

## **The Community's Perspective of Radical Changes to Sligo Creek Golf Course**

### **A group report to the Board of Directors of the Montgomery County Revenue Authority**

To the Board of Directors of the MCRA: The following is an addendum to the official report from the Sligo Creek Golf Course (SCGC) Stakeholder Advisory Group to the MCRA. Prepared and submitted by the following SCGC Stakeholder Advisory Group representatives: Heather Phipps (At-large/i-petition representative), Adam Pagnucco (President, Forest Estates Community Association), Carole Barth (President, Northwood Four Corners Civic Association), Karen Howland (Woodside Forest Civic Association), and Michael Welsh (President, North Hills of Sligo Creek Civic Association). This document summarizes the main reasons the community continues to oppose spending unnecessary capital in an economic downturn to make radical changes (e.g., driving range) to SCGC. These include the historical nature of the course, acting with fiscal responsibility, and the negative impact on the environment, local neighborhoods, and current SCGC users.

#### A Long History as a Learning Center:

The Sligo Creek Golf Course (SCGC) is a historically significant property and has served as a learning center for decades. SCGC was formerly the Argyle Country club, with records showing that it has been a golf course since at least 1927. In 1946, the Montgomery County Parks and Planning acquired the course and made it the first public golf course in the county with the initial aim of serving veterans of World War II. It has remained a learning course. Sligo's 9-hole configuration is appropriate for beginners and walkable for seniors. Generations of Montgomery County residents have learned to play golf at the SCGC. First Tee Montgomery, Inc., and MCPS golf teams benefit from significant donations of time and resources at SCGC and other MCRA properties. With its history and connection to the Park and County and with its success as a learning facility, drastically altering the facility is a mistake.

#### Financial Questions:

The residential communities remain unconvinced that the financial information and forecasts provided to the public have been clear and complete. At the beginning of the July 1 meeting, Mr. Miller explained that he thought the Stakeholder Group was becoming too bogged down with the details of SCGC's financial information and the information contained in the marketing report conducted by Kennady Consulting. Some members of the Stakeholder Group agreed that it would be incredibly difficult to determine a break-even scenario for SCGC without an extensive investigation of the course's financial picture. Mr. Miller made it clear that he only expected the Stakeholder Group to determine if they would recommend a driving range and where it should be located on the course. He explained that the scale, site and features of the driving range would be decided by MCRA. Hence, the Stakeholder Group was presented with an either/or scenario: driving range or no driving range. As a result of this discussion, a motion was passed by a majority vote to not recommend a driving range.

Some additional concerns regarding the information available include the following:

1. The Kennady report presented only one option -- a lighted driving range, with a specific slant to the largest size (70 tee stalls) to maximize revenues. Other

revenue generating solutions were generally dismissed as inadequate and cost-saving solutions were not a part of the Kennady report.

2. MCRA financial analysis used a baseline from 2006 but records show that the course had been profitable as recently as 2002.
3. A substantial management fee is now charged to SCGC, which is not prorated or proportional to the size and volume at Sligo. This fee exacerbates the appearance that the course's financial performance is poor.
4. The audited FY 2007 financial statements show that the County golf course system as a whole was profitable (over \$600K in profit). It is certain that SCGC does not make the entire golf system unprofitable, thus MCRA should not be able to turn back SCGC to MNCPPC under the terms of the lease.
5. In June 2008 MCRA increased the greens fees at SCGC. Mr. Miller acknowledged that this change was not included when preparing the financial projections he presented to the Stakeholder Group.
6. A renovation plan, prepared by a contractor with which MCRA has experience, estimated roughly \$2.5M in improvements to the course. Alternative plans were not explored. For example, improving the course in phases – correcting simple problems first and re-evaluating the projected value of subsequent items was discussed by the Stakeholders Advisory Group, but this suggestion was dismissed as inadequate by Mr. Miller.
7. A suggestion was offered by an observer at the end of one meeting that the MCRA implement less expensive improvements at other leased courses. Additional revenues generated by these improvements could then be used to gradually improve conditions at SCGC without requiring the major capital investments posed by installing a driving range. This suggestion would reduce the immediate requirement for additional revenue at Sligo because any financial burden would continue to be spread across all MCRA managed properties. The Stakeholder Advisory Group did not revisit this sensible suggestion.
8. Kennady put in a disclaimer at the end of their report about projections not being accurate in times of recession or economic downturn. MCRA acknowledged that the local economy is in a period of recession or economic downturn.

#### Impacts to Sligo Park and the Neighborhoods:

Significant concerns still remain about the impact of the proposed radical changes under MCRA's Master Plan for SCGC. Traffic, lighting, environmental and public safety issues resulting from any nighttime activities remain unaddressed.

At its January 2008 Town Hall meeting, MCRA's consultants presented their findings with respect to lighting, traffic and environmental impacts. The traffic and environmental reports focused on minimum, legally-required mitigation actions that would be required to obtain permits for proposed modifications. Instead of an actual study to determine the amount of light pollution that would be created in the currently dark parkland area, a lighting vendor's sales representative made a presentation. Issues concerning public safety and the costs to Montgomery County taxpayers associated with changes in traffic, environmental degradation of Sligo Creek, and loss of trees that would ultimately occur due to the proposed modifications were not addressed by the Stakeholder Group.

### Conclusion

There continues to be strong opposition to radical changes to SCGC in order to accommodate a driving range and mini-golf courses. This conclusion was supported by three separate votes documented throughout the Stakeholder Group process. Stakeholder Group representatives for four local civic associations, FOSC, and the i-petition/paper petition signers favor more robust marketing efforts emphasizing the unique aspects of SCGC in combination with a more staggered maintenance schedule. By doing so, MCRA will be preserving this historic course and protecting the watershed, park wildlife, and the quality of life of the broad communities who use SCGC and Sligo Creek Park.

### Resources

For a more in-depth understanding of community members concerns and comments, we encourage every member of the Board of Directors of the MCRA to visit the following website:

[http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Green\\_SligoGolf/signatures.html](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Green_SligoGolf/signatures.html)

In addition, please review the attached Google map which presents the six community/civic association that have officially documented their opposition of installing a driving range and mini-golf courses at SCGC.