



Sligo Creek Golf Course Public Meeting
May 26, 2009

Below is a summary of the PowerPoint Presentation and initial responses from staff to questions from the audience. This is followed by a detailed summary of each question from the audience, staff's response and comments that were received from the audience.

Summary of Staff's Presentation and Response

- Park is 65.5 acres
- The park is a County-wide park and will be classified as either recreational or special use
- Sligo and Colesville intersection exceeds threshold for congestion between 4-7pm on weekdays
- The only foregone conclusion is that Sligo park land will be returned to Park and Planning
- It will cost approximately \$60,000 per year to maintain the property as is
- Parks staff is committed to again opening its past financial records for Sligo Park for the public. Staff will ask the Revenue Authority to do the same
- Would like to meet the objectives of the State's : No Child Left Inside Act of 2007 and the other stated objectives
- Staff agrees to do a cost benefit analysis for an alternative of keeping the Golf Course in operation as part of the first phase of the planning process

Summary of Community Comments

- Many residents want the park to remain a golf course.
- The LPPRP (Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan) has not been thoroughly reviewed by County Council. Some residents question the assumptions and statistics in the plan.
- The area has too many trees and hills for the land to be graded for baseball, rectangular fields, and basketball.
- Surplus park uses in areas beyond the service area should be considered as meeting the recreation needs generated by this area, because residents sometimes use parks outside of their service areas.
- Do we have to attach a fee to using a golf course? Why can't it be subsidized like a basketball court and rectangular fields?

- Why aren't golf courses included as a recreational need in the LPPRP?
- Citizens should consider advocating for alternative financing strategies such as revenue sharing.
- Sligo golf course is a great course because of its small 9-hole size
 - o Allows players to comfortably walk around the whole course
 - o Great for women players who don't hit the ball as far
- Wasn't there a partnership offer years ago (Golf Etc?), why not consider a public/private partnership again?
- Little Bennett is also operating at a loss but unlike Sligo Park, Little Bennett is subject to bonds and the County would rather keep it in operation as a golf course than risk ruining its bond rating
- The Revenue Authority didn't listen to the community's suggestions on funding solutions (revenue sharing, etc). Residents hope that Park and Planning staff will consider the community's suggestions more than the Revenue Authority did.
- The Revenue Authority wasn't happy to leave it as a golf course. They wanted to turn it into an "amusement park" for golf by having putt putt golf and serving alcohol and adding lighting.
- The financial information (account books) need to be accessible to the public.
- Woodside Civic Association is in attendance.
- Did anyone analyze why the course failed?
- Has a feasibility study occurred?
- Could the property become residential?
- In PG county the golf course are operated by the Rec department and are subsidized by the County
- Sligo's retail should stay open longer to earn more money
- The course has a nice following; people who use it probably won't go out of their way to use others.
- Ten-twelve years ago the Park was turning a profit. What happened since then?
- What's the point of changing the use of the land when it costs money to build something new?
- What are the next steps for those who want to keep the park?
- Some residents feel that Councilmember Ervin is ignoring their emails
- The independent golf research group is the same group that surveyed the Course's golfers; therefore they had an interest in the results.
- Revenue Authority is a public agency so their books should be available to the public.
- It appears that many in the audience are unaware of the public meetings that MCRA had with the community last year. All of the comments being expressed by the community today were aired out during MCRA's process last year.

- Parks has received a number of ideas
- Disk golf would be a great alternative, in some residents' opinions.
- The course has had inadequate investment. There is a rectangular field across the street from the golf course and it is poorly maintained.
- The people may make noise but that won't be as effective as having an independent consultant do a cost benefit analysis for keeping the park a golf course. The consultant should be able to think creatively about different types of golf course if the current set up isn't working.
- It seems that the biggest problem is having the golf course in the Enterprise program.

Detailed Questions/Answers

Q= question, C= comment, A= answer from Parks staff

- Q: What can be done to un-do the golf course lease?
 - A: Staff has been told this is off the table. Citizens can go to elected and appointed officials with this idea. Staff can prepare a golf course option.
 - Q: Facilities that don't produce revenue—why are they okay, but not golf?
 - A: Other recreation facilities typically considered tax-based.
- Q: What are the accurate figures for SGC as a stand-alone facility?
 - A: Parks will provide.
- C: SGC has not been advertised by signage or in the brochure.
- C: Kids growing up in the area may create a need for golf facilities that is currently not recognized.
- C: Revenue Authority should look at revenue sharing.
- A: Keep a "next best" option besides golf.
- C: Parks should have a liaison with golf advocates.
- Q: Does Parks consider golf a recreation need?
- A: Since it is considered an Enterprise: No.
- C: Women golfers need separate course and this is a good one for them.
- C: Public/Private Partnerships/revenue- Generating uses may be considered.
- C: The community needs specific guidance on lease:
 - A: The only foregone conclusion is property comes back to parks.
 - A: Re-negotiation would be required
 - A: Background on the Lease: Expectation was that golf would continue to be financially viable for the Revenue Authority
- Q: Little Bennett- Why not close it instead?
- A: We can't default on the bonds.
- Q: Isn't there room in the language?
 - A: If there's a will, there's a way. If there is a decision that golf is the right use for the property, there are ways to do it. (Would have to be re-negotiated).
- Q: Ballpark figure on operating costs interim?

- A: \$56,000. We will review \$\$ of each alternative.
- C: Hope P&P is willing to listen.
- Q: Any targets for stewardship objectives of H2O quality or habitat?
 - A: Interagency agreements for water quality include this watershed.
 - A: US Army Corps of Eng/DEP working group on-going.
 - A: LPPRP discusses best natural areas, etc. Part of this process will be to articulate how to achieve these objectives.
- C: Remind P&P that Revenue Authority was not content to renovate ex. Golf course, but had proposed an “amusement park”.
- Q: How can golfers communicate?
 - A: Website with e-mail list.
- C: Montgomery County Civic Fed. Parks Committee contact: Carol Ann Barth, Cbarth@mindspring.com
- Q: Why not look at it like PG County? Where golf is considered a public service. Mgmt. and financial issues need to be transparent.
 - A: We can make \$ records available on our website.
- C: Woodside Forest Civic Association and Woodside Park listserv we need revenue figures to help us make a decision.
 - A: We will make public what info we can get.
- Q: Did anyone do an analysis of why it failed?
 - A: Parks owned golf courses which were losing money. Leased to Revenue Authority.
- Q: Have feasibility studies been done on any of the possible uses?
 - A: Not yet because we have not gone beyond asking for input, but we will.
- Q: Parks is locked into managing this for parkland? Could it be housing?
 - A: Our mission is to come up with a plan for a park.
- C: The way the golf course is right now works.
- C: We should be talking to the county council.
- C: PG County courses lose money but are subsidized by taxes.
- C: One reason SGC lost money is because operating hours are too short.
- C: If SGC closes, people may not go to other courses. It is a good course for beginners. Good exercise: 2.1 miles.
- Q: 11-12 years ago, why did SDC go downhill so fast?
 - A: We can look at it.
- Q: Wouldn't redeveloping the land lose money?
 - A: Yes, but anything we do will.
- Q: Lease doesn't stop P&P from running it as a golf course?
 - A: Revenue Authority opinion was that it was in competition with other courses.
- Q: When in process was it determined?
- Q: What are next steps for proponents of golf?
 - A: July we will be in front of PB.
 - A: Call or e-mail council members.
- Q: What about the “independent study”? Might have been a vested interest.

- Q: What more does P&P need to hear?
 - A: We have to revisit financial records, marketing opportunities and take the option to MCPB, along with other options.
- C: Setting up a website – Will parallel P&P website.
- C: Silver Spring Civic Association (umbrella org of several civics): We want to see this golf course saved. The only course in the county that serves a diversity of users: young, old, disadvantaged, and disabled.
- C: Heather Phipps: Neighbors of NW Branch- Stakeholder advisory group vetted these points with MCRA in 2008. MCPB and PHED were open to the public.
- Q: Why we are here is to talk about formal proposals. Has Parks recommended others?
 - A: Mostly informal: Dog walking, trails, track meets.
- C: Bethesda Bungalows’ proposed for a disc golf course: Would include trails, community gardens, and other “green: facilities.
- C: Usually natural environment loses out in the “balance”. Suggest supporting existing course with other slight improvements.
- A: Process shown in the PowerPoint slide is the process to take the proposal through MCPB.
- Q: Already is a soccer field across the street- Why should the GC be taken away? Lack of marketing?
- Q: Is there any capacity in the short-term to get meaningful money analysis, to accompany the planning process?
 - A: We will have to put this info together soon. Can’t commit to consultant, but will consider it.
- C: With a little investment, could be re-designed to be a real destination.
- C: Best approach for citizens would be to take it out of the enterprise category so it does not have to break even.
- C: Change the thinking.
- C: How about Golf Et Cetera?
- C: If golf course is not an option: driving range or 9-holes plus nature preserve.
- C: Disc golf could be a good interim use, even if regular golf considered for long-range.
- C: Timing issue: If you let the golf course deteriorate, it will be costly to renovate it.
 - A: We need to re-look at the schedule, if Parks taking it over is not a done deal.