance:

4.3.1 Integrate interdisciplinary natural resource goals with planned park, recreation and infrastructure improvements to reduce costs and maximize public benefit.

4.3.2 Demonstrate a commitment to biodiversity and ecological integrity through planning, regulation, and collaboration.

4.3.3 Demonstrate the benefits of both natural and restored environments as contributors to quality of life

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

The report is in accordance with Strategic Opportunity #7:

7.3 Preserve and Manage Parks and Natural Areas to Support Climate Change Mitigation (Primary Responsibility: Public Works - Parks).

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The report is in accordance with:

- Goal 6: All City Services are Equitable, Inclusive and Accessible

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Public Works
Division: Parks and Open Spaces
Prepared by: R Penner / D Domke
Date: October 23, 2025

Attachments:

Appendix A – Inventory of Tree Carvings in Bois des Espirts and Seine River Areas