



**(CONT.) ADOPTING A RIGHTS-BASED LENS ON
LAND DEVELOPMENT AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
FOR THE PROTECTION OF PEOPLE AND ECOSYSTEMS**

JAN 7, 2025

WINNIPEG, MB

Dear Chairperson Rollins and members of the Standing Policy Committee on Property and Development, councillors Allard, Eadie, Rollins, Schreyer, and His Worship Mayor Gillingham.

As the situation unfolds and this matter proceeds through the courts, we would like to reiterate our stance. In response to new insights gained in speaking with land defenders, and stakeholders and the response we received from councillor Eadie, we'd like to expand on some arguments that were made in our previous correspondence.

While land defenders, coalitions, law enforcement, and judicial officers are doing the best they can to honour efforts to save this forest, with what flexibility our current systems afford them, it has become increasingly obvious that corporations can easily leverage these systems for their advantage. It appears that recent developments may allow the community more time to act and undertake legal proceedings to halt the destruction of this important space. On the other hand, we have received word that the developer intends to access the property at 9:30 AM this morning (January 8th, 2025) attended by Winnipeg Police Service, presumably to continue carrying out the destruction they have commenced. If this comes to pass, we may have no choice left but to bear witness to needless ecocide, our hands tied, unable to intervene as this critical habitat disappears and devastating alterations are made to our valued space. A space not only vital to our Indigenous population but also immense amounts of wildlife, some protected species, which will be permanently displaced.

Meanwhile, the Manitoba Habitat Conservancy has made a new \$5.25 million offer to buy the parcel of land in question. While this figure is perhaps inferior to the purported profit generated by developing an assisted living center, it is much higher than what was paid for the property, not to mention plans for the center have been rejected at every level. Expenses relating to the development of the land would no longer be relevant in the event of its sale, increasing profit margins associated with this venture. Yet despite this dramatic increase in potential profit, concerns have been expressed that the offer is too low.

To be clear, we are not contesting or condemning 'any and all forms' of capitalistic endeavor. In the simplest terms, businesses exist to offer people the chance to meet other people's needs and get compensated accordingly. What we see, however, are companies deciding for us what we want and need, then putting their efforts toward silencing dissent, rather than seeking to provide what the community requires. Projects are often selected not for their inherent benefit to the community but based on maximum profit margins and optimal price points. If a corporation's business model does not afford them the ability to honour the community's priorities while earning compensation, that is a decision bearing its own consequences. If that decision turns out to be a mistake, the ensuing loss of profits should be their burden to shoulder.

It is our understanding that even suggesting amending legal frameworks could place the government at risk of litigation, as this could be construed as impeding a company's operations and disrupting its profits. If this is indeed the case, corporations have reached a level of influence that constitutes a direct threat to our democracy. Suppose corporations can successfully prosecute based on 'being encumbered from achieving the best possible return on investment'. In that case, it amounts to an insurance plan on their earnings, sponsored by taxpayers. We do not believe that municipalities, provinces, or federal governments should be in the business of financing this type of costly insurance program.

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These deeply concerning trends will only intensify and accelerate in the absence of regulatory mechanisms and legal frameworks dedicated to protecting the community's interests. With our collective agency at stake, a failure to act would be akin to handing over the keys to the city.

When powerful corporations are allowed to sue communities into submission, we lose sovereignty over the places we call home. When businesses operate solely to maximize profit, that profit dictates where and how we get to live. We ask whether these types of enterprises are truly entities that as a community we want to draft plans for our neighborhoods.

To attract honest businesses operating with integrity, we must first level the playing field; innovative startups will not want to compete with established developers if they have a stranglehold on the local market. We have habitually been afraid to scare off businesses and investors, but we should not fear driving off plunderers and profiteers. By failing to do so, we set Winnipeg up as an easy place for businesses to exploit and extort.

We need to break the self-amplifying negative cycle, by embarking on a self-amplifying empowering one. It is not sustainable for our citizens to defend our soils, forests, rivers, and wetlands one space at a time. This would require immeasurable time, energy, and resources, including both private and public funds, to be invested to safeguard our spaces. Until better protections are in place.

We will continue to educate others and gather support for this initiative. We will continue to hold decision-makers accountable. We will also continue to offer our assistance in finding a way forward, together. We would be grateful for a seat at the table to further discuss how to address this challenging issue. Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

Sincerely,

Rene Hince, Director, Grey Jay Healing Inc.

