

February 11, 2021

Dear Ladies & Gentlemen of the Strategic Priorities & Policy Committee:

Please find below thoughts pertaining to the closing of River Road and some possible suggestions as to how we can work together to save this beautiful golf course.

Within the contents of the City of London Golf Report I was amazed to see that River Road lost \$315,345.00, of which \$140,072 was wages and benefits. It appears like this was an error in judgement closing River Road last season and if the City permanently closes the Road, why was that money spent ?. If River Road was open last year, given the surge of interest in golf, then the worst it could have done was break even and that would have saved the City of London Municipal Golf program \$315,000.

Thames Valley showed a surplus of \$60,331., and Fanshawe a surplus of \$149,049., why is it that Thames with 27 holes paid out \$762,422 in wages which was \$117,240 more than Fanshawe with 45 holes to maintain ??? This significant wage difference at Thames should be reviewed as a possible saving and fine tuning to the Golf System's bottom line.

Last season was unique due to Covid19 and for that reason alone the City needed River Road to be open due to spaced out tee times at the other courses and the surge in people turning to the game of golf as an outlet for outdoor physical activity. Acquiring tee times was a miserable experience for many last year, with the disturbing part being the amount of no shows not only from an opportunity for others to play at those times but the amount of lost revenue to the program and no one holding those "no shows accountable."

The report indicates that Golf should pay for Golf, we have to figure out how to achieve that if we wish to make sure we can keep playing golf at River Road plus enhancing our golfing experiences at Fanshawe and Thames Valley.

I am in a dilemma on the above thought as I am confident that swimming does not pay for swimming, walking and bike paths do not pay for walking and bike paths, soccer does not pay for soccer, tennis does not pay for tennis etc. etc. and I am confident there are many other activities that do not fund themselves but are subsidized by City Hall. Golf pays for Golf because at one time it could, perhaps increased golf related expenses and a different Business model adopted in the nineties have contributed to this turnaround.

Is it possible that River Road could be overseen by one of the existing managing Golf Professionals from one of the other two courses ? Could the pro shop including the limited food and beverage responsibilities not be staffed by capable seasonal casual employees, would this not allow for a wage savings of at least \$30k per year?

Efforts need to be made to address the better marketing of River Road to attract green fee golfers that do not subscribe to a City golf membership. Has this ever been seriously addressed ?.... or just continue to passively advertise in the Spectrum. The Managing Professionals could work together with a volunteer member committee to come up with a plan to promote more play at River Road, every little bit helps.

In the letters included, there is considerable conversation about reducing green fees and other discounts at the Road, at the end of the day discounts should increase rounds played but won't have much effect on the bottom line which is the ultimate goal, however if the discount road is the chosen path..... let the world know those discounts are there!! Perhaps with substantial increased volume the bottom line may look brighter.

Maybe it is time to recognize that if the Membership desires to keep River Road as part of the Membership Program we may have to pay a little more to keep it included. Do some Londoners feel City Hall should be subsidizing Golf to some degree? The reality at present is that is not going to happen in the immediate future. Should Members be willing to address this through an increase in their membership fees? There are just over 2000 Members in which approximately 500 are full members, if each full membership realized an additional \$150 per membership that increase would offer another \$75k plus if the Regular (half) members fees were increased \$75 x 1500 golfers that would equal another \$112,500 totalling \$187,500.

I want to acknowledge that a Full or Value membership in the City of London is the best Golf Green Fee value in Ontario. The Value membership concept is and perhaps "was" a brilliant idea.

River Road is a good golf course and is challenging but certainly a fun golf experience for both young and old. The City is growing every day, in some way four 18 hole golf courses has got to add to the appeal of individuals, families and new business coming to our City.

Real “hands on management and marketing are necessary in every business, has it ever been anyone’s responsibility to pursue outside revenue?..... “more profitable corporate tournaments”, “signage” , “score card advertising”, creating additional playing programs offered by other courses “Friday Night 9 and Dines”, “a couples night” etc., this is not a “Field of Dreams” where if you build it they will just come.....

City of London Members perhaps never took it seriously that the Road would close, the message has hit home now!!

Years ago City of London golfers made a substantial investment in the creation of River Road and City of London Golfers also generated substantial funds allocated to other City recreational activities perhaps City Hall should not abandon this asset considering those facts.

We are looking at another year very similar to last year in the Golf Industry due to The Corona Virus . The numbers in the City of London Golf Report are black and white for 2020 and support keeping River Road open.

Thank You for your time.

George Buckley
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