

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF PALO ALTO**

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: City Council

FROM: Mayor Burch, Vice Mayor Kleinberg and Council Member Kishimoto

DATE: March 7, 2005

SUBJECT: GOLF COURSE REDESIGN and PLAYING FIELDS CREATION

“The citizens of Palo Alto are suffering from a serious lack of field space to conduct recreational activities. . . . [A]ny solution must include...securing additional space.” - From the Sub-committee Fields Advisory Report, presented to and adopted by the Parks and Recreation Commission on December 14, 2004.

The quest to find adequate playing fields for our community’s growing demand has been championed in recent years by our Parks and Recreation Commission, by recreational sports groups serving our community’s youth, and through the efforts of the City and Stanford University to partner in the creation of a new Mayfield playing field. These efforts have focused the Council and the community on the critical shortage of recreational field space, the scarcity of available public land and the overwhelming expense of purchasing appropriately sized and located private land.

As a result of reviewing the east Embarcadero area of the Baylands during our Zoning Ordinance Update (ZOU), a significant opportunity to address this problem has been identified through the possible reconfiguration of our current golf course complex.

Experts on golf course architecture state a championship 18-hole golf course can be created on far less acreage than the 180 acres currently being used at the Palo Alto Golf Course. In fact, a better golfing experience could be created at this site using 140 to 160 acres, thereby freeing up 20 to 40 acres that could be redesigned as recreational and playing fields contiguous to the existing fields on Geng Road. It should be emphasized that all of the 180 acres of dedicated parkland would remain as parkland, but be better utilized to help meet the increasing needs of our community for playing fields.

Redesign of the golf course could afford both direct and complementary benefits, including but not necessarily limited to:

1. leveraging an existing but underutilized City resource through creation of 20-40 acres of new playing field space without the expenditure of City funds to buy new acreage;
2. improvement of the recreational golfing experience through a remodeled golf course with additional golfing amenities (e.g., 9 hole executive course, expanded practice area) to bring it up to modern playing standards and more closely targeted to changing market conditions;
3. an environmentally planned course that includes expansion and enhancement of the natural habitat; and
4. helping to address San Francisquito Creek flood control needs.

Such a redesign of the park acreage may lead to other indirect benefits as well. For example, a successful course improvement and new field space may facilitate positive changes to adjacent private

lands across Embarcadero Road from the course, where aging office buildings and light commercial uses now exist. Additionally, new fields would help to reduce the current overuse and congestion around neighborhood parks and schools for organized sports. Overall this project could address numerous Comprehensive Plan and community goals, as well as being in compliance with and helping fulfill the objectives of the Baylands Master Plan.

Several strategies for financing these improvements have been successfully used for municipal golf course redesign, including some that exist outside of City resources. These funding methods would be explored as part of the project evaluation.

We have before us an unusual and timely opportunity for a creative re-evaluation of the best use of this valuable community asset that would maintain its park character and enhance the ecological and recreational assets of our Baylands, while leveraging its resources to better serve our community's modern needs and lifestyles. It is appropriate that we initiate this evaluation in as timely a manner as possible to not miss the planning and funding opportunities that may not exist in the future. Not only is there currently a critical shortage of field space, but also such an evaluation should be done concurrently with the ZOU to be most effective. In addition, the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) may consider some of this acreage for dual use as a floodplain and it is important that this plan be coordinated with any such efforts.

Being cognizant of limited staff resources, it is our recommendation that staff should follow a staged review process, beginning with a preliminary feasibility study to be reviewed by Council. If the preliminary review demonstrates a promising level of feasibility, Council may then direct staff to develop a more detailed plan and timeline for further evaluation and implementation strategies, and engage the Parks and Recreation Commission in reviewing the recommendations.

We therefore ask our colleagues to join us in supporting our recommendation that staff be directed to conduct a preliminary feasibility review of this proposal, including an emphasis on private financing strategies, and return to Council with its initial evaluation within the next three to four months.