

To: Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee
From: Robert J. Austin
Subject: River Road – proposed closure
Date: February 11, 2021

Council Members,

River Road Golf Course is green gem in the City's municipal golf system which happens to run a minor deficit. I say "minor" because the deficit could be easily covered by a minor increase in membership fees.

Then there is the issue of future capital expenses. For years the municipality basked in the "golf pays for golf" principle while diverting the surplus from municipal golf for other recreational projects and foregoing a solid golf reserve fund. Are hockey, baseball and other municipal recreational ventures held to the same financial standards?

The KPMG report shows a snapshot of the financial "now" for the municipal golf system with no creative consideration for the possibility of turning the present losses to a profit. The report's simplistic, one dimensional answer to the running deficit is to close down one or more golf courses. There is no real consideration for future growth in the southeast quarter of London and serving a future growing population. Also consider that the population is aging and golf is a wonderful and healthy recreation for seniors. Golf provides fresh air physical exercise even for those seniors that require carts. Additionally, golf provides mental stimulation and social interaction. And in the off season, the courses are used by walkers, cross-country skiers and other winter sports enthusiasts.

Council might view municipal golf with the same light as it views non-profit making amenities such as the Convention Centre, Budweiser Gardens, Storybook Gardens and various recreation centres. Such facilities are deemed to be of net value as they make London an attractive and vibrant place to live.

Please consider imaginatively and carefully. Once River Road Golf Course is dead, there is no bringing it back. This is a one-way, irrevocable decision, a decision that may save London a small amount of money but also detract from London's attractiveness as a place to live. Also consider that most of us members are willing to pay more to keep River Road alive.

Thank you for your consideration.

Robert Austin
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