Hello,

My name is Candace Berard, and I am a proud resident of the St. Boniface community. I am writing to you today about the approved plan to demolish the Windsor Park and Happyland pools. First, I am shocked to hear these two pools were chosen for demolition, as they are often fully occupied and well utilized. Second, I believe this to be a disappointing and irresponsible decision. Let me tell you why.

The impact of public swimming pools is immeasurable. City pools play a vital role in cities like Winnipeg, especially during our short but incredibly hot summers. People of all ages and backgrounds in St. Boniface have made fond memories and embarked on countless adventures, all because of publicly funded recreational facilities like the Windsor Park and Happyland pools. These outdoor pools offer programs that provide meaningful experiences and lessons that last a lifetime by offering a place for people to meet and socialize, learn new skills, encourage growth, and most importantly, appreciate the importance of water safety.

Public pools offer a place to cool off on hot summer days, especially for those not fortunate enough to have access to consistent or reliable air conditioning.

Pools offer a sense of community by providing opportunities to meet new people, connect with others, and promote a sense of belonging. This is particularly important for young people, as a sense of belonging and a safe place to land help deter risky and detrimental choices and behaviors.

Pools promote physical and mental well-being through physical fitness for people of all ages. As swimming is a low-impact activity, it can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities and can help reduce stress, improve mental health, and promote relaxation. Not to mention fostering family bonding and creating lasting memories.

Pools increase public safety by offering swimming lessons and water safety courses, which empower individuals with lifesaving skills and the confidence to participate in water activities safely. Lifeguarding training programs also help prevent accidents and emergencies and serve as a crucial community resource to promote public safety; benefits that proposed splash pads cannot provide.

Pools provide career, volunteer, and personal growth opportunities. Learning to swim aside, pools provide career and volunteer opportunities that lead to personal and professional growth, particularly for young people. These roles include lifeguarding, maintenance, coaching, and even facility management. Additionally, pools serve as a platform for community outreach programs. Young people often flock to social programs and facilities such as pools during hot summer days. Outreach programs, volunteerism, and work opportunities allow young people to contribute to their communities positively, again something proposed splash pads cannot do.

Public swimming pools offer accessibility to everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, and are instrumental in promoting water accessibility. They provide a supervised environment for people to enjoy aquatic activities, build communities, promote a positive relationship with water, improve the overall health of both people and communities, and provide avenues to cool off in the summer heat.

We are on the precipice of global disaster due to climate change. Unheated, outdoor public pools offer large groups of people a sustainable means to cool off while potentially offsetting individual household hydro electric and water usage. It has also been well documented that poor and marginalized social groups bear the greatest burden of the climate change crisis. By maintaining public outdoor pools, the City of Winnipeg can be proud to level the playing field by offering a sustainable means to cooling the masses.

Pools were once luxuries only the wealthy could afford. Through public initiative and taxation, public pools have become the cornerstone of democracies and municipalities. Pools are a place for people of every class and background to come together. They are meant to be inclusive and accessible spaces for recreation and well-being. The positive impact of pools on individuals and communities is immeasurable. Yet City of Winnipeg counselors have voted to demolish two pools in blue-collar, low-socioeconomic neighborhoods, where honest, hard-working people may not have the additional funds to install air conditioning, pay for swimming lessons, access well-paying municipal jobs, or congregate at safe and well-managed facilities. What this decision indicates is that only wealthy people who can afford to pay deserve access to swimming pools.

While I do not consider my family to be wealthy, our family does have the financial means to ensure we have access to a pool in the summer and swimming lessons if necessary. But that is not the case for everyone, and I believe everyone deserves the right to access, no matter their background. Furthermore, despite not being wealthy, I support tax increases, as I believe taxes are the pillar of a democratic society, particularly when funds are invested in a community. Investment in communities and facilities like pools benefits the greater good. While a balanced budget is important, freezing taxes has led to the demise of key public infrastructure, further marginalized the disenfranchised, failed to support the common good, and undermined the overall well-being of community members in St. Boniface and city of Winnipeg citizens.

In closing, I am writing to ask you to reconsider demolishing the Windsor Park and Happyland pools. Please consider investing in public infrastructure, thus investing in society and the community of St. Boniface for the long term.

Thank you,

Candace Berard