

Good morning,

I'm speaking to you today on behalf of the Parker Wetlands Conservation Committee.

It's easy to dismiss a small triangle on our city map, to see it as empty space, treat it as an opportunity for infill, densification and progress. It's also easy to go with the cheapest, quickest route, but is that how good decisions are made?

I don't know if I speak for all Winnipeggers, but this morning I am the voice of 700 individuals who oppose the extension of Rapid Transit through the Parker lands. And what continues to surprise me is the multitude of reasons people express so passionately...here are the top 10 reasons why Winnipeg's leaders should not agree to this proposal:

1. Environment is a big one...people, regardless where they live in this city, want to preserve this unique, valuable, small pocket of urban wetlands.
2. Cost is also big...Winnipeggers think this project doesn't justify the millions it will require, especially at the cost of losing the Parker lands.
3. Consultation...real consultation, not open houses after the fact, and at the most inopportune times when the majority of residents aren't able to attend.
4. The direct approach...so many have questioned why Rapid Transit would detour away from Pembina when there are other worthy options to consider...options that would provide Rapid Transit and preserve the Parker lands.
5. Mistrust and feelings of hopelessness...we want transparency and due diligence, we want to feel heard and for our elected leaders to consider our opinions and concerns.
6. Conflict of interest...a number of comments regarding the land-swap, developers' interests, and the priorities of City Council, which all feed into the feelings of mistrust and hopelessness.
7. Chaos and lack of practical planning for the good of Winnipeg and those who live here... this is perceived as another short-sighted plan for one section of the city.
8. Consistency with previously adopted City plans...this is perceived as contrary to existing objectives...what's the point of making plans if we so easily counteract them?
9. Significant increase in traffic and noise...this would affect the entire community, those living right alongside, and those living between Beaumont and Pembina.
10. Why would anyone choose to build on wetlands?

Yes, the public, me included, form opinions and perceptions based on information presented to us, whether it's a newspaper headline, a facebook post, or a 115 page report that cost a chunk of money. We're not all planners, consultants, developers and politicians. Regardless, our questions and concerns must be addressed by the people who have been elected to represent us in making these decisions. Don't discount the residents of Winnipeg...don't be so quick to dismiss public opinion. This is an opportunity to gain back some trust!

I challenge each of you to get up close and personal with the land you hold the fate of...stroll through the Aspen forest, take advantage of our Winnipeg winter to squeeze through the dense wetland foliage and listen to the Northern Shrike. This is not a barren field, nor is it well-used commercial property being re-purposed. It isn't just another parcel of greenspace that can be recreated elsewhere.

Two of your peers, John Orlikow and Justin Swandel, have put a lot of effort into reviewing the full consultants' report and presented even more questions and concerns. They've also provided more options that deserve serious consideration. Good planning takes time, so at least 700 of us urge you to delay this process and do it right.

Thank you for your time,  
Susan Belmonte  
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Winnipeg!