OURS-Winnipeg (Jan 27, 2022) to CITY COUNCIL

OURS-WINNIPEG (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces - Winnipeg)
Presentation to Winnipeg City Council

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Re: Proposed Sale of City-owned Property – Part of 4540 Portage Avenue (John Blumberg Golf Course) Council Meeting January 27, 2022

OURS-Winnipeg (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces – Winnipeg) was formed in 2011 as 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 has led the campaign to keep the John Blumberg Golf Course as public greenspace and save it from sale for development.

The City Property Planning Development Committee on Jan. 17 and the Executive Policy Committee on Jan. 19 have voted "that the proposal for the sale not be approved."

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.

Golf courses are greenspace that are zoned parkland.
The Complete Communities 2.0 amendment of June 24, 2021 includes "Consideration of municipal golf courses as major nature preserves and greenspace".

John Blumberg Golf Course is an important greenspace and recreational area for citizens of Winnipeg just as La Barrière and Little Mountain Parks are.

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

Comparison of the amount of parkland among Canadian cities can be based on percentage of land that is parkland or land area per population. Either way Winnipeg comes up short. According the National Park People Report 2020 data, Winnipeg ranks in the bottom third of 27 Canadian cities in hectares of park land per 1000 people. Whether you compare % age of city area that is parkland or hectares of park per 1000 people Winnipeg is below average or median. Winnipeg lags behind other major Canadian cities in percentage of greenspace. 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[i].

The 2022 City of Winnipeg Community Trends and Performance Report[ii] indicates Winnipeg is below average in the amount of parkland per 100,000 of population and that number is showing a downward trend.

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) 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 City Council did indeed place greenspace at the heart of our city planning when it passed the planning amendments calling for a Greenspace Master Plan, a Nature Corridor Plan and a Biodiversity Policy. 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 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 2013 Council decision to declare John Blumberg Golf Course a surplus property conflates with City Council's recently, near unanimously approved, 25-year vision and planning documents that include a Master Greenspace Plan, Nature Corridor Plan and Biodiversity Policy, with a commitment to add 1000 acres of greenspace.

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 context of the past when Winnipeg was deemed to have too much greenspace that John Blumberg Golf Course was declared surplus.

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 priced at $150,000 to $200,000 per acre. The dollar amount per acre that the the sale of John Blumberg could acquire is far less than what it would cost to buy an equivalent amount of parkland in the city of Winnipeg. The sale of John Blumberg Golf Course would result is a loss of parkland.

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 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. Headingley was part of Winnipeg and could become part of Winnipeg again as boundaries can change.

Blumberg is as accessible to Winnipeggers as the neighbouring soccer and baseball fields and Exhibition grounds. The municipal golf courses are priced to allow greater participation to a wide range of golfers including youth, families and seniors compared to the private golf courses.

The Blumberg lands provide habitat for wildlife and biodiversity opportunities with the river corridor, Gowler Creek, natural areas, water features, trees, shrubs and grass. The course provides habitat for the Logger Head Shrike, an endangered species. Maintaining habitat provides resilience for species.

Golf popularity is expected to continue after the Pandemic as new players have been introduced to the game, regular golfers are playing more and retiring baby-boomers population (bigger than other generations) may keep the numbers alive well beyond any COVID effects as people have been exposed to the benefits of outdoor recreation.

John Blumberg Golf Course must not be sold. It must be taken off the surplus properties list.

City Council must make decisions that maintain the integrity and vision of the amended planning documents OUR Winnipeg (2045) and Complete Communities 2.0 that revised the wording of Policy 2.20.

On June 24, 2021 Council moved a number of "green" amendments to **OurWinnipeg 2045** [iii] ***By-law No. 120/2020. Included is an amendment 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 moved amendments to By-law No. 119/2020, the Complete Communities Direction Strategy 2.0 [iv] ***The following are some of the amendments that were 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

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[i] Park People City Parks Report 2020. https://ccpr.parkpeople.ca/2020/themes/growth/data

[ii] Community and Trends and Performance Report 2022 https://winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/CommunityTrendsandPerformanceReportVolume1_2021.pdfpage 193

[iii] Winnipeg City Clerks Website, Council Meeting Agenda, June 24, 2021, Report of the Executive Policy Committee June 16 2021 OurWinnipeg 2045 Plan – Bylaw Amendments are on pages 1-5, 9 -11 http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/permalink.asp?id=M20210624%28RM%29C-17

[iv] Winnipeg City Clerks Website, Council Meeting Agenda, June 24, 2021, Report of the Executive Policy Committee June 16 2021, Complete Communities 2.0 Direction Strategy Pages 1,2 5 -7 http://clkapps.winnipeg.ca/DMIS/permalink.asp?id=M20210624%28RM%29C-22