

Minutes – Standing Policy Committee on Community Services – April 14, 2026

REPORTS

Item No. 5 Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund

STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION:

The Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and approved the following:

1. That this report be received as information.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

The Chairperson called Councillor Allard to the Chair in order to move the following motion:

Moved by Councillor Santos,

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

Carried

Councillor Allard asked to be recorded as having voted against the above motion, in accordance with Rule 47(7) of The Procedure By-law No. 50/2007.

Councillor Santos resumed the Chair.

The following persons submitted communications:

- Erna Buffie, Co-Chair Trees Please Winnipeg, Trees Please Winnipeg Coalition, submitted a communication in support of the matter.
- Pam Lucenkiw, Co-Chair, OURS-Winnipeg, submitted a communication in support of the matter

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On January 9, 2026, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and granted an extension of time of 90 days to report back on the following:

1. Funding opportunities for the City of Winnipeg to fund the restoration and acquisition of land to establish new park space as approved in the Winnipeg Parks Strategy.

On December 2, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and granted an extension of time of 30 days to report back on the following:

1. Funding opportunities for the City of Winnipeg to fund the restoration and acquisition of land to establish new park space as approved in the Winnipeg Parks Strategy.

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION (continued):

On October 6, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service and granted an extension of time of 60 days to report back on the following:

1. Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund

On January 10, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 150 days with funding opportunities available to the City of Winnipeg to fund the restoration and acquisition of land to establish new park space as approved in the Winnipeg Parks Strategy.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Community Services

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
D. Domke	J. Berezowsky	T. Graham	J. Dunford

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OurWinnipeg 2045 includes policies to protect and enhance urban forests and natural habitats. It also includes direction for responding to climate change. One direction is to acquire 1,000 acres of new parks, waterways and natural areas.

This is further supported by direction in the *Winnipeg Parks Strategy*. The strategy recommends potential funding mechanisms for new parks. One of these is grants.

The Government of Canada's Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund closely aligns with the goals and policies of both *OurWinnipeg 2045* and the *Parks Strategy*. However, the City is unable to apply as there is no source from which to provide required matching funds.

To improve Winnipeg's ability to apply for grants and allow for parkland acquisition, the Public Service will be coming forward with recommendations proposing:

- changes to existing policies;
- the establishment of a reserve fund; and,
- a dedicated Parkland Acquisition capital budget.

The recommendations will be brought to the Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development. It has jurisdiction over the relevant policies as per the City Organization By-law No. 7100/97.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On January 10, 2025, the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 150 days with funding opportunities available to the City of Winnipeg to fund the restoration and acquisition of land to establish new park space as approved in the *Winnipeg Parks Strategy*.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no implications with receiving this report as information.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

Background

The Government of Canada offers the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund to address climate change and biodiversity loss, investing \$5 billion from 2021 to 2031. Although applications for the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund are currently closed, future intakes for the program are anticipated.

In addition to the Council-approved *Winnipeg Parks Strategy*, *OurWinnipeg 2045* has a number of statements that align with the goal of acquiring and establishing new parks.

The City of Winnipeg does not have a reliable funding source to purchase parkland without significant changes to its policies and a dedicated capital budget. This was recently highlighted when the City had no funding to purchase the Lemay lands. Similarly, the Sumka lands, ecologically significant lands along the Seine River, were recently purchased by a developer. These lands are considered key acquisitions because of their high value natural habitat and forests. These properties are some of the few remaining high quality, ecologically significant areas in Winnipeg.

OurWinnipeg 2045:

On May 26, 2022, *OurWinnipeg 2045 Development Plan* (OurWinnipeg), the City's 25-year plan for strategic growth and development, received third reading and was officially adopted by Council. Policy 2.20 speaks to the inherent value and ecological function of parks, waterways and natural areas which includes the direction to "increase quantity of such lands by 1,000 acres that can be accessed for recreation, social interaction, active living and connection of people and nature with nature, as population growth occurs." Additionally, policy 2.21 recognizes the value urban forests as "a key contributor to air quality, erosion control, carbon sequestration, storm water management, efficient energy resource consumption, shade, improved health and well-being, and mitigation of an adaptation to the urban heat island effect."

Winnipeg Parks Strategy

On May 26, 2022, Council adopted the *Winnipeg Parks Strategy* (Parks Strategy) as a long-range strategic plan to guide the City of Winnipeg parks system service delivery and investment decision-making. The Parks Strategy provides direction, policy and level of service targets for the ongoing provision of parks services and operations for the City.

The Parks Strategy includes policy direction for establishing new parks, outlining park types, locations, service targets and potential funding mechanisms. There are six types of park spaces identified (i.e. park classifications): Regional park, Regional sport park, Community park, Neighbourhood park, Nature park, and Linkage park. Priority locations for new parks include areas of higher poverty, in the Downtown, and in densely populated areas with below average parkland access. Protecting natural areas, archaeological and historical sites, and providing access to riverbanks and nature are also priorities for parkland acquisition.

Policies specifically directing natural area restoration and acquisition include:

- 4.2.1.20** In developed parts of the city where natural areas no longer exist, seek to naturalize low-functioning parks, first focusing on geographic areas of higher poverty.
- 4.2.1.21** Recognizing that most remaining natural areas lie beyond the built-up areas of the city, proactively acquire natural areas on the city outskirts to protect these habitats from development pressures, and in anticipation of future park needs.
- 4.1.1.31** Consider acquisition of school sites, golf courses, or other public lands that are made available for repurposing and suitable for designation as parkland.
- 4.1.1.33** Encourage and promote the donation of private land to expand the parks system for public use.
- 4.1.1.34** Seek creative alternatives to expand park access, such as exploring the possibilities and implications of publicly available private lands (i.e. green roofs, private park spaces).
- 4.2.2.C** Explore the opportunity to establish a separate and distinct land dedication requirement specific to the preservation of ecologically significant natural lands.
- 4.6.1.17** Pursue innovative funding opportunities to support park development and renewal.
- 4.6.2.P** Leverage provincial or federal infrastructure funding programs to renew trails, amenities, and facilities.
- 4.6.2.Q** Consider the establishment of land dedication-related funding streams, in addition to, or specifically allocated within the *Land Dedication Reserve Fund*, including:
 - i. A fund for the preservation of ecologically significant natural lands.

In addition, the Public Service is currently developing a Greenspace and Natural Corridors Plan By-law (Greenspace Plan) and a Biodiversity Policy, which align the priorities for the restoration and acquisition of new park and natural areas as part of its outcome.

Funding the Establishment and Restoration of New Parklands

Presently, there are opportunities available to the City to help with the establishment and restoration of new parklands, including:

1. Capital budget;
2. Special purpose reserve funds;
3. Declaration of Surplus and Sale of Property Policy; and
4. Land acquisition through donation or tax sale.

Each of these is described briefly below. The Public Service proposals are being provided for information regarding intended next steps.

The Public Service intends to bring formal recommendations to the Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development (SPC PD) in May 2026. As per Section 11 of the City Organization By-law No. 7100/97, SPC PD has jurisdiction over the relevant policies, including Parks Planning.

1. Capital Budget

A. Parkland Naturalization and Restoration Program (Public Works)

The Parkland Naturalization and Restoration Program has been approved in the 2025 budget for a total of \$200,000 in each of the years from 2026 to 2028 and then \$206,000 in 2029 and \$212,000 in 2030. This program is intended to support the implementation of restoration and naturalization projects within parks to address gaps in service, particularly in geographic areas of higher poverty, and in accordance with the Greenspace and Natural Corridors Plan and the Biodiversity Policy (currently in progress) and the Natural Areas Asset Management Plan (to be developed).

B. Parkland Acquisition (Public Works)

A Parkland Acquisition program was originally recommended in the *Winnipeg Parks Strategy*. The program called for \$7.7 million over five years but has not yet been funded through the budget process. Future funding of this program will support the acquisition of new parks.

Proposal

The Public Service proposes that a Parkland Acquisition Capital Budget be established to fund the policy goal of acquiring 1,000 acres of parkland. Currently, the Public Service is aware of two properties that are particularly valuable as parks property and may be available to purchase. A capital budget of \$2.64 million in 2027 would be required for the first property, while \$700,000 would be required in 2028 for the second. It is recommended the locations of these parks be kept in-camera as publishing the locations may negatively affect negotiation.

2. Special Purpose Reserve Funds

Special Purpose Reserve Funds, as per the *Reserve Funds* policy adopted by Council on May 23, 2001, are established to maintain specific program needs and provide budgetary stabilization.

A. Land Dedication Reserve (“LDR”)

In 1973, Council adopted policy that requires developers to pay cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication, where land is not conveyed to the City. The fund was established “for the purchase of land for recreation, parks and community use within the district.” The authority to require developers pay cash-in-lieu comes from the City of Winnipeg Charter (the “Charter”), which states in section 259(1)(b) “that instead of setting the condition [for land dedication] under clause (a), money be paid to the City for the purchase of land for purposes of the City other than streets.” Section 262(2) of the Charter further directs said cash-in-lieu “must be deposited in a reserve fund and used to purchase land for purposes of the City other than streets, or, with the approval of council, used in whole or in part for a city purpose other than the purchase of land.”

In 1979, Council amended the cash-in-lieu policy to direct payments from the sale of surplus Parks and Recreation lands to the LDR fund.

In 2008, Council approved the Land Dedication Reserve Policy to clarify how the fund is allocated and can be used. In accordance with the LDR policy, LDR funds may be utilized for:

- Acquisition of land for parks or recreation facilities;
- Development of properties for parks and recreational purposes including such ancillary equipment and structures as may be necessary to that development;
- Construction or renovation of recreation facilities on parks and recreation properties.

Currently, a total of 75 percent of every dollar collected for LDR is allocated to the Community Committee in which development occurred. The remaining 25 percent of every dollar collected is distributed, on an equal basis, to all the Community Committees.

The *Winnipeg Parks Strategy* includes policy direction to “Revisit the *Land Dedication Reserve Fund Policy* to confirm and clarify how the funds may be allocated, with an emphasis to designate a minimum percentage to be retained for the purchase of parkland.” LDR is a fund that may be used for park land acquisition; however, historically funds have primarily been directed to the construction or renovation of parks and recreation assets.

One of the main challenges with the current policy is that funding is largely dedicated to Ward-specific parks and recreation projects. Moreover, Council can waive the requirements, and there are a number of projects that move forward that are neither land acquisition nor parks and recreation related development.

If the City allocated a percentage of LDR funds specifically and exclusively to the establishment of new parks, this would enable the Public Service to acquire park land opportunistically and potentially leverage these funds for grants in support of this interest. Over the last five years, if 10 percent of the LDR funds were collected to fund new parklands city wide, approximately \$840,000 would be contributed to this fund. A higher contribution rate could also be considered at 15 percent or 20 percent because the purchase of land is significant. Based on past results, funds collected are estimated at \$1.3 million and \$1.7 million, respectively.

Proposal

On a go forward basis, it is proposed that a portion of LDR funds collected as cash-in-lieu of park land dedication be specifically directed to a park land acquisition fund for the purposes of acquiring land to establish new parks. Instead of the existing 75 percent and 25 percent split, it is recommended that 70 percent of the Reserve funds be allocated to Community Committee, 20 percent be distributed on an equal basis to all the communities, and 10 percent be directed to the Parkland Acquisition Fund.

B. Land Operating Reserve

The *Real Estate - Land Operating Reserve Fund Policy* (“LOR”) was adopted by Council on September 29, 2021, and last amended July 13, 2023. LOR establishes how proceeds and revenues from the sale of surplus City-owned land are allocated and what expenditures are authorized. Revenues are the gross proceeds from the sale of City property as well as interest earned. Proceeds are allocated to several program areas, including three percent to tree planting initiatives.

Proposal

It is proposed that the LOR be amended to redirect the three percent of gross sale revenue that is currently dedicated to tree planting to a *Parkland Acquisition Fund* instead. The rationale for this change is that protecting high quality mature trees on newly purchased park lands is more important than planting new trees. Moreover, Council’s funding of the Urban Forest Strategy has now ensured significant resources to the planting of new trees in the City.

C. Parkland Acquisition Fund

In the interest of acquiring new parklands, a policy that establishes a fund specifically and exclusively for this purpose can ensure the City is meeting with its policy direction.

This fund can pool from multiple existing resources including:

- a) Cash-in-lieu contributions from developers, exclusively for the acquisition of Non-City Property for parks or recreation facilities, in accordance with *Contribution in Lieu of Land Dedication Reserve Fund Policy*;
- b) Proceeds from any sale of City Property that is defined as a “Park” under the *Parks By-law No. 85/2009* and any City Property that is defined as “Parkland” under the *Real Estate – Declaration as Surplus and Sale of Property Policy*;
- c) Three percent of gross sale revenue from the sale of City Property, in accordance with *Real Estate – Land Operating Reserve Fund Policy*;
- d) Grants or donations from private entities, non-profits, or other levels of government; and,
- e) Interest income generated from the reserve fund balance.

Proposal

It is proposed that a *Parkland Acquisition Fund* policy be approved to ensure there is some level of base funding so new parks can be established.

3. Real Estate – Declaration as Surplus and Sale of Property Policy

The *Real Estate – Declaration as Surplus and Sale of Property Policy*, adopted by Council on September 29, 2021, and last amended September 26, 2024, outlines the requirements to declare City-owned property surplus, negotiate the terms and conditions of a sale, easement or land exchange, and the approval authority for the sale of City-owned property. Funds from the sale of surplus parkland are deposited into the LDR Fund.

Land exchange, also included in this policy, refers to the “sale of City-owned property in exchange for the acquisition of non-City-owned property.” The City may use land exchange as a mechanism to acquire new parks in areas of higher priority (e.g. higher poverty) or for land of higher priority (e.g. natural areas deemed valuable to protect).

The *Winnipeg Parks Strategy* supports the sale of City-owned parkland as per clause 4.1.1.44 where: “lands (are) deemed ‘non-essential’ (lands no longer considered a priority to retain for parkland or park-related purposes). This includes;

- i. Low-functioning parkland;
- ii. Fragments or isolated/inaccessible parkland (excluding riverbank lands or other disconnected parcels intended to form part of a future linkage park);
- iii. Parkland that cannot be repurposed for other park-related uses; or
- iv. Parkland in areas of above-average level of service, where evaluated community need and anticipated future demand are low.”

Directing the proceeds of park specific land from LDR Fund to the *Parkland Acquisition Fund* would help ensure the City has a net zero loss of park space when parkland is sold. In doing this, the City can endeavor to meet the park level of service target of 50m² of park per person, per the *Winnipeg Parks Strategy*. The funding could then be used to support a city-wide parkland acquisition strategy.

Proposal

It is proposed to amend the *Real Estate Declaration as Surplus and Sale of Property Policy* to direct all proceeds from the sale of surplus parkland to the *Parkland Acquisition Fund* to support the acquisition of new parklands.

4. Real Estate – Acquisition of Property Policy

There are a couple of mechanisms through which the City acquires land for potential use as new parks. The City can acquire privately held land, in accordance with the *Real Estate – Acquisition of Property Policy*. This Policy sets out the requirements to acquire non-City-owned property, to negotiate the terms and conditions of an acquisition, easement or land exchange, and the approval authorities for the acquisition of non-City-owned property.

Currently, the City is not able to respond to opportunities to acquire new parkland for purchases over \$700,000 without writing a report to Council or Committee of Council. This introduces a risk in the City's ability to strategically respond to parkland acquisition opportunities by introducing both time restraints and the public disclosure of intent to acquire. Amending the policy to provide the CAO with the authority to purchase land that is to be used for park purposes with a value of up to \$5,000,000 would enable the City to strategically respond to new parkland acquisition opportunities.

Further, landowners are occasionally interested in donating land to the City for park use. Land for parks tends to be donated to create a positive legacy in the community and provide recreational and environmental benefits for the public. In return, donors may receive a charitable tax receipt for the appraised value of the land. A change in this policy would better facilitate the process for donation of land for park use.

The City may also acquire land through tax sale. Tax sale properties are purchased using the LOR and the subject sites are resold to recover the cost of acquisition. If the City decides to retain a property taken in tax sale, the LOR must be reimbursed through another budget source as the LOR does not allow for purchase costs that cannot be recovered. If Parks considers a tax sale property to be valuable as a new park, a funding source must be available to acquire the land for parks purposes, by way of repaying the LOR. A funding source is also required to cover land appraisals and land transfer fees. Occasionally, the City acquires bare land which may be considered for naturalization. However, this would require not only the budget to cover the cost of restoration but also the budget to reimburse the LOR.

Proposal

To update the *Real Estate – Acquisition of Property Policy* to enable quicker responsiveness to potential parkland acquisition opportunities, including the purchase or donation of land. This would be accomplished by delegating the authority to the Director of Planning, Property and Development to approve and negotiate the terms and conditions of donation agreements, to enable the CAO to approve Purchases and Land Exchanges for Parkland up to and including \$5,000,000.00, regardless of appraised value, and to enable the CAO to approve Land Acquisition Programs for parkland.

In the case of acquiring parkland through donation or tax sales, it is proposed that the future *Parkland Acquisition Fund* reflect that it may be used to pay for costs incurred and/or associated with those land acquisitions.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** [February 27, 2026](#)

Project Name:
Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund

COMMENTS:

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

J. Ruby, 2026-02-27
J. Ruby, CPA, CA
Manager of Finance & Administration

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- Planning, Property and Development
- Legal Services (as to legal issues)

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

2.20 Leverage Green Infrastructure

Create a master green space and natural corridor plan by-law that enables conservation, management, restoration, and enhancement of the inherent value and ecological functioning of parks, waterways, natural areas and systems year-round, to support the environment, advance climate change adaptation and mitigation, and increase quantity of such lands by 1,000 acres that can be accessed for recreation, social interaction, active living and connection of people and nature with nature, as population growth occurs.

2.21 Leverage Green Infrastructure

Conserve, restore, and enhance the urban forest as a key contributor to air quality, erosion control, carbon sequestration, storm water management, efficient energy resource consumption, shade, improved health and wellbeing, and mitigation of and adaptation to the urban heat island effect.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

This report is in alignment with the *Winnipeg Climate Action Plan* through the following directions and their related actions:

Strategic Opportunity #7 Community Climate Resiliency

Direction 7.1: Implement opportunities to improve Winnipeg's Resilience and adaptability to the effects of a changing climate (Primary Responsibility: Office of Sustainability)

Direction 7.2: Increase and preserve tree canopy (Primary Responsibility: Public Works Department)

Direction 7.3: Preserve and manage parks and natural areas to support climate change mitigation (Primary Responsibility: Public Works Department)

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

The following actions are identified in the 2023-2027 Poverty Reduction Implementation Strategy in support of equitable access to City services, including parks and public open spaces:

6.1 Maintain & Expand Programs for Indigenous Youth

1. Increase supports for Indigenous organizations to host land-based education programs and cultural teachings at City parks and public open spaces. Supports could include providing free access to green space and facilities, equipment, honorariums for Elders, and/or supplies.
2. Healing spaces: Identify a City site to create a healing space, and explore methods to develop and operate a healing centre.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Public Works
Division: Parks and Open Space
Prepared by: David Domke, Manager, Parks and Open Space, PW
Stephanie Whitehouse, Senior Urban Designer, PPD
Shauna Prociuk, Project Manager, PPD
Date: February 27, 2026