

Are we ready for multifunctional golf courses?



**Michele
Kading**
COMMUNITY
CORRESPONDENT

ST. VITAL

I golf for the same reason that many people walk their pets or garden.

It is an opportunity to spend time outdoors in nature. I am not alone. Studies show that golfers rate their experiences of nature on the golf course and the opportunity to walk around in nature more highly than the actual game.

Let's face it. Golf courses offer beautiful vistas and natural experiences.

Many golf courses are located along rivers that provide a convenient and free source of water to maintain the greens. They harbour some of the best remaining natural habitat in Winnipeg. They are refuges for wildlife and biodiversity.

Even golf courses that are not on rivers have large blocks of forest and prairie (a.k.a. "the rough"). At worst, golf courses provide a savanna-like park experience with scattered trees and ponds (a.k.a. "water traps").

I have had many wonderful nature experiences while golfing.

In Jasper, I watched in awe as a cavity-nesting duck flew at warp speed into its nest hole high in a tree. I saw two red-headed

woodpeckers foraging for acorns on a course near the Winnipeg airport. This species has since disappeared from Winnipeg parks and golf courses. It is a threatened species in Manitoba and Canada. I even saw a loggerhead shrike on John Blumberg Golf Course. This bird is in imminent danger of extinction. Headingley is one of the few places it nests.

I am sure that council was unaware of this when it declared John Blumberg Golf Course surplus in 2013. The debate was restricted to the economic aspects of golf. Environmental and societal benefits of the golf course were excluded. Sadly, this critical shrike habitat is slated to be sold for development.

The pressure to sell golf courses stems from the idea that the land is underutilized. Can, and should, more people benefit from these beautiful natural landscapes? Yes.

The Scandinavian Turfgrass and Environment Research Foundation recommends transforming golf courses into multifunctional facilities. Golf courses expose people to nature. This, in turn, instils a sense of peace, provides invaluable experiences, and improves health. "There is every reason to offer more users the opportunity to share this delightful environment."

Councillor Mayes has asked Winnipeggers



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Winnipeg golf courses and urban parks provide valuable habitat for the red-headed woodpecker, a threatened species.

to reimagine the Canoe Club Golf Course. This is unique chance to create a multifunctional golf course that protects natural habitat and builds community support. For the first time in a decade, I have hope for Winnipeg's public golf courses.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of