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**Subject:** Rockwood Park (1671 Sandy Point Road)

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Greetings to the Mayor and Councillors,

I am writing this email to you all in regards to the plan to designate 1671 Sandy Point Road as "surplus" which could potentially result in that land being sold in the future.

I have thought about this issue and am struggling to understand just exactly what is the problem which could possibly cause the council to consider potentially selling off part of Rockwood Park.

**Is there a lack of housing in Saint John that is causing the City to sell part of Rockwood Park?**

The lack of housing in Saint John is the key issue causing Council to consider selling off this property according to the Mayor (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/rockwood-park-sandy-point-road-city-of-saint-john>). While I support growing the housing stock of Saint John and reducing the rate of homeless and/or precariously housed people, there are plenty of areas for housing development that would not compromise our prized urban park.

If providing shelter to the homeless is a priority for the City, why does not the City open up the campgrounds at Rockwood Park to the homeless during the winter months? This would provide badly needed shelter space and it would also allow easy access for the Fire Department, the Police Department and various social service providers (as well as the city sanitation services). In 2024, the campgrounds are open from April to October 5th (<https://rockwoodparkcampground.com/pricing>). Why is that land with 112 full

service (water, electric & sewer) and 34 partially serviced (water & electric) camping spots (<https://rockwoodparkcampground.com/campground/>) not available to the homeless for the coldest months of the year? They are currently having to make due in out of the way spots without any of those services nor bathrooms. Unfortunately, we have already experienced the tragedy that can unfold when the marginalized are left to inhabit spots that are difficult to be reached by first responders. Actions speak much louder than words and the actions of this council do not support those claims about this issue being about housing the less fortunate amongst us.

If housing is the true issue, why is the City considering selling the land? If housing was truly the issue, should not the City be seizing upon the opportunity of this underutilized land to provide housing to the citizens who are unfortunate enough not to have stable housing? Why does the land have to be sold in order to provide housing? Saint John has a plan for housing (<https://saintjohn.ca//2022-11/SJ Affordable Housing Plan Backgrounder>) but nowhere does that mention selling off assets. That plan mentions a lack of rental units available and exploring opportunities for non-market housing. Why not offer that property as a long-term lease to a non-profit agency to be able to provide that non-market housing while also keeping the property within the City's land holdings so that it could potentially be utilized as part of the park in the future? If this has not even been considered as an option, it certainly makes it appear that there is an ulterior motive behind the plan to declare this parcel of land surplus and potentially eventually selling it off.

### **Is there a lack of vacant property within the city of Saint John available for development?**

No, there is so much vacant land available for development that they sit on the MLS listings for many months. That is not even counting the land that is sitting vacant without any development nor Percy Wilbur's woebegone hole. There are in excess of 60 vacant lots listed for sale in Saint John on MLS currently.

There is so much vacant land within the City that it is not currently listed for sale that it would take a great deal of time to count them all. Here are some examples from the North End:

- The corner of Lansdowne and Visart (which should be prime land) is currently part of a parking lot that is pretty much only used for piling snow during the winter months. It is a separate lot from the Sobey's lot with its own PAN (01660227). As "Lansdowne Centre in the Old North End" is designated a "Mixed Use Centre" for population intensification in Plan SJ, that property should be developed to have a retail space on the ground floor and multiple floors of residential units above that (although the City actively prevents any such usage due to parking minimums - 1 per dwelling unit or 0.5 for affordable housing let alone that required for a retail space).
- The corner of Elgin & Victoria now features a vacant lot (110 Victoria Street), that used to have a building that had to be demolished by the City in recent years due to neglect. That property is now adjacent to three other vacant lots (112, 114 & 116) on Victoria Street (and they are not the only vacant lots on Victoria Street).

- But the grand-daddy of them all (as far as I know) is 104 Main Street. That is the property that used to be the home of the Main Street Forum which burned down in 1967 ([https://icehockey.fandom.com/wiki/Main\\_Street\\_Forum](https://icehockey.fandom.com/wiki/Main_Street_Forum)). That land has been vacant since 1967. That was the year that the Beatles released the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album. That was a year before Pierre Elliot Trudeau even became Prime Minister let alone got married and fathered the current Prime Minister of Canada (Justin Trudeau). Main Street west of Douglas Avenue has been designated as a "character corridor" in Plan SJ. However, that does not seem to have been prioritized as in the decade since Plan SJ has been in place has seen the loss of many residential units along Main Street. 104 Main Street is part of a barren landscape of vacant lots including 105, 111, 115/117, 119, 120, 123/125, 126, 129, 135, 141/143, 154, 156, 160/162, 168, 173 and 177 (which had a house when Plan SJ was developed as did all of the listed lots west of Albert Street). If ever an area was crying out for some development, it is this area that has many lots all with electrical, sewage, and water connections in an area that used to house many families.

I could go on but it is clear that there is not a need for converting existing parklands into "green field" development opportunities as there are plenty of vacant lots available to be developed. One more vacant lot listed for sale will not make one iota of difference in housing as it is quite clear that the housing shortage in Saint John has not been caused by a shortage of vacant lands suitable to develop into housing.

### **Is there a lack of vacant property in the specific area of Sandy Point Road available for development?**

No, there are currently multiple vacant lots in the very area on the same road that have been listed for over 600 days (<https://www.realtor.ca/real-estate/1750-sandy-point-road-saint-john>). Given that demonstrated lack of demand, why does the City even think that there will be demand for 1671 Sandy Point Road?

For what it is worth (apparently \$449,000), 1870 Sandy Point Road is also currently for sale (<https://www.realtor.ca/real-estate//1870-sandy-point-road-saint-john>). There is another property for sale without a street address on Sandy Point Road but with 10 PIDs (<https://www.realtor.ca/vacant-sandy-point-road-saint-john>) that was planned to be a subdivision but for whatever reason was not developed. If there are developers clamouring for land to develop on Sandy Point Road, there are plenty of options currently available so there does not seem to be some sort of gap in the market that the City needs to step in and fill.

Given that the real estate market is driven by supply and demand, why would the City think that now is the time to sell 1671 Sandy Point Road when there is not one, not two but three other vacant pieces of land on that very same road? Even if selling 1671 Sandy Point Road was the correct decision (it is not), the timing of trying to do so when there are other vacant pieces of land currently listed for sale in the immediate vicinity is very poor for trying to maximize value. It seems to make no sense as to why this parcel of land should sell quicker or be more desirable unless this has something to do with

potential lakefront property (given the assertion in the CBC article that the land might not even be used for affordable housing) than that which is on offer on the other side of the Sandy Point Road.

### **Is there a lack of revenue generated by Rockwood Park?**

Is the City being forced to sell off property due to financial reasons?

If lack of revenue is a problem, would it not make much more sense to either raise the rates for camping (possibly including higher prices for higher demand weekends) or expanding the number of camping spaces available in order to increase revenue?

If a lack of revenue is the problem, why is Rockwood Park providing free parking (<https://www.rockwoodpark.ca/amenities.html>)? Making all of the parking spaces at Rockwood Park be pay parking would significantly boost the revenue that Rockwood Park generates. Why should I, as a tax paying citizen who walks to Rockwood Park, have to subsidize the environmentally damaging parking lots (and the maintenance thereof) at Rockwood Park just so that others can park their cars without paying the cost of that privilege? Kayaks have to be rented, why are parking spaces not also rented? I believe that there could be options to make that parking more affordable (like monthly passes) or to have it be reimbursed for those that are dining at Lily's but overall parking should be a revenue stream that can be used to maintain and improve Rockwood Park.

If City revenue is a problem such that the Council is considering selling off land, Council should consider other ways of raising revenue such as charging for on-street parking. The City of Saint John has sub-optimal parking practices (parking minimums & free on-street parking) but to get into that will take me off on a tangent so I will leave it at just a brief mention of a vast untapped revenue stream.

Suffice it to say that if revenue is a problem, a one time property sale without addressing underlying problems in the ongoing revenue streams is not the answer that the City should be contemplating.

If housing really is the issue, then trying to sell off park land is definitely not the answer. There are many trees in Rockwood Park but all of them are the wrong trees for Council to be barking up.

Another issue (which is one that I do not know anything specific about) is whether that land was acquired by the City or donated to the City specifically to be park land (and thus is not actually legally available to be sold off by the City). If so, the land would not be able to be sold but that would be an issue for the lawyers to sort out (and the taxpayers to pay for it all).

The CBC article (linked above) indicated that the next steps would be to find out whether there is any interest in that parcel of land. Let me be clear when I tell you all that there is interest in that land and that there are many citizens and tourists who visit

Rockwood Park and have an deep and abiding interest in the park (as well as all of the flora and fauna who have no voice but definitely have a significant interest in that parcel of land).

Please mark me down as one of the many citizens who are requesting that the motion to designate 1671 Sandy Point Road as "surplus" be rescinded. I would much rather that 1671 Sandy Point Road be covered by a conservation agreement so that the land may remain within Rockwood Park in order to provide habitat to the native flora and fauna and be enjoyed by future generations of citizens and tourists alike.

Yours truly,  
Jon Fraser  
5 Alexandra Street