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Andrew Marquess
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Parker Lands: Ensuring Successful Prairie TOD

Dear Mr Marquess,

I am writing with respect to the Parker Lands, also now known as Fulton Grove.

The Parker Lands are approximately 133 acres that fall within 800 metres of the proposed Parker Transit Station on the Southwest Bus Rapid Transit Corridor that is currently under construction through the southern half of the site. It is one of eleven Major Redevelopment Sites (MRS) identified in Our Winnipeg and is critical to accommodating growth in the City in a manner that is consistent with sustainable development principles.

In the context of OurWinnipeg, the bold step was taken by City Council to recognize that directing new growth to areas that are supported by existing infrastructure is fundamental to creating Complete Communities where people can play, shop, learn and work within close proximity home. While this is an aspiration identified, it is challenging to achieve in a low density sprawling city where precedents do not exist.

Fulton Grove, however, presents an opportunity to deliver on this vision by becoming a demonstration project that embraces best practises in infill development. Its proximity to mature neighbourhoods, bus rapid transit, and the unique scale of the site are defining features that are difficult to replicate elsewhere. It is for this reason that it was identified for intensification as part of the City of Winnipeg's Urban Structure Plan.

The risk to the project is that it will not have the densities required to deliver a truly walkable community, nor some of the mixed-use amenities that create a true sense of community. While the policy framework for OurWinnipeg makes it clear that Major Redevelopment Sites are to be developed for high density development, a new template is required that takes into account the unique challenges of adapting such a low-density city for walking and transit to become desirable modes of transport.

One of the key challenges that I see pertains to whether or not Fulton Grove can accommodate *enough* density to provide a truly animated and safe street life, where people walk within their community to visit their neighbours, run small errands, as well as to access transit. On the one hand, part of creating a walkable community is linked to street and building design. On the other hand, there needs to be a critical mass of people who rely on shared amenities within a specific geography. This will be a key challenge for Fulton Grove: designing the Site Plan in such a way as to accommodate as much density as the site, and the market, can accommodate as an end towards ensuring you deliver on the objectives of Complete Communities.

Unfortunately, imposing a woodlot in the centre of the redevelopment site runs counter to this aim, for a series of reasons:

- From a redevelopment perspective, the imposition of a woodlot in the center of the development parcel reduces the developable area and compromises the key policy objective of maximizing development on the site. These lands are *one of only eleven* key sites that can accommodate redevelopment in a significant way in the City of Winnipeg. They are precious to the sustainability of the city as a site for higher density transit-oriented development precisely because of their proximity to the new bus rapid transit infrastructure – and because there are so few sites that share this characteristic. Woodlots can be accommodated elsewhere: redevelopment sites within 800 metres of rapid transit in Winnipeg are rare. To best capitalize on the City’s investment in rapid transit, this land ought to accommodate as much housing as possible for as many people as possible;
- In terms of context, given the dog park to the south, the Humane Society to the west, the 20 acre meadow and pond to the east, and the adjacent hydro lands, the site will be, in perpetuity, adjacent to *little if any additional development*. This presents two challenges: first, the only lands to accommodate critical mass and density in proximity to this new busway at this location will be at the Fulton Grove site and therefore this opportunity ought to be maximized, 2) it will be difficult, even with a ‘higher’ density Site Plan at Fulton Grove, to achieve densities that will make local amenities, such as a local coffee shop or small-scale retail or offices, viable. To sterilize a portion of the site from redevelopment as a result of the proposed woodlot fundamentally compromises the objective of creating a Complete Community;
- From a community planning perspective, woodlots are rarely useful or desirable amenities for families and in most cities have been removed and redesigned for this reason. They tend to attract unwanted behaviour, score poorly from a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design perspective, and are not places for children to play in an urban setting due to a lack of sight lines. In the best-case scenario, the woodlot will act as a space for owners to hike with their dogs. But given that a dog park is planned directly to the south of the site, there is no logic behind adding additional amenities for dogs while there is a dearth of play spaces

for children. The Site Plan should be designed with a mix of urban built form typologies, both in terms of low density residential and mid-rise. As such, open spaces should be designed as a central organizing principle of the Site Plan that can complement the more urban living in this context. There is no design logic behind having a woodlot in the center of a high density redevelopment site;

- From an urban design perspective, a large woodlot would divide the site in two. If the objective is for the site to be experienced as a complete, walkable community, it should not have two distinct, disparate characters. Rather, a unifying public realm, open space, and street network that creates one overall community on the site is required;
- To create a more permeable community, which is critical to community safety (eyes on the street), connectivity within the entire site is desired. Both the scale and the location of a woodlot hinders the possibility of connectivity within the site.

One of the key challenges of Prairie Urbanism, which you have an opportunity to define in this context, will be achieving a critical mass of people and uses in a denser urban form than has been previously imagined.

I look forward to the prospect of working with you to do so.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Keesmaat, MCIP, RPP