

Nichole Baldinger

From: Steven Braswell <braswes@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 17, 2018 1:41 PM
To: City Council; Chris Humphrey; Bob Young; Barbara Babbitt; Stephen Dyer; Matt Shaughnessy; Justin Speight; Rocco Yeargin
Cc: Gerard Neugebauer
Subject: Proposed Raintree Acquisition

Greetings,

The city administration has expressed a desire to purchase Raintree Country Club for a sum of \$3.3M. This purchase is being classified as a Parks matter, so the monies to be spent will be routed through the Parks capital fund, with a loan from the city's general fund, to be repaid by the Parks fund (likely using money collected from the portion of annual income taxes that is earmarked for Parks capital spending).

The proposed legislation is solely concerned with the purchase of the land and buildings (and miscellaneous equipment) and with the funding mechanism / repayment mechanism. There is no mention in the legislation of any future use of the land or buildings or what if any purpose would be served by this purchase. To my knowledge (speaking prior to the town hall), any publically available information about future uses has only been documented as verbal declarations at city council / city council committee meetings.

To the best of my recollection of the verbal statements on this topic, the administration has proposed the following justifications for this purchase:

- Prevent the land from being developed as residential - reducing future infrastructure requirements / possible school impacts
- Acquire a contiguous parcel of 140+ acres of green space
- Retain a banquet / meeting facility in the city
- The administration has proposed a possibility that the golf course or the golf course / banquet center combination could be operated by a 3rd party under some form of lease / operation agreement. There seemed to be some agreement among the parties discussing this that the city operating a golf course on its own would be a bad idea.

Arguments on the justifications:

- Since the housing crash in 2008, residential development in the city has slowed. Why are we afraid of new residential development - particularly a development that would likely take 10+ years to build out. Given the declining school age population in the city (US Census data available on request), I'm not sure that school impact is a valid fear either.
- Additional green space is a decent justification (but not as a golf course). More on this later.
- There are numerous (and arguably better) banquet and meeting facilities in the area. I see no compelling argument for the city to get into this business.
- There are numerous golf facilities in the area. I see no compelling argument for the city to get into this business - either directly or indirectly through a 3rd party. Those who say that the risk would all be on a 3rd party have obviously not experienced all the ways these arrangements go bad.

Issues and questions regarding this purchase:

- Appraised value of the property as a golf course - \$2.7M. Appraised value as a residential development - \$3.5M. Why is the city offering a premium of more than 20% over the value of the property (particularly if they intend to keep it as a golf facility)? If the owner declines a lower offer, one more in line with the appraised value, have we really lost anything?

- Ethics and conflicts of interest. There are issues and a need for disclosure exists. I am happy to discuss verbally with those with a need to disclose - you know who you are (at least you should).

- If the city purchases this property and keeps it as a golf course, then is it doing the right thing by making the appropriation through the parks fund? Parks are a civic virtue - one of their defining characteristics is being open to the public. If this land is maintained as a golf course - then it is closed to the public and really does not meet the definition of being a park. It may be legally allowed to characterize this purchase as a "park" but it is morally wrong.

- Facts are facts. Golf is a sport in decline. Do you really want to invest dollars into that kind of business model? And golf is non-inclusive - participation is dominated by rich white older males. Is that kind of message you want to send to the community - that you want to spend our tax dollars on a playground for the well off?

There are alternative uses for this property if purchased by the city - it doesn't have to be a golf course

- Spring / Summer / Fall sports complex - skate park, scooter / roller skate / bike trails, bmx trails, archery range, outdoor shooting range, additional pickleball courts.

- Winter sports complex - cross country skiing, skate ponds and trails, sled hills, toboggan chutes.

- Picnic pavilions

- Maybe keep the golf driving range (simple enough to sell buckets of balls and do simple driving range maintenance). I might not be able to afford to take my kids golfing, but I might be able to afford a bucket of balls.

- Second dog park - because one is not enough

I could see supporting the purchase of the land and turning it into a real park / sports complex. I cannot support keeping the golf course portion. I also seriously question whether there is any justification for any investment in the banquet / clubhouse building as a business.

At the end of the day, the business of the city is to spend our tax dollars wisely, serving the interests of the residents. Ask yourself this - if you (as a private citizen) had \$3.3M to invest, is this where you would commit your funds? At least if the land is purchased and turned into real public park land, there is no need to make up justifications about it being "revenue neutral" or low risk or "good for the city". But if you buy this land and intend to keep the golf course, be prepared for endless second guessing. When the city committed to move the E. Liberty school house, we were told that it would be easy to sell to a business to recoup some of the cost. Still waiting on that one.

Regards,

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