OURS-Winnipeg Presentation to City Council

My name is Muriel St. John and I am a volunteer with Crescent Park Rescue Committee, CPR and OURS-Winnipeg, (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces) and a retiree of the University of Manitoba.

First of all, I would like to thank the City of Winnipeg for giving its citizenry the opportunity to speak today. Secondly, I would sincerely like to thank the mayor and each and every city councilor for their courage, fortitude and vision for making the Winnipeg planning documents to include a Master Plan for Greenspace, a Biodiversity Plan and a Nature Corridor Plan for the 2022 budget. In doing so, you are recognizing the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, 2021-2030. According to the UN, this means not only helping to restore ecosystems that have been degraded or destroyed but also **conserving ecosystems that are still intact.** As Winnipeg citizens, we look forward to your plans and their translation into action.

Thirdly, I sincerely want to thank you for the approval in principle for the purchase of an additional 1,000 acres of greenspace for our **much-loved growing city**. We are definitely moving in the right direction. Greenspace in most cities is a **scarce resource**, especially in Winnipeg with only 6 % compared to the national average of 9%. According to the *Park People City Parks Report 2020,* Winnipeg ranks in the **bottom third** for total City land area that is **park** and for the amount of **natural area** within its parks.

The issue before us today is that the City of Winnipeg is now planning to sell 200 acres of the historic John Blumberg publicly owned golf course, including 40+ acres of naturalized parkland along the Assiniboine River. Green spaces provide many **environmental** and **social benefits**. According to the *Eos Science News* by the American Geophysical Union called

“Growing Equity in City Green Space”. I quote. “Green spaces in and around cities, collectively known as urban forests, can mitigate regional and local flooding from storms, reduce water scarcity, improve air and water quality, regulate temperature and aid soil nutrient cycling, all the while **sequestering carbon”.** End of quote.

World Wildlife Fund Canada states that o**ne-third of greenhouse gas emissions** results from the destruction of trees, ground cover, peatlands and coastlines. In John Blumberg’s case not only trees and ground cover but loss of part of the river corridor. In order to safeguard our city and address the dual crisis of biodiversity loss and climate change, we have a golden opportunity right here in Winnipeg and right in this **moment now** to act, by saving the John Blumberg Golf Course. You can’t put a price on that.

In an article written in the reputable scientific journal, *Epidemiologist* called “Fifty Shades of Green: Pathway to Healthy Urban Living” states and I quote “Disease rates tend to be higher in urban areas than in rural areas. **More green space in cities** could reduce these rates”. End of quote.

The distribution of green spaces also matters in terms of **accessibility** and **equity** for its citizens. With the visionary plan to purchase 1,000 acres, it makes no sense to start this visionary plan off by selling land that the city already owns in a developed neighbourhood. Winnipeg is a growing city and it is predicted that the largest planned growth **will be in the west of the city.** We are extremely fortunate that John Blumberg is in the west of the city which will make Blumberg easily accessible for the newest residents of our city.

Picture this destructive scene, with the trees being torn down, the ground being rooted up, the river corridor lost to its citizens, the

habitat lost, new housing being put up and **then this greenspace is lost forever.** Where is the public good, the common good that our democracy is based upon? Remember, these greenspaces belong to all of us Winnipeggers paid for by our tax payer dollars over many years.

We would like to see a **biodiversity walkway** for bird watching and wildlife on the 40+ acres along the river. We would also like to see **cross-country skiing** on the golf course in the winter. Something to think about - should **scarce greenspace** be sold before proper assessments have been carried out for the forthcoming policies that you have promised? Because once this land has been developed there is no going back.

I would encourage the mayor and city councillors to read this book, which brings hope to our Canadian democracy, called *Value(s): Building a Better World for All,* published in 2021 which won the 2021 National Business Book Award and was written by Mark Carney, the former Governor of the Bank of Canada and former Governor of the Bank of England and now the United Nations special envoy for **climate action and finance. Unfortunately, he states what has happened in our society is that the market economy has come down into our society at the expense of our social and human values. Everything is about money in our society and we have a present crisis of values.** We need to get back to our human and social values. He states and I quote: "**Every financial decision should take climate change into account".** End of quote.

He also states that we need to consider important human and social values when making **financial decisions** that include **Fairness** for all citizens, **Responsibility** but with accountability, **Solidarity** vs. Divisiveness, **Sustainability** for the **Environment**, building **Resilience** from the shocks of climate change and

making decisions that consider the well-being and opportunities for our **children** and **grandchildren**.

I realize that the money from the sale of Blumberg would go to an infrastructure deficit and for recreational amenities in the **short term.** This could **please** each city ward for councillors in their decision-making. However, we have to look at the bigger financial picture. It will cost more to buy greenspace in the future and we already have John Blumberg. We also have to look at the long-term picture regarding the **vision for the city, regarding climate change mitigation and our mental and human health.** We don't want a short-term financial and political picture but a more **long-term approach** that considers **social** and **environmental aspects.**

We recently experienced the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland and Canadian governments at every level, federal, provincial and **municipal** need to step up to deal with the climate change crisis. As voters we are asking the City of Winnipeg to see the urgency of **beginning today.** We ask the city administration to look at more creative, responsible and sustainable solutions to find money. This means without selling off our greenspace, remember, "**every financial decision should take climate change into account".** It is up to you, city councillors, Blumberg does not have to be sold; City Council can remove it from the surplus list. In voting to keep John Blumberg, you, city councillors, will be following the UN directive to '**conserving ecosystems that are still intact'.** You will also be following the **policy vision of city council** including the Master Plan for Green Space, the Biodiversity Plan and the Nature Corridor Plan.

I thank you very much for your **valuable time** here today.