



## Make Hope Your Superpower in 2024

Grocery bills that make me gasp. Wars that leave me feeling horrified and helpless. And a climate emergency which, this year, brought us devastating forest fires, flash floods and the highest recorded temperatures ever, worldwide.

As the Queen once put it, 2023 has been in many ways an *annus horribilis*.

So what do we do to counteract the despair and the grief?

I can't speak for others, but I can tell you what I do. I pay close attention to everything that might offer me even just a glimmer of hope.

So in the post-seasonal spirit of sharing, here are a few of the events I've observed and the people I've read about or met which left me feeling more hopeful about the coming year:

First off is my newest hero, Walter Kehm, a man who should be a role model for architects, builders and developers everywhere. Kehm, a noted landscape architect, walked away from a

multimillion dollar redevelopment project at Ontario Place, because he was opposed to clearing hundreds of trees to make way for a high end spa and waterpark on Toronto's waterfront.

Apparently, Kehm values a walk in a city forest - one that will outlive most of us - over the more ephemeral value of a waterslide and spa.

To say that I agree would be an understatement.

And there's no shortage of hope-inspiring, local heroes right here in Winnipeg - people like Cat Gauthier, Stacy Gosman and Georges Beaudry. Gauthier and Gosman have been leading the charge to protect the 22 acre Lemay forest in St Norbert, while Georges Beaudry has been hard at work for more than 2 years, pressuring the city to save and protect the Sumka Forest in St Vital south from development.

Then there are all the neighbourhood groups - from Glenwood and Wolseley to Riverview and the West End – that have been busy planting trees to enhance and climate proof their communities with the aid of city grants, and often, with a helping hand from the amazing folks at Trees Winnipeg.

Hope can also be found at city council these days as our civic representatives scramble behind the scenes to find the money needed to purchase and protect our few remaining intact forests. Kudos go to members of the Riel Committee for encouraging the city to act on purchasing those woodlands, and a special nod to Brian Mayes, who as city councillor responsible for water, waste and the environment has also established a citizens' advisory committee on climate.

Also deserving of a hat tip is councillor Cindy Gilroy who initiated a motion to have Winnipeg sign the Montreal Biodiversity Pledge. The Pledge motion, supported by Trees Please and OURS Winnipeg, passed in April and includes 15 actions to protect urban biodiversity – the forests, wetlands and river corridors that mitigate climate change and support wildlife.

For the past decade, OURS Winnipeg has also been lobbying the city for a comprehensive greenspace and biodiversity policy which, under the guidance of city councillor Sherri Rollins, will appear some time in the next year or two.

All of these actions spell hope, because they represent a sea change on council - a growing awareness amongst our politicians that nature-based solutions can enhance this city's climate resiliency.

Another reason for hope? Just take a look at the Consider Climate Campaign launched during our recent provincial election. That campaign, led by volunteers and local climate NGOs, was based on a poll which found that an astonishing 75% of Manitobans believe climate change should be incorporated into every government decision.

So, will our new NDP government make that happen?

Well, if 75% of us continue to demand that climate be the lens for decision making, I believe we will see a paradigm shift – a shift in perspective that measures real progress not in balanced budgets and GDP, but in terms of what’s good for both people and the environment.

Finally, when I feel really hopeless, I turn to the world’s scientists, especially those like Australian climate expert, Lesley Hughes.

Hughes openly admits to the grief she experiences as a climate scientist, especially when diving on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, where coral species continue to bleach and die in rising ocean temperatures. But she counters that grief with hope.

Hope, for her, is the great motivator, a boundless natural resource and a strategy for counteracting despair. Because, as she puts it, if the world’s scientists give into despair, if she and the rest of us give up, “then we are all lost.”

So my advice for 2024? Make hope your superpower and use it to make your voice heard.

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