

From: Michael Klug
Sent: Wednesday, February 10, 2021 10:16 PM
To: SPPC <sppc@london.ca>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] River Road Golf Course

To the members of the Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee:

I write in my personal capacity to express my strong opposition to the City selling River Road Golf Course.

If the City does decide to sell River Road, it will be compounding immeasurably its serious mistake in closing the golf course in 2020, which decision appears to have cost the City (and its golf reserve fund) in the range of \$300 000.

It is certainly frustrating in the extreme that these losses – due to the City’s error in closing River Road to the public in 2020 but still staffing it – are now used to justify the sale of this beautiful course on public lands.

The fact is that it is well understood that golf is experiencing a major rebound in popularity currently, for obvious reasons. If there was ever a good case for eliminating River Road from the City’s golf system – which I dispute -- it is certainly not in early 2021.

Municipal golf is a public good which, like other recreational facilities, supports the well-being of the population. Given the non-existent impact on the City’s budget, there is no good reason for our municipal government to be making cuts to these important public recreational facilities. Instead it should be investing in and expanding the use of these public lands.

Respectfully, I request that the City reject the Administration’s recommendation to sell River Road and instead maintain it as a City-owned and operated golf course at least for 2021 and 2022 to determine how it performs in this new golf economy. I think there is good reason to predict that London’s public golf system (and the golf reserve fund) would profit from this.

Please also consider the following points in support of a decision to maintain River Road as a public golf course.

1. The lands upon which it sits – which the Administration is proposing to sell – were identified by UTRCA as late as 2009 as “core conservation lands.” In its Thames Valley Corridor Plan, the City recommended that these lands be added to the Thames Valley Corridor and further provided that “the River Road Golf Course also provides an opportunity to serve as a demonstration of best management practices in support of ecological objectives.” It is obvious that the maintenance of the lands as a public golf course supports important environmental objectives of the City, while the sale of these former (or current?) “core conservation lands” likely would not.
2. Related, the Administration’s recommendation with respect to River Road is to sell the property with no indication of what the ultimate use of the property would be post-sale. If the City sells the golf course to a private golf course operator, who purchases it on the premise that it will be profitable as such, that simply establishes that the City should maintain it as a golf course itself and reap those profits for the public golf system. If, by contrast, the lands are to be sold for some form of development, then the City will have decided in effect to allow for development of a large tract of scarce environmentally sensitive public lands, bordering the Thames River, when that land could have been used in perpetuity, creatively for any manner of environmentally-sensitive public purposes, including golf.
3. The main argument that the Administration advances is that the sale proceeds from River Road are needed to fund capital improvements at the other golf

courses. Remember – golf pays for golf, and the City selling these lands and denying the golf system the proceeds would be a serious violation of this principle. However, the report does not identify what these supposedly necessary capital improvements to Thames and Fanshawe are. If the City is going to sell River Road to fund capital improvements at the other golf courses, surely Council and the public need to understand what the proposed capital expenditures entail and whether they are truly necessary. In my own experience, as a regular customer of these golf course over the years, neither the golf courses or the club houses require any apparent major capital investment. More to the point, the 2019 Corporate Asset Management report, cited by Administration, provides at page 268 for only \$200, 000 in annual existing capital budget for the City's golf assets. Is the City really intending to spend an additional \$615 000/year, i.e. \$842 000/year (or the entire proceeds of the sale of River Road) on capital improvements at Thames and Fanshawe golf courses? For what? I can say with confidence that the vast majority of those who use these facilities would rather River Road remain as a public facility over spending money on un-needed new clubhouse at Thames and/or Fanshawe (especially given how charming these clubhouses currently are). Certainly as part of the decision before it, the Committee should carefully consider what capital investments are being proposed at Thames and Fanshawe GCs and whether there may be a possibility of these capital costs being inflated in a desperate attempt to find some palatable justification for selling River Road for other unstated reasons.

In short, I am very much opposed to the City cutting back on the provision of public recreation facilities like River Road Golf Course and encourage the Committee and Council to direct Administration to operate River Road as a public golf course this year, as it has for 30 years.

Yours truly,

Michael Klug
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