

Presentation to the *Our Winnipeg 2045 City Development Plan*

By Muriel St. John

May 13, 2021

First of all, I would like to thank the city of Winnipeg for giving its citizenry the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Muriel St. John and I live at 926 Crescent Drive in Fort Garry. I am a proud member of the Crescent Park Rescue Committee (CPR) and of OURS-Winnipeg (Outdoor Urban Recreational Spaces). I have some important stories to tell.

I have been living in Winnipeg for 22 years and I am now retired from the University of Manitoba. Previously, I lived in Edmonton for 31 years and during this time there was a similar situation where the city wanted to develop parkland. However, the citizens wanted to preserve the parkland so they could have an interconnected parkland for biking, walking and dog walking. I lived down the street from the MacKinnon Ravine in West Edmonton and the city in the early 1980's decided to build a road through the ravine and they began to build it. The citizens stopped the road from continuing to be built. Today there is a bike path all along the Saskatchewan River connecting the whole city.

The *Our Winnipeg 2045 Development Plan* should not have development options for parks, golf courses and greenspace in the Major Open Space Chapter with its goal to preserve and protect these lands. As a concerned Winnipeg citizen, I am asking that the development options be taken out of this plan and not be considered at all particularly the 1-2- acre exemptions. Thermea is an example of 1–2-acre exemptions for developing on parkland and golf courses. We citizens need to **change our mindset** regarding our green spaces and as citizens of Winnipeg, we all need to **protect** our green public spaces.

Consider this, that during the pandemic people have been widely using the public parks and green spaces. According to the *Winnipeg Free Press* the Crescent Drive Golf Course increased their golf rounds last summer by 44%. I golf at Crescent Drive Golf Course and the city keeps this particular golf course up beautifully. Crescent Drive Golf course is only a Par 3 golf course but parents love to bring their children there to golf and the private golf courses love Crescent Drive because those children become future members of their clubs. Also, seniors love to golf at Crescent Drive as well. The city-owned golf courses are **affordable** for most citizens and **accessible** for most citizens. They operate only so many days per year but the rest of the year they are used for **walking** on the outside of the golf course and **cross-country skiing** in the winter. Remember, golf courses along the rivers provide habitat and natural areas for wildlife,

retain storm water and runoff that protect the waterway and provide protection from the hotter summer days that are forecasted in the future for Winnipeg by the **Prairie Climate Centre**.

Research has been done that says how important green space is for our **mental health** as it boosts our well-being. We all presently see how the pandemic has emphasized the importance of nature for our **human health**. With **climate change**, keeping our green spaces and our trees is even more important for clean air in these times, in this present **pollution of our planet**.

We need to look at more novel and more progressive ways of keeping our green spaces and not at the expense of decreasing our quality of life. Other cities are meeting these challenges in different ways. We need to create **more green cities** not more concrete cities. I totally agree with the 'Save Our Seine' organization who are giving a **financial alternative solution** to the city in order to maintain our green spaces. They are suggesting to the city to set up an **Endowment Fund** which would maintain the green spaces in **perpetuity**. This Endowment Fund could be funded by private citizens, organizations, foundations and governments.

Over my 22 years in Winnipeg, I see how our parks and green spaces are being **incrementally infringed upon**, the key word here is incrementally. Now the City's Development Plan wants to repurpose up to 30% of Public Golf Lands including the sale for development of housing. The city allowed Thermea Spa to build a huge private operation on Crescent Drive Golf Course with a 25-year lease and they told us they would like to expand. My concern is that Thermea will expand into the golf course and take over even more green space.

We expected Thermea to be a 'Good Neighbour and we were disappointed as there were **negative consequences to the community**, not the least being, living in a residential area and having problems getting out of our driveways with the increase of traffic to Thermea. There are many unresolved issues, despite attempts over a 6-year period to work with Thermea towards resolutions that would be mutually beneficial. One of the main issues is a **risk to pedestrian safety** by cars parking on the street by both Thermea's staff and Thermea's clients along where there are no sidewalks. They prefer to park on the street rather than parking in the Golf Parking Lot when there is always enough space in the parking lot to do so. We have asked Thermea to tell their staff and clients not to park on the street and to put up **signs** to tell clients to park in the golf parking lot - but to no avail.

In addition, with the **new pavilion** opening in the park very soon it will bring even **increased traffic** into the **entrance of the park**. A cautionary tale, in the future there could be an injury or even a death there. This is an example of green spaces taken over by a private company with negative consequences to the community.

I would encourage the Mayor and all city councilors to read this book, actually every Canadian citizen should be reading it and I will be sending a copy to my MP, it is called *The Sport & Prey of Capitalists: How the Rich are Stealing Canada's Public Wealth* by Linda McQuaig, published in 2019. So, what is Canada's Public Wealth? Well, it means hydro, education, public telephones, water, roads, bridges, **parks and green spaces** that have all been paid for by our taxpayers. I quote "A pugnacious corporate sector has attacked the public sector and undermined Canadians' confidence in the public domain". End of quote. Canada has a poor history of privatizing its public wealth and more importantly, this practice, definitely **shrinks our democratic capacity as a nation**. This mindset could be applied to our green spaces; this title could easily read – "*How the Developers are Allowed to Steal our Public Green Spaces*".

Remember, privatizing means that the goal of private companies is to make money and we have a **crisis of values here**. We are about the public good, the common good and that these green spaces belong to all of us Winnipeggers. If you, the councilors, vote against the development in not including our parks, golf courses and green spaces in the development plan, *Our Winnipeg 2045*, you will be leaving these green spaces for your children, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren and they will be eternally grateful that you had the courage to stand up and did the right thing for **our growing, much loved city**. Thank you for your time.