OURS-WINNIPEG
Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces - Winnipeg
Presentation to City of Winnipeg, Executive Policy Committee

Re: Proposed Sale of City-owned Property – Part of 4540 Portage Avenue (John Blumberg Golf Course)
Jan. 17, 2022
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OURS-Winnipeg (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces – Winnipeg) is a city-wide, community-based, green space advocacy organization with a focus on urban green spaces, river and nature corridors and the urban forest.
OURS-Winnipeg was formed in 2011 to stop the planned sale of city-owned golf courses for commercial and residential development.
City Council ultimately agreed with OURS position and the proposed sale of golf courses failed to achieve the required 2/3 majority of Council.
The old policy of selling greenspace for commercial and residential development was championed by then Mayor Sam Katz. That old policy still looms large, as today, Winnipeg again faces a proposed sale of public green space at the John Blumberg Golf Course.
The sale of John Blumberg Golf Course is based on these old policies that date back 10 plus years.

City Council moved forward in 2021 with new policies that outline a vision for Winnipeg with greenspace at the heart of city planning.

Much has changed over the last ten years, including:

- a heightened awareness of the climate crisis and the negative impacts of climate change
- a growing commitment to implement mitigation measures that address climate change
- a world pandemic, an on-going health crisis that showed the value of large outdoor greenspaces that enable people to safely gather for recreation and leisure activities
- recently amended city planning documents OurWinnipeg (2045) and Complete Communities 2.0 have set a higher standard for Winnipeg on environmental and ecological protection of greenspace.
- The Master Greenspace Plan, Nature Corridor Plan and Biodiversity Policy additions to the city planning documents plus the commitment to add 1000 acres of greenspace in Winnipeg shows that today, greenspace matters.

Winnipeg's City Council added greenspace amendments to the planning documents' 25-year vision and acknowledged the value of greenspace including golf courses as essential to public health, climate change resilience and biodiversity.

The history of Golf Courses in Winnipeg has evolved.
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 view changed to real estate development with the Expression of Interest to sell the golf courses for commercial and residential development. It was in this Katz era context of the past when Winnipeg was deemed to have too much greenspace that John Blumberg Golf Course was declared surplus. A recent amendment to the Complete Communities 2.0 planning document provides for "Consideration of municipal golf courses as major nature preserves" confirmation of their value as parkland and to biodiversity.

Today, City Council has an opportunity to reverse this decision and remove John Blumberg Golf Course from the surplus property list so this land can continue to meet the needs of future generations as parkland and nature preserve. The valuation of greenspace and natural areas is inherently undervalued, making it susceptible to development. The price of $13,680,000 proposed for the sale of John Blumberg Golf Course grossly undervalues the land at $68,000 per acre compared to nearby land being sold at $150,000 to $200,000 per acre.

Furthermore, the revenue of $13,680,000 from the sale of 200 acres of Blumberg would provide nowhere near enough purchasing power for even a small amount of greenspace and natural riverside area within the city. The revenue would be dispersed in a year through the Transformative Fund to pay for infrastructure deficit.

All the as yet immeasurable benefits and services this large greenspace provides to city residents will be gone forever.

The sale of Blumberg will provide ongoing taxes for Headingley and nothing for Winnipeg. The sale of 200 acres of greenspace at John Blumberg Golf Course is a bad financial deal for the public, like those from an earlier era at city hall. Blumberg must not be sold and it must be taken off the surplus properties list.

John Blumberg Golf Course is a large greenspace that provides environmental benefits to the City of Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region. There is a shared environment that transcends artificially created municipal boundaries.

The plan for the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region establishes a path toward building a sustainable, climate-resilient region positioned to meet the challenges of the future. Sustainable cities prioritize environmental conservation; and invest in protecting, restoring, and maintaining green spaces, urban forestry, and local ecosystems

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration states:
"Green spaces need to be placed at the heart of urban planning." "When urban areas are well-managed, they can improve air quality, reduce the UHI (urban heat island) effect, protect us from climate change impacts, house a surprising amount of biodiversity, and provide ample recreational activities."

WINNIPEG LAGS BEHIND OTHER MAJOR CANADIAN CITIES IN GREEN SPACE
Winnipeg has 6% of total urban area as parkland compared to the 9% average for other major Canadian cities, according to data from Park People City Parks Report 2020.

John Blumberg Golf Course is an important greenspace and recreational area for citizens of Winnipeg just as La Barrière and Little Mountain Parks are, and will similarly grow in importance as the population of west Winnipeg increases. It must remain as a public greenspace for future generations.

OURS-Winnipeg opposes the proposed sale of the John Blumberg Golf Course. We request that the RFP sale process be terminated and that the John Blumberg Golf Course be removed from the city's surplus land designation.

The sale of greenspace at John Blumberg Golf Course would conflate with the City Council amendments to new planning documents OurWinnipeg (2045) and Complete Communities 2.0. City Council needs to maintain the vision and principles of these new planning documents.

REFERENCE:

OnJune 24, 2021 Council approval of OurWinnipeg By-law No. 120/2020 included a recommendation that Policy 2.20 be replaced with revised wording:

2.20 Leverage Green Infrastructure. create a master greenspace and natural corridor plan by-law that enables conservation, management, restoration, and enhancement of the inherent valued and ecological functioning of parks, waterways, natural areas and systems year round, to support the environment, advance climate change adaption and mitigation, and increase quantity of such lands that can be accessed for recreation, social interaction, active living and connection of people and nature with nature, as population growth occurs.
Council also directed that funding for the development for a Master Greenspace and Natural Corridor Plan By-law be referred to the 2022 budget process.

Council Approval of By-law No. 119/2020, the Complete Communities Direction Strategy 2.0 included the following recommendations be added to the Parks and Recreation Chapter, namely:

4.8 a) Consideration of municipal golf courses as major nature preserves and greenspace

4.8 b) A Biodiversity Policy for Winnipeg that will detail, among other things, an ecological network that is interdependent, reciprocal, healthy, connected and integrated with the built environment and life on the land; one rooted in indigenous traditional knowledge of land, community, and ecology. This should include a requirement for an annual report to Council structured I line with the Durban Commitments Local Governments for Biodiversity 4.8 c) A

Corridor Plan to protect, and enhance Winnipeg forests, green spaces, natural environment and natural area corridors including Winnipeg's connecting riverbank corridors

4.8 d) Tracking the status of greenspace and regular reporting to the public and Council