Executive Policy Committee Regular Meeting Agenda - April 18, 2023

2. Golf Repurposing Study
Pam Lucenkiw, Co-chair OURS-Winnipeg

OURS-Winnipeg supports the Golf Course Re-purposing Reports to be accepted as information with amendments and some reservations as outlined below.

The statement 'The City of Winnipeg's municipal golf courses are major placeholders of greenspace within the City in Schedule A. This is a critical statement because these lands probably would not be currently under the public domain if they had not been utilized as golf courses. As golf courses they have generated some income to offset maintaining the land as greenspace to provide benefits now and for the future. These large greenspaces contribute to climate resiliency and biodiversity preservation. The golf lands are major nature preserves and are usually adjacent to waterways so are prime lands for wildlife/natural corridors and habitat areas.

The Consultant's Reports provide good basic research for each course, their history and some repurposing options. However, the primary value of the report is the basic research. The repurposing initiatives have gaps when it comes to an environmental perspective that is integral to the value of these lands.

This submission requests amendments, identifies contradictions, and observes gaps for golf land contributions to climate resilience, biodiversity preservation and nature based solutions.

The direction for the Repurposing report changed over the three years it took to complete. The report began with one of its primary goals being the generation of revenue from sale and development of golf land to support the Transformative Fund. When the City approved amendments to the new city planning documents in June 2021 the housing development option was removed and the report had to be adjusted.

Blumberg was added to the repurposing study when City Council voted in January 2022 to NOT sell it and to take if off the list of surplus properties. The Supplement for Blumberg is separate from the larger Repurposing Report for the 10 other golf courses. This is an anomaly, different than previous reports where golf courses were considered together.

Amendment to repurposing reports to address a gap
Add – "Consideration of municipal Golf courses as major nature preserves and greenspace"
This key amendment to Complete Communities 2.0 was approved by Council in June 2021 and is central to the Repurposing Golf Courses reports.

There is a large gap in the environmental perspective throughout. The CEIR (Community Energy Investment Roadmap) recently approved by City Council includes

Protecting, reclaiming, and expanding natural areas is key to carbon sequestration and fighting climate change. Biodiversity must be protected and enhanced.

The City of Vancouver's Study[i] of its Urban golf courses shows they play a vital role in conserving urban biodiversity in several ways, including providing refuge for wildlife as a result of less human disturbance and

preserved large old trees, a place to stop and refuel for migratory birds, and potential to provide ecological or functional connectivity among green spaces in an urban area. In Winnipeg the users of golf across all seasons and area residents can confirm the existence of nature in and around the courses.

Amendment to John Blumberg Supplemental Report p. 9
Remove 'Scenario 4 – Sell or Lease to the RM of Headingley - if the City of Winnipeg no longer requires the site for golf course or alternative recreation purposes to meet service needs' The sale or lease of Blumberg is contrary to the City Council vote in January 2022 to NOT sell it. Its sale would result in a net loss of greenspace for Winnipeg at the same time the City committed to increase it by 1000 acres.

Climate change resilience, flood mitigation, and biodiversity functions are all services provided by large greenspaces that do not seem to be considered. P 30 Schedule A identifies global natural solutions as a standalone piece rather than integral to the document.

Remove 'Other Considerations' P.9 "that considers to build a river road (river front drive) for motor traffic on the Blumberg property continuing through the soccer and softball properties."
This option is contrary to the principles of the Master Greenspace and Natural Corridors plan and does not consider the wildlife corridor and habitat unique to the logger head shrike, an endangered species. The river corridor is the most biodiverse area of the property and would be compromised by a road.

Winnipeg and Headingley are members of the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region. They should be working together to extend the natural corridor and have an option to put a road on it for vehicles.

Add – "Incorporate the John Blumberg Repurposing Report into the same report for all other golf courses with the same protection of greenspace."
There are Contradictions between the two Repurposing Reports. The larger repurposing report (Schedule A) does not propose any opportunities where golf land is sold or used for non-recreation purposes such as river side roads.
Blumberg stands out as being treated differently than the other city owned golf courses. The Blumberg Supplemental Report (Schedule B) contains a scenario to sell or lease golf/park land to the RM of Headingley. **Leasing** is not an option as it would not prevent Blumberg from being developed as it would be out of the City's hands, and relying on caveats.

The reports offer repurposing activities of sports fields, walking, and dog walking. They do not include the full suite of passive recreational and educational use opportunities: nature reserve (quietly cleaning the air and water, storing carbon, supporting biodiversity) wildlife habitat, wildlife corridor, wildlife viewing, birding, nature photography, nature walks, nature interpretation, forest bathing, natural classrooms, etc. It is too focussed on providing active recreation facilities that sit unused the vast majority of the time.

A more natural version of repurposing golf courses called Multi-functional golf courses are popular in Europe where golf courses are seen to have several roles to play in addition to golf such as natural and cultural values and biological diversity and areas for active outdoor recreation. Reports can be found at:
http://www.sterf.org/Media/Get/1788/multifunctional-golf-courses-an-underutilised-resource, and
https://www.ngcoa.org/golf-business-weekly/2020/november/week-3/multifunctional-courses

Placement of off leash dog parks and vegetable gardens on wildlife corridors and habitat are not usually a compatible use. Golf courses are wildlife refuges in Winnipeg.

The Canoe Club Repurposing PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY was released in November 2017. There are insights to what the public would like to see as uses of the golf courses.

From the Canoe Club summary of the 34 options provided in the survey
Passive uses of the space were the most desired by the public (walking, picnicking, and jogging).
Among all respondents, the five additional activities/amenities with the most support were:
1. Walking for fitness and pleasure
2. Use washroom facilities
3. Cross-country skiing
4. BBQ/picnic
5. Jogging/running/race walking

The five least supported recreational activities were sports fields:
30. Cricket
31. Lacrosse
32. Football/rugby
33. Softball/ baseball/ slow-pitch
34. hockey/ringette/sponge hockey"

The repurposing reports provided options to repurpose some of the publicly owned golf lands during the changing policy landscape so the following are not part of the options in a significant way:

- Master Greenspace and Natural Corridor Plan and Biodiversity Policy,
- COPS 15 goals and targets for Biodiversity,
- Decade of Ecosystem Restoration,
- Climate change goals to 2030 and 2050,
- Increasing use of use of nature-based solutions to protect against climate shock, and
- Amendments in the new planning documents to acquire an additional 1000 acres of greenspace.
- A gap on Schedule A p. 8 does not mention the growing global interest in biodiversity and climate resilience. This could follow the COVID section or there could be a section of Global themes with local impacts.

There is a gap in reporting on **economic benefits** of greenspace and nature's services Schedule A p. 12. The report includes real estate values for properties around golf courses and a report on the modest increase in the price of golf clubs. This report should include the economic benefits of nature based solutions and large greenspaces There are public health benefits, carbon sequestering benefits, flood mitigation to name a few.

The Prairie Climate Centre provides key messages on the benefits of greenspace in its Building a Climate Resilient City series

KEY MESSAGES from the Prairie Climate Centre - Building a Climate-Resilient City:
• Ecosystems and green infrastructure provide human health benefits and critical environmental, social and economic services, and protect against climate shock.
• Healthy and well-managed ecosystems are economic assets that enhance a city's resilience to natural disturbances and extreme weather events.

• Investing in urban ecosystems and green infrastructure can provide lower-cost solutions to multiple challenges when compared to traditional infrastructure solutions.

It is premature at this time to be embarking on decisions about the golf lands without including the recent global environmental reports and Master Greenspace Plan to inform best decisions. Natural benefits and winter activities can co exist with golf courses.

[ii] [i] BIODIVERSITY AUDIT OF VANCOUVER PARK BOARD GOLF COURSES https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2020-54_Biodiversity%20Audit%20of%20Vancouver%20Park_Oyunkhishig.pdf