OUTDOOR URBAN RECREATIONAL SPACES WINNIPEG

(OURS-Winnipeg)

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PRESENTATION BY RONALD MAZUR,

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to

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE , CITY OF WINNIPEG

Golf Course Sale and Leasing - The Facts

The future of 12 city-owned golf courses is on the line. Next week Council will consider the sale of John Blumberg (27-hole course on 81 hectares of riverfront property in Headingley), and leasing courses at Kildonan Park, Crescent Park, Harbour View and Windsor Park.

Here are 10 points that you need to remember about golf courses/green space:

1. **Golf courses can make money. Profit depends on management and city administration. Winnipeg courses covered their costs before they were moved into the Winnipeg Golf Services Special Operating Agency in 2002. Revenue generated by the golf courses has been transferred to the general operating budget since then.**

2. **The public is supporting keeping golf course lands public. OURS presented Council with a petition with over 8,000 signatures. Hundreds of people – particularly seniors and students – use the golf courses. In winter skiers, school programs and others use the courses. The public wants and deserves access, affordability and accommodation of their interests.**

3. **Golf courses are an important recreational and health asset for the community. Green space is a recognized benefit for any modern city seeking to attract companies, families and professionals. Green space becomes more valuable as urban density increases.**

4. **Who gains and who loses if golf courses are privatized. Clearly golf courses can be profitable, so who should benefit from these assets – private companies or the public? An Ontario company or Winnipeg families?**

5. **Selling off assets is bad management. Council needs to raise revenue, but eliminating revenue potential exposes the lack of vision and creative thinking in dealing with the city's major needs – now and for the future.**

Here is what you need to remember about how the sale decision has been manipulated:

6. **The public has been denied their voice. 20 registered delegations including OURS-Winnipeg were denied time to speak to the Property and Development Committee chaired by Russ Wyatt in February 2012. Even as recently as Friday, at the ASD Committee, delegations wanting to speak against the leasing and sale of the golf courses were denied an opportunity to speak.**

7. **City officials have refused to disclose golf course financials. A freedom of Information request made by OURS-Winnipeg was denied by the City. The subsequent complaint to the provincial Ombudsman has passed the 90 day time limit for investigation without resolution. The lack of transparency continues.**

8. **Recommendations by consultants have been selectively used. The Golf Convergence report has been cherry picked for recommendations and analysis that supports privatization. However, comments by the consultants that point out how the city has underfunded and mismanaged the golf courses, thus creating the appearance of their failure, have been ignored.**

9. **City Hall has neither informed nor consulted the public on proposed changes to the golf courses. On such an important issue as selling public land, the public should be involved, as any decision will have long term impact on the future directions of city planning and land use.**

10. **The Mayor and Deputy Mayor have abused their authority and are trying to pressure Councillors to support privatization. The 'Responsible Winnipeg' campaign must be challenged as a misuse of public funds for the purpose of pressing a few councillors to support the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in their desire to sell the golf courses. Their campaign:**

    a. **Was initially misrepresented as a community organization**

    b. **Pretended to have a track record in taking on issues**

    c. **Claims to provide information but does not**

    d. **And now hides the action of two individuals beneath a canopy of the City of Winnipeg.**

Municipal golf courses have historically been regarded as recreation facilities that served a public good or social need. The change to focusing on profitability was implemented with the formation of Winnipeg Golf Services in 2002. Its Operating Charter changed the mandate to "shift the strategic and operational focus to that of maximizing profitability."

In 2011 the focus changed to real estate development with the Expression of Interest to sell the golf courses for commercial and residential development.

Any plan to convert public lands to private lands through long-term leases and sale surely demands public consultations before any decision. We are facing the largest conversion of public land to private land in the history of Winnipeg, and yet there have been no public consultations on the issue. A long term lease privatizes public land by restricting access and control.

It is important to note that the Golf Convergence Report, the City Auditor's Report and the 2011 Expression of Interest Request ALL included the two stage process for achieving private development on city golf courses:

A. **In the short term, conduct a competitive bid process for the operation of the city run golf courses:**

B. **In the long term, follow the City Auditor's recommendations regarding the divestiture of City-owned golf courses for commercial or residential development.**

Selling John Blumberg Golf Course is simply the first step in a long term plan to eliminate public green space and replace it with private development.

Leasing the City-run golf courses to private management is simply the first step in the long term plan to eliminate public green space and replace it with private development.

We must protect all our public green spaces so they are available to future generations.

Once they are lost, they are gone forever.

I conclude with the following quote by Chief Seattle of the Susquamish Nation:

"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors;

We borrow it from our children."

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