A Retirement Roast for Councillor John Orlikow

Friends, colleagues, and fellow survivors of committee meetings, Orlikow entered City Hall so long ago that some of us genuinely assumed he was elected as part of a school civics project. He did come from trusteeship.

John Orlikow arrived at Council looking so young that security asked him where his parents were. Now, after so many years, three mayors, countless debates, and approximately 47,000 discussions about trees, he's leaving City Hall as Winnipeg's most experienced crossing guard for urban forestry. A bonified tree hugger.
If River Heights is Riverdale, then John has always been Archie Andrews to Gilroy and I.

Not because he's accident-prone— or for a record a love interest (sylvia can have him) and although there were a few committee agendas that suggested otherwise—but because somehow he spent his entire political career caught between two great loves.

On one side: neighbourhood preservation, mature communities, heritage, and making sure every tree had a lawyer.

On the other side was: growth, community development, investment, and city building.

And like Archie, John spent years trying to keep both happy while wondering why everyone seemed upset with him.

No councillor has ever loved trees more. Most people see a tree and think, "That's a nice tree." John sees a tree and thinks, "Has anyone checked whether this elm has been properly consulted?"

He fought for recreation centres and while he did too. John fought for the emotional wellbeing of Winnipeg's urban canopy.

While one forest, was taken away from him. Entire forests sleep better tonight because John Orlikow was on Council. In fact, when he announced his retirement, several mature ash trees immediately lowered their branches and whispered:

"Thank you for your service."

His accomplishments are substantial.

- The Waverley Underpass.
- The Bill and Helen Norrie Library.
- The Brenda Leipsic Dog Park that my dog Truth Bader Ginsberg can be found.

Three major achievements representing what truly matters in Winnipeg: getting over the tracks, getting a book, and walking a dog.

He served under three mayors: Sam Katz, Brian Bowman, and Scott Gillingham.

At various times he chaired committees, sat on Executive Policy Committee, and became the institutional memory of City Hall. He has the best gut for how a policy and program is going to land with the public. The gut – is invaluable.

And now John tells us: "So it just puts that a little bit more in perspective, that if I do have that time to do something else, now is the time, before it's too late." Which is a beautiful sentiment.

But let's be honest. Most Winnipeggers heard that quote and thought: "John finally found a tree he hasn't visited yet."

So, John, as you leave Council, know this:

You arrived as a baby-faced councillor – barely out of your tight speed skating outfit.

You leave as Winnipeg's elder statesman of collaboration, consultation, and canopy protection. You proved public service can be thoughtful, decent, and principled.
And while Archie eventually leaves Riverdale, everyone knows he'll still be wandering around town, checking on things, offering advice, and making sure nobody does anything too reckless.

Congratulations on your retirement, John. May your days be filled with your girls. Family, travel, community service, and the comforting knowledge that somewhere in Winnipeg, a tree is standing today because you worried about it first.

Love you and thank-you for your service to Winnipeg.