Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces Winnipeg

(OURS-Winnipeg)

May 28, 2013

Presentation by Pam Lucenkiw,

Co-Chair, OURS-Winnipeg

to

Executive Policy Committee, City of Winnipeg

I will first mention our Access to Information request that the city has been stalling in responding to. This is disappointing coming from an Agency that promised "Operating as an SOA will enhance the financial and organizational accountability of Winnipeg Golf Services."

I will move to the main focus of my presentation - the greenspace. The auditors reported that Winnipeg has excessive green space, a daunting problem that the sale of the golf courses can fix. "Enhance the balance" was the wording used in the report.

OURS Petition garnered signatures from 8500 citizens asking to preserve the greenspace. Many took the extra step of writing comments hoping they would be heard. I would suggest taking a look at the petition filed in the city clerks' office. You may view citizens' comments about green space. The mayor has said he wants to hear what citizens have to say. It is all there neatly packaged. That is what citizens said.

CBC Radio interviewed Leon Younger, the president of Pros Consulting in Indiana, the company that was credited for providing the greenspace standard value of 4 hectares per 1000 of population for the Operational Report.

Here is what Leon Younger said in the radio interview. There is no such thing as too much greenspace. It is based on a community's values. The "too much green space" standard of 4 hectares (9 acres) per 1000 of population was seen as low. He said people are increasingly valuing urban greenspace especially park and streamside areas. He said greenspace standards are increasing. 6.1 hectares (15 acres) of greenspace per 1000 is the norm. Cities in the Midwest average more green space with a normal range of 6 hectares (15 acres) to 8 hectares (20 acres) per 1000 of population.

This puts Winnipeg currently with 6 hectares as being at the low end. The audit report is proposing reducing from 6 hectares to 4 hectares, even with population growth forecast.

Mr. Younger looks at golf courses as park first and golf course second. When golf course lands are looked at as a single amenity there is a much greater inclination to sell it off.

He simply provided Golf Convergence a low and a high number because they asked for a range. The City chose the low number for its report.

The following is from the May 2010 Consultant's Report titled "Operational Review - City of Winnipeg Golf Services Executive Summary"

Under the heading of "**Daunting Challenges**" the rational to expand the focus on golf courses to excessive green space is introduced.

> "The initial purpose of this report was to focus on the three golf courses operated and maintained by the City. Unfortunately, such a narrow focus is ill-advised."
>
> The third of three Daunting challenges in this section is
>
> "☐ Council's historical practice to maintain all existing Open Space far greater than recommended by international standards. With a footnote 4 Pros Consulting, "Draft Level Service Report," December, 2009, pg 4."

It is of note that a golf analysis company is commenting on "Excessive Park Spaces" in Winnipeg as the amount of park space is a decision based on the values of its community.

The report goes on .

> **"Excessive Open Public Space"**
>
> "The **plight** of the golf courses **masks** a far more important issue. Based on international standards, the City of Winnipeg maintains open park space at a rate that is 50% greater than required by comparable municipalities.
> For most mid-western prairie-based municipalities, the accepted ratio is 4 hectares per 1,000 of population.6 Currently, the City of Winnipeg maintains as open park space 6.1 hectares per 1,000 of population. ... Even with predicted growth in the Winnipeg population, there will still be a **sizeable excess of open park space** in 2020."
>
> Again referenced to 6 Pros Consulting, "Draft Level Service Report," December, 2009, pg 4

What Pros consulting said in the CBC interview is 4 hectares (9 acres) per 1000 of population is a low number and the average for mid-western cities is 6 hectares (15 acres) to 8.1 acres (20 acres) per 1000 of population.

The report writers chose the lowest number and called it excessive and went on to emphasize the point that even with future predicted growth there would still be a sizable excess. Mr. Younger said that cities are increasingly valuing greenspace and the rates are increasing.

Farther on is the heading

> **A Plan for Action: A Mandate for Change**

3) The sale of golf courses for commercial or residential development is advocated to raise capital for judicious reinvestment and to **enhance the balance between commercial, residential, and open park space** as part of a master plan for open space.

In November 2010 The Audit department firms up the plans in its dpcument

Operational Review of Winnipeg Golf Services November 2010
"Leaders in building public trust in civic government"

In the longer-term, the report identifies that Winnipeg has a surplus of open park space when compared to other mid-western prairie based municipalities. The consultant recommends that the City divest itself from the operation of public golf courses... Any surplus property can then be sold for commercial or residential development to raise capital for reinvestment in other open park space."

The very lowest standard for greenspace was used in Convergence Consulting May 2010 Report and was used by the Auditor as a rationalization from which to further reduce green space by selling golf courses.

It is of interest to note how the question of too much green space and sale of green space became so central to the ~~Auditor~~ Consultant's report about golf courses.

The Audit Report did not do due diligence in determining a value for greenspace. It was out of step with trends in other Midwestern cities that are increasing green space.

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.

OURS Winnipeg held three public forums where citizens where consulted about green space and golf courses in the absence of opportunities by the City.

Does all of this this taint my confidence in the Auditors report? Yes it does.

Reference

CBC http://www.cbc.ca/player/AudioMobile/Information%20Radio%20-%20MB/ID/2248106302/