

The Lance

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The Lance welcomes letters to the editor
in a regular post. All letters must

Zoning not enough to protect parks



Michele Kading
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ST. VITAL

Sadly, on Oct. 12, the last remnants of Winnipeg's Parker forest and wetlands were destroyed. Ten years ago (2008), the city owned this ecologically-significant natural land (ESNL). It had been used as a nature park by the Beaumont neighbourhood for decades, as evident by its many trails.

In 2007, Winnipeg adopted an ecologically significant natural lands strategy to protect public and private lands that contain important pockets of natural flora and fauna.

As an advocate for conserving Winnipeg's ESNL since 1999, I naively assumed that ESNL already owned by the city was safe. I was wrong. In 2009, city council declared the Parker land surplus and swapped it to a developer.

The same year, city council initiated a process to remove golf courses (zoned as PR2 and PR3) from parks jurisdiction, making it easier to sell these parks in the future. The Seine River owes much of its natural beauty

to three golf courses that line its banks. While the city may not want to designate ESNL or golf courses as parks, many Winnipeggers do.

In light of significant public outcry about the Parker land swap and the sale of golf courses, I thought the city would shy away from selling any more city-owned ESNL or park land.

Wrong again. In December 2017, council decided that Winnipeg needs another warehouse more than it needs 10 acres of Grade A forest in St. James. Meanwhile, other park land (zoned PR2 and PR3) is being eyed for a health treatment centre and a police station.

These seemingly endless, city-wide threats make me wonder if any natural lands or parks in Winnipeg will ever be protected in perpetuity.

Some have said that the Parker Land was an easy target because it was not zoned for park purposes. It requires more votes at city council to declare park land surplus (11 of 16) than non-park land (nine of 16).

Does Bois-des-Esprits face a similar risk? Fifteen acres of this cherished forest are still zoned residential (R). They were never re-zoned after they were purchased.

The city says that re-zoning the Bois-des-Esprits from residential to park status is unnecessary, costly, and would not improve protection because the land is obviously



Supplied photo

Winnipeg's ecologically-sensitive natural lands (ESNL) contain important pockets of natural flora and fauna.

being used as a park despite its zoning. I wonder if the people of the Beaumont neighbourhood, who obviously used the Parker forest as a park for decades, would agree.

What more can we do?

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.