

## Another Parking Lot Fiasco For The City



On Thursday, Feb 6<sup>th</sup>, I spent 8 hours, beginning at 9:30 AM, attending a zoom meeting with Winnipeg's property and development subcommittee, waiting to comment on actions the city might take to save the Lemay Forest. Instead found I myself listening to an interminable debate over an infill development which, in the end, lasted 10 full hours.

I finally gave up and clocked out at 5:30 PM to start dinner and was later informed that my name was finally called at 9 PM.

Now, the fact there were people at that committee meeting who had taken an unpaid day off work to speak about the Lemay forest was bad enough. What really got my knickers in a knot was the single subject that ate up 10 hours of the meeting.

I am referring, of course, to the debate that occurred over a rezoning request made to facilitate the development of an apartment block next to the Granite Curling Club. A development which would be built, not by destroying riverside greenspace and trees, or any trees at all, because it will be constructed – halleluia! - on the footprint of an existing parking lot.

Championed by the University of Winnipeg's Community Renewal Corporation and Number 10 Architects, the proposed building will be virtually net zero in its operation, because solar panels installed on the structure will allow it to produce its own energy.

Even better, the building will provide both affordable and deeply affordable housing. More than 50% of the units will be rented either at a cost below the CMHC's median rental rate, or better still at a "rent geared-to-income," rate.



The new development proposed for Granite Way includes solar panels, a roof top garden and deeply affordable housing.

Which means if you're living on minimum wage, social assistance or a limited pension you could actually afford to secure a home there.

In fact this building ticks almost every box for sustainable, equitable and environmentally sound housing.

So why is its construction being contested? Well, surprise, surprise - it's all about the Granite parking lot. One that the city, not the curling club, owns.

Now as those of you who read the Free Press know, I am not a fan of the fact that 40% of downtown is relegated to parking lots. To me, 32,000 parking spaces in a downtown area that's just 3 sq. kilometers is patently absurd. What it says, essentially, is that concrete, asphalt and parked cars are more important than people, trees and greenspace.

So why is the curling club executive opposing the elimination of one parking lot to make way for affordable housing? Well according to the executive it's because a reduction in onsite parking would impact the club's sustainability.

Interesting, isn't it, how the word sustainability can be twisted around to justify the most unusual things. Does sustainability equate to convenience, privilege and drivers' rights to parking? Is it too much to ask a curler to walk a block from on-street parking which is ample on Granite Way and other adjacent streets.

After all, curlers are, presumably, physically fit if they're getting down in the hack to throw then sweep those rocks. And even if they are unable to walk a block or two, the club still has 15 parking stalls that could be designated for visitors with mobility issues.



The Granite Curling Club and Sun Life Parking Lot. The proposed apartment building will sit on the current site of the west side parking lot.

Furthermore, the curling club is right across the street from what may be the biggest parking lot in downtown Winnipeg – the Sun Life lot, which is basically empty from 6PM to 8AM every single day plus Saturday and Sunday. Surely this wealthy insurance company would allow curlers to leave their parked cars in that vastly empty nighttime lot.

But instead of listening carefully to the testimony of the 70 club members who support rezoning for the development, two councillors - Jason Schreyer and Russ Wyatt – decided to pander, for *hours*, to the club’s pro-parking executive.

The fact that they forgot that this was a meeting to vote, not on a development plan, but on rezoning the area for residential use, and were not reminded of that fact by their Chair, Evan Duncan, let loose a procedural nightmare. Which allowed councillors to free associate, tossing around ill conceived “ideas” about how to keep the parking lot-obsessed club executive happy.

By the time Councillor Wyatt suggested felling riverside trees to make way for yet another parking lot to replace the one being developed into housing, I was apoplectic. Thank God for the civil servants at the meeting who pointed out that his “idea” would contravene city policies.

Bottom line? If I sometimes wonder why this city can't get its act together to save the Lemay, a forest of some 19,000 riverside trees, and endorse environmentally sound infill, this parking lot fiasco of a meeting certainly confirmed my worst suspicions.