



Delay, Delay And More City Delays

I was waiting patiently on June 9th for the city to post the agenda for a Community Services Committee meeting scheduled for the 13th of the month. When it appeared I was delighted that the Report on City Tree Bylaws I expected to see was listed.

But when I hit the link – ta da! - there was no report for me to read. Only a couple of lines saying it had been delayed for yet another 60 days.

Now, I know that report was completed well in advance of the meeting, so why has it been delayed? After all, the establishment of a public and private tree bylaw isn't rocket science, given that at least seven other Canadian cities have it on their books.

And why have those cities passed those bylaws? Well, it's because they know that protecting not just their public trees but trees on private land, while also expanding their overall canopy cover, is one of the best ways to improve their climate resiliency.

Which, at the risk of repeating myself, yet again, is essential.

In fact, I've written numerous times about the services our mature trees provide from mitigating heatwaves and superstorms to fighting pollution and even increasing the price of your home.

So why the seeming reluctance to get the job done? Is city council afraid of initiating bylaws that would protect the trees that protect and benefit all of us? Are they afraid the general public will storm the doors of council yelling about their individual property rights and

freedoms? Including the freedom to cut down their perfectly healthy mature yard trees just because they don't like raking leaves?



Or is council more concerned about developers who believe they have the unfettered right to clear cut thousands of trees on their “private land,” simply because it’s more convenient for any future construction they might undertake?

I’ll let you answer that question Although the fact that there’s a civic election looming on the horizon may have some play in what is rapidly becoming a pattern of delay at City Hall.

Take, for example, the Property and Development Committee’s deferral of a motion to study how the city might assist its citizens in switching to clean energy.

Or the recent delay of a report on how and when the city might apply to the federal Nature Smart Climate Change fund for money to purchase land for parks and greenspaces or restore the ones they have. An utterly baffling delay considering the ongoing demand for a “new fiscal deal” from other levels of government!

Add to that the outcomes of Winnipeg’s Reduced Speed Neighbourhood Pilot project that was due in the fall of 2024 and is still nowhere in sight. Plus a 30 day delay on a report for plans to improve bike and pedestrian safety on Wellington Crescent, which was expected to appear at

the Public Works Committee meeting earlier this month. Chair of the committee, Councillor Lukes asked for the public's patience, noting that such studies typically take 3 years to complete.

Really? Deciding to create a safe bike path on a residential feeder road leading to the city's biggest park, as well as a few dozen residential streets, takes three years?

Give me a break.



Then there's Winnipeg's own unanimously adopted Climate Action Plan, which includes, among other things, a set of goals to facilitate and encourage active modes of transportation. That plan was approved 7 years ago, and we're still waiting for council to fix a city full of dangerous roads that prevent people from actually *using* active transportation.

So, if low-hanging fruit like the above takes years and years to bring over the finish line, there is no doubt - we will not reach our climate action targets by 2030.

And yes, of course, some delays may be legitimate. After decades of austerity, most city departments are operating – and I use that word loosely - with little more than a skeleton staff in a large bureaucracy that appears to be deeply siloed.

But our province is literally on fire. Climate change is here, and it threatens every aspect our lives. So these delays aren't just frustrating. They're dangerous.

I don't know the conversations and machinations happening behind closed doors at city hall. Maybe it's true that some of the delays are due to the complex nature of the initiatives. Perhaps they're the result of a public service that lacks capacity and resources. Or maybe our elected officials are just worried about public backlash in the leadup to a civic election.

Only the mayor and council know for sure. What is for certain? - with every delay, we're losing time we don't have.

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