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**Aan:** Wolbert Meijer <[wolbert.meijer@groningen.nl](mailto:wolbert.meijer@groningen.nl)>

**Onderwerp:** Re: vraag over inspreken tijdens raadsvergadering

Geachte meneer Meijer,

Hierbij mijn twee teksten over Groenplan en APVG. Ze zijn nog in het engels en te lang maar ik zal voor morgen mijn toespraak in Nederlandse vertalen en in een veel korter versie - beide ongeveer 300 woorden etc.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Kristin

**Proposal for better integration between green/tree proposals of city council (Vitamine G) and its implementation by municipal green workers**

Kristin McGee (Boomwachters Groningen)

August 24, 2020

### **Part 1 (Vitamine G) – Better integration between Vitamine G and municipal green division**

Considering recent commitments for more environmental and tree-friendly policies by the city council, the Boomwachters Groningen encourages first and foremost **more collaboration, oversight and interaction by members of the council and the greens division of the municipality**. In our experience, there appears a profound disconnect between what is done on the ground and the policy proposals created by council members. There are many cases in which the council is even unaware of large-scale projects with plans to remove entire forested regions or hundreds of sometimes potentially monumental trees. This is obviously an ineffective structure preventing a truly sustainable implementation of a green plan through the proper application of its related regulations (such as the APVG).

### **Size Matters - Tree cover over Tree numbers**

The first amendment to the Vitamine G plan needs to be an emphasis on tree crown cover ratios over tree numbers, although tree numbers should also be inventoried. Tree cover tells us much more about the health of the city and its overall tree population. A large tree cover ratio also indicates greater biodiversity, a more sustainable climate, and healthier living conditions.

### **Tree crown ratio targets as basis**

No green proposal will be effective unless a basic tree crown ratio target is set and monitored on yearly basis. The first step in designing a city's tree policy is the fundamental understanding of knowing what is there and how it will be preserved. Then, the goal of extending the urban forest through massive tree planting can be a second priority. A third priority should be adequate and expert-based regulations for the proper care of both mature trees and newly planted trees.

### Yearly inventories

Second, this plan needs to require yearly inventories of tree removals, tree plantings (compensation rules), and tree values of tree cover based upon iTree Tools environmental criteria such as *carbon sequestration*, *pollution* and *water filtration*. These can be easily quantified with iTreeTools or other programs. These inventories should be published online and widely available to the public. With such transparency, we the residents request more accountability to this proposal's aims.

### Better regulations for tree maintenance and care

In fact, the actual objectives of Vitamin G are not in alignment with the existing cutting quotas, pruning styles, and overall maintenance of urban trees. Such integration would require more centralization as tree maintenance appears highly inconsistent depending upon the contracted tree pruner, the role of the neighbourhood head (wijkhoofden), or the maintenance by SBB in city parks and green corridors. We would therefore suggest an improved municipal-wide standard for tree pruning such as yearly scheduled tree assessment and pruning, required crown to trunk ratios, the preservation of large, structural limbs, and the abolishment of destructive techniques such as lions tailing, extreme crown raising, and topping.

### 30% tree loss in a decade

Further, unless the APVG is radically transformed and in concert with current goals, local tree workers and administrators of the VTH will continue to enable the irreversible destruction of healthy large-statue trees contained within Groningen's interconnected urban forest. In effect, these regulations have made it easy to remove a tree, **leading to a estimated nearly 30% loss of tree cover in Groningen in the last decade**, based on numbers provided by the gemeente (Vitamine G, 2020) in comparison to the prior reports (Groene Pepers, 2009), which in 2009 indicated an estimated inventory of some 220,000<sup>1</sup> city owned trees in Groningen, Haren, and Ten Boer. **Conversely, the current estimation of only 140,000 municipal trees as listed in Vitamin G reveals a loss of some 80,000 trees in only a decade.** And this doesn't even consider trees felled by (SBB) StaatsBosBeheer which manages several green areas and parks in Groningen. These trees do not require permits for felling by SBB and this too needs to be reversed and centralized. Other municipalities have witnessed a similar trend in tree losses such as in Ede where their balance descended from 90,000 trees to only 60,000 in just five years since the push towards so-called renewable energy as a core priority of the Netherlands' energy transition program<sup>2</sup>.

### Tree permit deregulation in last five years

Since around 2016, because of deregulation of tree permits as well as a loss of financing and lack of centralization in tree monitoring, maintenance, and felling, Groningen has witnessed, unfortunately, a period of increased incentives for tree cutters to remove or aggressively prune healthy trees and consequently dramatically reduce the life spans of specimens which previously could have contributed essential benefits for decades to come, especially those

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<sup>1</sup> In the Groene Pepers report, some 180,000 trees are listed in Groningen. In the Groen Parel report in Haren, some 30,000 trees are mentioned. We estimate some 10,000 trees in Ten Boer.

<sup>2</sup> 13 aug. 2020, "In vijf jaar, tienduizenden bomen gekapt" <https://www.edestad.nl/lokaal/natuur-en-milieu/357236/tienduizenden-bomen-in-vijf-jaar-gekapt-in-ed>

helping to combat the adverse and expensive costs of climate change, such as from drought, water drainage, and extreme heat.

Until there is actual harmonization between the utopian green words of Vitamine G and its implementation within processes for obtaining felling permits, with a centralized oversight and expert based maintenance of trees and with full compensation, yearly inventorying and monitoring of replanting, the continued decrease of the urban canopy will continue at an alarming pace. Now we have one of the lowest tree crown cover ratios in NL. **At 12% we could stand to regain some 10-15% tree cover for a truly liveable city in an increasingly hot concretized city centre.** If we don't set targets for tree cover and incorporate these into both the APVG assessment criteria as well as our green proposal, more and more green space will be built over with new housing, businesses, and roadways projects. There needs to be better balance between expansion and preservation for a truly liveable and sustainable city. We need to protect all existing mature trees, green buffer zones, tiny forests, and urban parks, as these green spaces are the most valuable for the current climate challenges.

I ask you, what tree cover ratio do you find necessary and which areas will **you** identify as requiring special protection for the coming years? Or will we look back at this period with regret for not recognizing the essential value of those few green spaces and healthy adult trees that use to be here, such as in the Driebondsbos near the Meerstad, a once thriving urban forest, removed in order to allow an unchecked and unsustainable expansion for short term financial gain and unobtainable expensive housing for most.

