

# *Jackson Park Watch*

*jacksonparkwatch@gmail.com   www.jacksonparkwatch.org   www.facebook.com/jacksonparkwatch*

August 4, 2017

Michael Ruemmler, Chicago Parks Golf Alliance Co-Founder and Director  
Brian Hogan, Chicago Parks Golf Alliance Co-Founder and Director  
Michael Kelly, Chicago Park District CEO

(sent via e-mail)

Greetings,

It was just one year ago – August 3, 2016, to be precise - that Chicago Park District CEO Mike Kelly e-mailed Mayor Rahm Emanuel, saying, "We have an opportunity to transform Jackson Park golf course (1899) and South Shore golf course (1907) into the strongest urban golf site the PGA has seen in 25 years...." The message, which was sent to the Mayor's personal e-mail account and later revealed by a Better Government Association investigation, continued with Kelly's admonition to the Mayor: "It is critical for YOU that this project has the support of the Obama Foundation and the surrounding community. Furthermore, the community should initiate the request to improve the golf courses."

Today the plan referenced in that e-mail – the Chicago Parks Golf Alliance proposal for a merger, redesign and expansion of the Jackson Park and South Shore courses – is mired in controversy. While you have repeatedly said the new course would remain within the footprints of the existing golf courses, when you finally released the proposed design on June 21 it instead showed a major expansion. Your proposed golf course would take out numerous well-used recreational facilities and natural areas-- tennis courts, baseball diamonds, basketball courts, the Nature Sanctuary adjacent to the South Shore Cultural Center, and the south side's only dog park. This vast expansion beyond the current golf courses is itself is a major cause of the controversy. In response, spokesmen for the CPGA and the Park District have made vague statements about replacements elsewhere, statements that have been received with considerable skepticism. If anything, community opposition to the elimination of existing, well-utilized, and accessible natural and recreational facilities in favor of a golf course designed primarily for affluent golfers, most of whom live elsewhere, is growing.

A further reason for growing dissatisfaction in the surrounding community and among city taxpayers more broadly is the virtually complete absence of any financial information about the project. What would the various components cost: changes to the courses, construction of the underpasses, construction of the new clubhouse and of the winter golf practice facility, road closures, replacement of lost recreational facilities and natural areas? What are the projected sources of funding? Who would pay for what? What would it cost city taxpayers?

Beyond construction costs, what is the business plan for operating the course? How many pro golf tournaments are projected, how frequently? What revenues would these bring, and who would keep the revenue? Since you are seeking private funding for parts of this project and since potential donors would certainly insist on full financial disclosure about the viability of the project, much of this information has to exist, but you have yet to make any of it public. Absent any of this vital information, you are saying in essence "trust us, it will be great." Maybe so, maybe not. Only actual data can answer the questions.

Also inexplicable is your continuing failure to release the one piece of information that could confirm your pledge to keep the new golf course affordable and accessible to local golfers: the projected greens fees schedule and cart fees for each day of the week, and for each class of golfers – i.e., resident and non-resident; senior; and league members – and not only for the first year, but for five years and further into the future. For how long will the Park District commit to providing caddies "at no extra charge" to golfers, a benefit CEO Kelly recently disclosed? Which golfers would be eligible for caddies at no charge and for how long? You cannot expect meaningful public comment on the critical question of accessibility to the elite golf course you propose as long as that essential pricing and scheduling data remains concealed.

We are, and you should be, quite concerned about the potential discriminatory impact of your elite, more expensive golf course project on the continuing availability of public recreational benefits in the neighborhoods served by Jackson Park and South Shore. As things now stand, your proposed golf course project would have a major adverse impact on these communities in two ways: (i) by depriving community members of existing, well-utilized recreational facilities and natural areas without any equivalent, acceptable, accessible replacements; and (ii) absent credible data and written multi-year guarantees to the contrary, by depriving local golfers of regular and convenient access to these well-run and much-loved municipal golf courses, and consigning them instead to economically restricted access to the elite PGA tour course you favor.

We call on you to immediately take several steps:

- release all financial information needed to assess the feasibility and viability of the project;
- release the projected greens fees and other pricing for the first five years of the new course's operation – data essential to assessing your pledge to keep the course affordable and accessible for local golfers
- right-size the dimensions of the proposed golf course to remain within the current footprint, so as to preserve the existing recreational facilities and natural areas. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

*Brenda Nelms and Margaret Schmid  
Jackson Park Watch*

*cc via e-mail:*

*Mayor Rahm Emanuel  
Deputy Mayor Andrea Zopp  
Alderman Leslie Hairston  
Friends of the Parks Executive Director Juanita Irizarry  
Openlands President Jerry Adelman  
Editor, The Chicago Sun-Times  
Editor, The Chicago Tribune  
Editor, Hyde Park Herald  
Michael Strautmanis, Vice President for Civic Engagement, The Obama Foundation*