Saving John Blumberg,
City Council Meeting, January 27th, 2022

For many years, the 200-acre John Blumberg golf course suffered from benign neglect. New managers took over 3 years ago and substantially improved the courses and the numbers of golfers skyrocketed. Affordable rates and lack of a dress code make Blumberg particularly attractive to seniors, families and children.

Metro Winnipeg purchased Blumberg in 1964 when Headingley was part of Greater Winnipeg, followed by Little Mountain Park in 1965 and La Barriere Park in 1969 in order to add 1,000 acres of greenspace to the 1,000 acres the City already owned. All three are outside the city proper. The City acquired both Assiniboine Park and Kildonan Park before they were part of the city. However, Blumberg is the only significant green space close to St. James, which has only the much smaller Sturgeon Creek and the 30-acre Living Prairie Museum. Blumberg is only a kilometre from the edge of the city. Buses that go to Assiniboia Downs and the Red River Ex could go to Blumberg. Blumberg could also be a cycling destination as part of an active transportation corridor. In any case, the soccer pitches and baseball diamonds next door are not being sold, so the accessibility question is essentially meaningless.

Blumberg was intended to be a park that would include a single golf course, a toboggan run and a natural area. The city changed course in 1969 and had two professionally designed golf courses added in order to attract professional golf competitions. Eventually the City discontinued cross-country skiing on the property in winter. But Blumberg could have a lot more additional use by the general public year round without it having to cost millions.

The proposal is to sell John Blumberg for $68,000 per acre which is more than what a City appraiser valued the land at in Feb of 2020. However that was before the Pandemic drove land prices through the roof. Now $68,000 per acre for a fully serviced site is a firesale price, when unimproved farmland 600 m away from Blumberg is currently selling for $148,000 per acre. Schinkel Properties, the company that is hoping to purchase the golf course, is selling their lots next door to Blumberg for an equivalent rate of $420,000/acre, so we that know land in that area is both valuable and sellable. The price for the much smaller amounts of greenspace inside the city limits costs significantly more than what Blumberg would achieve.

If the proposed development went ahead, likely a sizable number of Winnipeggers would move there where they would pay lower taxes while enjoying Winnipeg amenities, and all future tax revenues would go to Headingley. This sale is generally a bad deal for the City all around.

John Blumberg is significant green infrastructure. Golf courses are zoned parkland by the City. The Complete Communities report considers “municipal golf courses as major

nature preserves and greenspace.” This is in line with other municipalities across Canada. Blumberg is a cost-effective climate resilient service. John Blumberg is not like the golf courses of old. Provincial regulations ensure that Blumberg follows a strict Nutrient Management Plan. 100 to 200-year-old trees are scattered across the course. The City planted an additional 3,000 trees and shrubs. The majority of these trees would be cut down to facilitate the development. This goes against the goals of the Million Tree Challenge launched by the City.

We do not know a great deal about the early history of this piece of land, but given its strategic location we know that it must have been important to both Indigenous peoples and early settlers crossing the Assiniboine. The Blumberg golf course has an enthusiastic following. Its rebirth is essentially a good news story. It would be a tragedy if City Council sacrificed John Blumberg for short-term gain that would be quickly dissipated. Once this green space is gone, it is gone forever. Thank you.

Shelley Sweeney,
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