

WHY THE PARK HILL GOLF COURSE LAND MUST REMAIN AS OPEN SPACE

The City of Denver should acquire the 155-acre Park Hill Golf Course (PHGC) land to preserve it in perpetuity as park/open space for the enjoyment of all our citizens. PHGC was recently sold to a real estate developer, Bushwood, LLC, a subsidiary of Westside Investment Partners, Inc., which terminated the existing golf course lease due to run through the end of 2024 with a 5-year renewal option through 2029.

There are many compelling reasons for the City to purchase the land and maintain it as open space or parkland:

Historic Promises and Plans

- The golf course was identified as a “major facility” in the Park Hill Neighborhood Plan, and the plan’s Land Use and Zoning section states a goal to “preserve the existing parks and open space within the neighborhood.”
- The city purchased a perpetual open space conservation easement for the golf course in 1997 for \$2 million “to maintain the...Land’s scenic and open condition and to preserve [it] for recreational use.”
- PHGC is zoned OS-B (Open Space-Recreation).

Health and Recreation Benefits

- Open space promotes physical and psychological wellbeing.
- Trees and plants within the PHGC combat the effects of dirty air and climate change, especially important since Denver ranks 12th worst of 228 metros for ozone pollution.
- Open space mitigates extreme temperatures resulting from the Urban Heat Island Effect.
- Open spaces “hold, clean and infiltrate stormwater, decreasing the load on our storm sewer system,” according to the Dept. of Parks and Recreation’s Game Plan for a Healthy City.

PHGC Helps Meet Current and Future Open Space Needs

Denver has fallen behind in acquiring park land: from 13th place in park ranking among America’s 100 largest cities in 2012, to 29th, covering only 8.3% of the city’s area.

Where to Go from Here

Westside may choose to continue to operate the property as a golf course. If not, it should honor the existing perpetual open space conservation easement or sell the land to the city.

- A 2015 fair market value of the PHGC’s fee simple interest – without development rights – was \$3.1 million. The city should pay only current appraised fair market value for that fee simple interest, as restricted by the conservation easement.
- The city has the money, based on increased sales tax revenues from recently passed Measure 2A, estimated to be at least \$37.5 million annually and earmarked solely for parks and open space.
- The city already offered to buy the land in January 2019 – paying \$10 million for half and leasing half for 30 years at \$350,000 annually.

Balancing Denver’s Needs

Balancing Denver’s need for density and affordable housing and open space is not a fair equation in this case. Preserving PHGC would benefit all of Denver’s citizens. The more density the city achieves, the more critical the need for open space. Preserving the PHGC as open space provides health, environmental and recreational benefits. There are many underutilized properties in the area that can be developed for more housing. There is only one Park Hill Golf Course with 155 acres of mature trees and grass. This is not an “either/or” situation.

