



### **YES TO TREES, NO TO NEW ROADS**

Well folks, I'd say the last 10 days have been pretty darn stellar. First off, the city's four year urban forestry budget shocked even me.

In fact, after years of descending on city council like a swarm of buzzing bees, urging that urban trees be seen as essential infrastructure, Trees Please Winnipeg and other greenspace organizations have finally hit pay dirt.

Over the next four years, urban forestry will not only have the money needed to replace the 1000s of trees we've lost and expand our canopy at a 2 to 1 ratio, council has also provided sufficient funds to achieve a seven year best practice pruning cycle for our mature public trees.

But that's not all. For the first time ever, the Public Works Engineering Dept will also provide additional cash, *out its own budget*, to ensure better tree protection during road renewal projects and provide money for silva cells – soil filled planting chambers that also capture storm run off - so trees can actually be planted along our roadways and survive.

I mean, wow - city departments working together toward a common goal? Who would have thought.

And just as an added bonus, the water captured by trees and silva cell systems also takes some of the burden off our combined sewer system.

So all those weeks spent getting council and mayoral candidates to sign The Trees Please Pledge and back the 20 year urban forestry strategy with cold hard cash, rather than empty promises, actually worked.

Now all we need to do is ensure the budgets outlined for the next four years are honoured. And I strongly suspect that our mayor and council will make that happen.

It's an astonishing leap forward, and the moral of story is this – you really can fight city hall and win them over if you're patient, methodical and have enough solid evidence to make your case.

And winning them over is critically important because increased funding for trees suggests that the mayor and council are finally beginning to understand the benefits of nature based solutions - using natural infrastructure to offset the impact of climate related extreme weather.

It also means that our city representatives are beginning to take climate resiliency seriously and looking past a 4 year election cycle to ensure that this city is a safer, greener place for our grandchildren. It could even mean that city council is ready to take increasingly bolder steps to reduce this city's carbon footprint.



Does Kenaston Blvd really need to be widened?

Yesterday, they got the perfect nudge to do just that from Federal Climate and Environment Minister, Stephen Guillbault, who announced that while the liberal government is more than willing to spend money to repair existing road infrastructure, it's no longer in the business of helping cities and provinces build new or wider roads.

When I heard that announcement I almost jumped for joy, unlike the head honcho of the conservatives, Mr. Poilievre, who seems to think that no new road construction means a return to prehistoric times and life in a mud huts.

So why was I jumping for joy while Mr. Poilievre was gnashing his teeth? It's pretty simple really. By not building new roads and investing instead in things like natural infrastructure, active transportation and denser walkable communities, this city might actually start to reduce its massive infrastructure debt.

Because here's the thing – new roads don't stay new for long. They buckle, break down and collapse into potholed nightmares, which means endless decades of constant and costly repair. While natural infrastructure like trees and storm water parks just keep doing what they do, with very little backend cost.

And in the long term, saying yes to trees and no to new roads can also free up money to invest in other things like, say, libraries or outdoor pools or shelter for the homeless.

And just as an added bonus, by not building new roads and expanding our canopy, we'll also be significantly reducing our carbon footprint.

I mean, come on people. What would you prefer? A lushly treed city that's safe to walk through because council has invested in services for kids and families rather than cars? Or a city that's edging toward bankruptcy because it continues to equate growth and progress with the unbridled construction of the new and the bigger?

I know which option I'd go for and given that most of you love your kids and grandkids, I'd lay bets on which option you'd go for too. Because no matter which way you look at, more trees and a moratorium on new roads spells a better climate safe future for everyone.

*Erna Buffie is a writer, filmmaker and chair of Trees Please Winnipeg. To read about Winnipeg's infrastructure debt go to <https://www.dearwinnipeg.com/>*