

Speech given by Grace Nombrado, Executive Director of Free the Fern
To City Council in Support of the “Motion 8: Greening the City”
September 17, 2025

Hi, I am Grace Nombrado, Executive Director of the environmental non-profit, Free the Fern, and I am here to speak in support of “Motion 8: Greening the City” or, as I like to call it, “The Mini but Mighty Motion”.

For thousands of years, what we now call Vancouver, was covered by dense old growth Douglas fir & cedar forest. This forest was stewarded by the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Today, only 4% of that original forest remains.

Over the past 4 ½ years, I have had the honour of stewarding one of these last remaining forests, the Champlain Heights Trails, in South East Vancouver. With the support of the City of Vancouver, my non-profit, Free the Fern, and over 1,500 local volunteers, we have removed 233 cubic meters of invasive species and replanted over 3,500 native plants in the trails.

We consider our work an act of healing and reconciliation, as we replace colonial invasive species with Indigenous plants, helping heal the land, return that which was lost, and support the tradition of caretaking that the First Peoples continue to this day.

Through this work of restoration, I have come to see that there are many benefits of having a forest in our neighbourhood:

- In the summer it is 10 degrees cooler under the Douglas Fir trees
- When we have an atmospheric river the forest floor helps mitigate flooding
- The forest provides habitat for owls, bats, eagles, woodpeckers and many migratory birds
- While the forest also provides access to berries, including salmonberries, thimbleberries, saskatoon & salal.
- Not to mention, the community connections that come from stewarding a forested area

I often think, “I wish everyone in the city had access to a forest in their neighbourhood.”

At the same time, we have competing pressures: climate change, lack of available land, and a housing crisis.

Thankfully, this motion addresses all these concerns by incorporating Miyawaki or mini forest design.

Started in Japan in the 1970’s by Akira Miyawaki, this form of afforestation is now spreading globally. It involves the dense planting of native species - trees, shrubs, ferns, and groundcover – into small, urban spaces. As small as 2 parking spaces! These dense plantings lead to faster growth, increased biodiversity, and climate change mitigation. These mini forests could be planted on the edges of new developments, existing transportation corridors, parks, school properties, and other lands that are not ideal for other proposed development.

This motion supports many City-wide and Park Board Strategies & Policies, including:

1. *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2024)*: Which identifies urban forests as playing a vital role in our response to extreme heat, heavy rainfall, and drought

2. *Vancouver Plan 2050*: Which proposes expanding habitat for wildlife and restoring ecological corridors
3. And other City Strategies: *Rain City Strategy* (2019), *Biodiversity Strategy* (2016), and *Vancouver Bird Strategy* (2015)

This “Mini but Might Motion” just makes sense for our city and the future of our climate, and I encourage you to vote in support of it.