MEMORANDUM

September 23, 2009

TO: Planning Housing and Economic Development Committee

FROM: Marlene Michaelson, Senior Legislative Analyst
       Shondell Foster, Research Associate

SUBJECT: Special Appropriation to the M-NCPPC’s FY10 Operating Budget, Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund - $150,000 for the Sligo Creek Golf Course

On September 4, 2009, the County Council received from the County Executive a special appropriation request in the amount of $150,000 for Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to have the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA) continue operating Sligo Creek Golf Course. Although MCRA is operating all of the MNCPPC golf courses, MCRA has exercised its right under the lease to return a course to M-NCPPC, which would result in its closure on October 1, 2009. The special appropriation would provide the funding necessary for operational costs through June 30, 2010, the end of the fiscal year.

The County Executive supports this request because he believes it is a “modest investment in an existing recreational activity” and would provide additional time to explore other options that would allow Sligo Creek Golf Course to be a self-sustaining operation. The Executive would form a task force that would explore these options. If, at the end of fiscal year 2010, more time is needed, then the Executive is willing to include additional funding in the FY11 Operating Budget. It is important to note that this supplemental appropriation does not include any support for major capital improvements or repairs and the Montgomery County Revenue Authority does not assume responsibility for any capital repairs or improvements. The Executive’s request is attached at ©1-4.
Background

In October, 2006, the Council approved legislation to allow M-NCPPC and the MCRA to enter into a long term lease agreement where the MCRA would operate all of the M-NCPPC owned golf courses. This agreement was created to achieve the efficiencies associated with a single County golf system and help improve the fiscal condition of M-NCPPC’s Enterprise Fund since the golf courses showed losses for 12 of the prior 13 years. These losses impacted the overall health of the Enterprise Fund, which led to General Fund subsidies to support the Enterprise Fund budget.

From the fall of 2006 through the fall of 2008, the MCRA explored options to generate additional revenues at Sligo Creek Golf Course in order to make the course self-sustaining. These options were presented to the surrounding community as well as the Planning Board. The Montgomery County Revenue Authority submitted, as part of its FY09-14 Capital Improvement Program, a project for Sligo Creek Golf Course in the amount of $5,500,000. However, the County Executive recommended deferring this project until community concerns were resolved. The MCRA Board supported the County Executive’s recommendation to defer funding for this project. The MCRA worked with a citizen advisory group, the Sligo Creek Stakeholders Advisory Group, to develop a concept plan for Sligo Creek Golf Course that would result in a self-sustaining course. No option was identified that was considered both financially viable by the Revenue Authority and acceptable by the surrounding community.

In early 2009, MCRA contracted for an independent financial analysis, which was conducted on the entire golf system to determine if any golf course was adverse to the entire golf system. The analysis concluded that Sligo Creek Golf Course was adverse to the entire golf system. (Although questions have been raised about the financial analysis, both the Planning Board and Council have reviewed it and found it to be an acceptable basis to allow MCRA to exercise the provision in the lease which allowed them to return a golf course.) Upon this finding, according to the terms of the lease agreement, MRCA returned Sligo Creek Golf Course to M-NCPPC on April 1, 2009 with an agreement that allowed for MCRA to operate the golf course through October 1, 2009. Absent any further action, on October 1, 2009, M-NCPPC will assume operation and management of the facility. Since the lease does not allow M-NCPPC to continue golf operations, the golf course would close.

Special Appropriation Request

The Council has a long standing policy of not subsidizing golf and Staff continues to support that policy. If the special appropriation could lead to a strategy for the long term operation that would not require a subsidy, Staff would be supportive, however Staff remains skeptical of such an outcome. The rounds of golf being played in the County and nationwide has been steadily decreasing, suggesting the inevitability of closing a course. As the popularity of different recreational activities wax and wane, the County must be prepared to increase and decrease funding accordingly. The only option on the table at this point that appears possible of achieving the goal of self-sufficiency is Councilmember Ervin’s proposal to partner with Veteran’s Affairs

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1 The County has provided tax-supported funding for recreational activities that serve the broader public while charging for activities that serve a more limited population (golf, indoor tennis, ice skating, boat rentals, etc.).
to provide rehabilitative golf for wounded soldiers. (see ©11-14) This option could achieve self-
sufficiency if the federal government, or another entity, agreed to subsidize capital and operating
expenses for the course.

In response to five Councilmembers who requested that the Planning Board and Parks
Department explore short and long term options of maintaining golf at Sligo Creek Golf Course
without a County subsidy, the Planning Board stated that Sligo Creek Golf Course is unlikely to
be self-sustaining absent major improvements, such as those proposed by the Revenue Authority,
or a continued subsidy for operations and major capital improvements. The letter is attached at
©17-19. While the conversion of the property to other uses would involve capital and operating
costs that are from tax-supported revenues, the other uses being considered are park activities for
which it is Council’s policy to provide funding through tax-supported sources. The Planning
Board reports that there is an increased demand for different outdoor park activities in the Sligo
Creek Golf Course service area because the demographics of this area have significantly changed
over the years. Both the Planning Board and the Parks Department have stated unequivocally
that this land will not be sold to private developers and no public official at M-NCPPC or the
Council has considered transfer to private developers as an option.

Staff’s primary concern with this supplemental is that it is likely only to delay the decision to
close a golf course while using scarce tax payer dollars that could be needed to fund higher
priorities. The Executive has just identified the need to cut $30 million from the FY10 budget
and Staff is concerned that many of the proposed reductions may be a higher priority than
continued operation of Sligo Creek Golf Course. Should the Council decide to fund this
supplemental, Staff recommends that it make clear that it is only willing to consider options for
the golf course that will lead to future self-sustainability and clearly reject the option of a
permanent subsidy for golf.
MEMORANDUM

September 3, 2009

TO: Phil Andrews, President, County Council
FROM: Isiah Leggett, County Executive
SUBJECT: Special Appropriation #10-283 to the FY10 Operating Budget

Sligo Creek Golf Course Operations
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund - $150,000

I am recommending a special appropriation to the FY10 Operating Budget of the Department of Parks of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in the total amount of $150,000 to continue operation of the Sligo Creek Golf Course during this fiscal year. This amount reflects the amount of funds to be paid by the Department of Parks to the Montgomery County Revenue Authority for operating the golf course during FY10 including $5,000 for any minor capital reserves that may be needed to sustain golf course operations. At my request, the Revenue Authority prepared a budget for the remainder of the fiscal year to allow for continued operation of the Sligo Creek Golf Course. The budget is attached and reflects a significant absorption of overhead expenses by the Revenue Authority through a reduced management fee of $46,533.

While I share the Council's concerns about subsidizing golf activities, the reality is that the proposed supplemental is a modest investment in an existing recreation activity. When compared to the unavoidable costs the Department of Parks would incur this fiscal year to decommission Sligo Creek Golf Course and the investment that would be required to put this Course to a different use, I believe that this supplemental appropriation for operations will end up being a significantly smaller requirement of public funds at this time.

As I indicated in my July 29, 2009 memorandum to the Council, based on feedback I have received from you and a variety of community leaders, I believe we should again review our options before proceeding to close this golf course. I am in the process of forming a task force as described in my earlier memorandum to examine appropriate solutions to transform Sligo Golf Course into a self-sustaining operation. Barring any failure of capital improvements, this supplemental will get the golf course through FY10 while the group examines golf options for the Sligo Creek Golf Course, and if more time is needed, I am prepared to include another year of operations in my FY11 Operating Budget. It is important to note that while the Revenue Authority has proposed a budget for operating the golf course, it has clearly stated that it is not funding, nor assuming responsibility for, any capital repairs that may be required at the course.
I recommend that the County Council approve this supplemental appropriation in the amount of $150,000 and specify the source of funds as General Fund Undesignated Reserves. This supplemental will reduce County General Government Fund Reserves by $150,000 and is consistent with the fund balance policy for tax supported reserves.

Given the anticipated closure of the golf course as of October 1, 2009, I appreciate your prompt consideration of this action.

IL: dj

Attachment: Special Appropriation #10-283

c: Keith Miller; Executive Director, Revenue Authority
    Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
    Kathleen Boucher, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
    Diane Schwartz Jones, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
    Joseph F. Beach, Director, Office of Management and Budget
SUBJECT: Special Appropriation #10-283 to the FY10 Operating Budget
Sligo Creek Golf Course Operations
Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund - $150,000

Background

1. Article 28, section 2-118(a)(6) of the Annotated Code of Maryland permits the County Council to amend the budget of the M-NCPPC by resolution on the Council’s initiative, or at the request of the Commission, after receipt of a recommendation from the County Executive, and after public hearing upon reasonable notice to the public.

2. Section 308 of the Montgomery County Charter provides that a special appropriation: (a) may be made at any time after public notice by news release; (b) must state that the special appropriation is necessary to meet an unforeseen disaster or other emergency or to act without delay in the public interest; (c) must specify the revenues necessary to finance it; and (d) must be approved by no fewer than six members of the Council.

3. The County Executive has requested the following FY10 Operating Budget appropriation increases for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission – Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personnel Services</th>
<th>Operating Expenses</th>
<th>Capital Outlay</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Source of Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>General Fund Undesignated Reserves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This increase is needed in order to ensure M-NCPPC has sufficient resources to continue operations of the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

4. The County Executive has requested a special appropriation to the FY10 Operating Budget in the amount of $150,000 for the operation of the Sligo Golf Course including $5,000 for any minor capital reserves that may be needed to sustain golf course operations and specifies that the source of funds will be General Fund Undesignated Reserves.

5. The public was notified by a news release.

Action

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland, approves the following actions:

1. A special appropriation to the FY10 Operating Budget of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission – Department of Parks, Enterprise Fund is approved as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personnel Services</th>
<th>Operating Expenses</th>
<th>Capital Outlay</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Source of Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>General Funds Undesignated Reserves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The County Council declares that this action is necessary to act without delay in the public interest.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

Linda M. Lauer, Clerk of the Council
July 29, 2009

Valerie Ervin, County Council, District 5
Marc Elrich, County Council, At-Large
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Councilmembers Ervin and Elrich:

Thank you for your inquiries and discussion regarding possible solutions for the Sligo Creek Golf Course. As you are well aware, the Sligo Creek Golf Course is scheduled to close on October 1st of this year unless action is taken to preserve this facility for use by the local community and all County residents. In previous discussions with the County Council, the Revenue Authority has indicated that, without substantial capital investments, they do not believe this golf course has the potential for ever becoming self sufficient. For this reason, the Revenue Authority has requested and the Council has approved a change to the lease agreement with the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) to return responsibility for this golf course back to M-NCPPC.

After careful consideration on this matter and feedback I have received from you and a variety of community leaders, I believe we should again review our options before proceeding to close this golf course. Specifically, I will request that the County Council provide a supplemental appropriation to fund continued operations of the facility for no more than the next 24 months while we review other options to make this facility self-supporting for the long term. While this approach will continue temporarily the operation of the golf course, we need to avoid imposing these costs on the Revenue Authority or M-NCPPC for the continued operation of a facility with conditions that prevent it from becoming profitable.
I will shortly form a task force with representatives of the local community, Revenue Authority, M-NCPCC, and County Government who will identify and develop options for the continued, self-sustaining operation of the Sligo Creek Golf Course. I would welcome the Council’s participation in this Task Force as well. I believe by collaboratively working together we can identify the appropriate solutions for maintaining this golf course in a self-sustaining manner into the future.

Sincerely,

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

cc: Phil Andrews, President, County Council
    Roger Berliner, County Council
    Nancy Floreen, County Council
    Mike Knapp, County Council
    George Leventhal, County Council
    Nancy Navarro, County Council
    Duchy Trachtenberg, County Council
    Kathleen Boucher, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
    Keith Miller, Executive Director, Revenue Authority
    Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Valerie Ervin  
Councilmember  
District 5  

July 27, 2009  

To: Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board  

From: Valerie Ervin  

Subject: Request that the Planning Board continue to investigate preserving golf at the Sligo Creek Golf Course  

It has been brought to my attention that during the July 16th Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Planning Board meeting, the Board unanimously decided to remove the option of maintaining Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course from the re-use study being conducted by the Department of Parks. I understand that the Board is legally bound by the lease agreement between the Montgomery County Revenue Authority and M-NCPPC, and thus chose only to evaluate the nature preserve and the “fun for all” recreational park options. However, if directed by the Council, the Board would include the option of maintaining Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course in the re-use study.  

While I applaud the Board’s efforts to fulfill it’s objectives of satisfying recreation needs while maintaining open green space, as the Councilmember for this district, I believe it is critical that the Board include the option for golf, and I am requesting that golf be placed back on the list of options to be further explored and considered by the Parks Department.  

Since Sligo Creek Golf Course is the only public golf course inside the beltway, and has been a part of the down-county community for decades, the impending closure of this course has ignited a flood of community concerns about the need to keep Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course. In order for the Council to take the appropriate action for this facility, we must fully appreciate the fiscal impacts of maintaining this facility as a golf course versus using this public land in another capacity. To do this we must fully understand the cost of needed capital improvements and what level of operating budget subsidy would allow the course to become self-sustaining.  

Lastly, while there has been no mention by the Planning Board or any public official of the potential to sell the golf course land for private use (such as housing), a rumor of this possibility continues to circulate. I believe it is critical for the Planning Board to explicitly state that there is no intention of selling this land and that any option you
consider will retain it as parkland. In considering re-use options for the site, I believe it is vital that we maintain it as open green space for community use and that we minimally impact the surrounding communities.

I look forward to your response and to continuing to work with you and your staff on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Valerie Ervin

cc: Phil Andrews, County Council President
Roger Berliner, Councilmember—District 1
Marc Elrich, Councilmember At Large
Nancy Floreen, Councilmember At Large
Mike Knapp, Councilmember—District 2
George Leventhal, Councilmember At large
Nancy Navarro, Councilmember—District 4
Duchy Trachtenberg, Councilmember At Large
Ike Leggett, County Executive
Keith Miller, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Revenue Authority
Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst
Mike Welsh, President of North Hills Civic Association
Heather Phipps, Vice President of Neighbors of Northwest Branch
Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association
Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association
Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
Lillian Suffanti, Louise Hall
July 30, 2009

The Honorable Delegate Alfred Carr, Jr.
House Office Building, Room 222
6 Biaden St., Annapolis, MD 21401

To the Honorable Delegate Alfred Carr, Jr.,

Thank you for expressing your strong support for maintaining the Sligo Creek Golf Course as a golf course. This is an issue of great importance to Montgomery County residents, especially golfers and down-county residents, as it is the only public golf course inside the beltway. I am writing to you today to request your help in keeping this unique community treasure in operation.

As you know, the prior County Council approved a lease agreement between the Montgomery County Revenue Authority and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission after it was shown that public golf courses, while under MNCPPC's management, experienced increased financial losses for 12 of the 13 years studied, lacked the revenue to make necessary capital improvements, and showed the continued decline of infrastructure.

In my opinion, this course serves an important community need and its closure would be detrimental to the area. Re-establishing another golf course inside the beltway would be a nearly impossible and extremely expensive task. Despite our dire budget constraints this year, I believe that we cannot be short-sighted about preserving this important community resource.

To preserve this golf course, the Council will have to amend the lease and negotiate with the Revenue Authority to continue course operations. This means the county will have to subsidize operating and capital expenses.

The county will need your help to secure funding for one-time capital improvements at the course. These improvements will be necessary for the long-term viability of course operations. I have asked Park and Planning to prepare a cost estimate for necessary improvements, and I will forward that information as soon as it becomes available.
In the meantime, if you need additional information, please contact me. Thank you so much for your dedicated service. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Valerie Ervin
Montgomery County Councilmember, District 5

cc:
- Phil Andrews, County Council President
- Roger Berliner, Councilmember—District 1
- Marc Elrich, Councilmember At Large
- Nancy Floreen, Councilmember At Large
- Mike Knapp, Councilmember—District 2
- George Leventhal, Councilmember At large
- Nancy Navarro, Councilmember—District 4
- Duchy Trachtenberg, Councilmember At Large
- Ike Leggett, County Executive
- Keith Miller, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Revenue Authority
- Mary Bradford, Director of Parks
- Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator
- Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate
- Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst
- Mike Welsh, President of North Hills Civic Association
- Heather Phipps, Vice President of Neighbors of Northwest Branch
- Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association
- Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association
- Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
- Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
- Lillian Louise Hall
The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs  
Mr. James A. Adkins, Secretary  
Mr. Wilbert Forbes, Deputy Secretary  
The Jeffrey Building, 4th Floor  
16 Francis Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Secretary Adkins and Deputy Secretary Forbes:

I am writing to propose an innovative partnership between Montgomery County and the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs focused on therapeutic golf for veterans at Sligo Creek Golf Course in Silver Spring, Maryland. This publicly owned, nine-hole golf course faces an uncertain future because of the fiscal constraints confronting Montgomery County. One option being considered by some county lawmakers would close the Sligo Creek Golf Course on October 1, 2009. Instead of losing this valuable community asset, I propose that the course begin to serve veterans, especially those who are returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq with injuries that can be ameliorated by golf.

As you may know, a similar model can be found in Washington at the American Lake Veterans Golf Course (www.alvetsgolfcourse.com), which is dedicated to providing, teaching and promoting the benefits of golf to veterans including those who are receiving medical care and outpatient veterans who have disabilities. The goal of creating a similar partnership in Montgomery County would be to provide a therapeutic environment where all golfers can enjoy the benefits of golf, such as exercise and relaxation, in a positive and accepting social environment.

At the American Lake Veterans Golf Course, hospital in-patients and their guests have first priority on the course. Persons in possession of a Veterans Universal Access
Identification Card and their guests may also use the course. In addition, active
duty and retired military with military identification cards and their guests may play on
the course. Military hospital in-patients play at no cost, and golf clubs, balls, tees and
carts are also provided free of charge. Authorized military personnel are required to pay
green and cart fees. The course is open seven days a week, except during the holiday
season. Tee times are not required and golfers play on a first-come, first-served basis.

It is my understanding that the American Lake Golf Course is operated and maintained
by an all volunteer force consisting of grounds crews, maintenance personnel, operating
staff and management personnel. This course is not supported by government funds and
operating and capital costs are paid for with annual pass and daily green fee revenues.
Friends of American Lake Veterans Golf Course, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization,
also raises funds to support the course. For example, they are currently raising $5.5
million for a new rehabilitation center.

Sligo Creek Golf Course is the only publicly owned, nine-hole golf course inside the
beltway, and it is located only five miles from the National Naval Medical Center and
three miles from Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Also, many military families live in
the Washington Metropolitan Area and could conveniently take advantage of this
resource.

There is strong support for maintaining the Sligo Creek Golf Course in the neighboring
community and among golfers throughout Montgomery County. Many residents have
banded together to form a non-profit organization to help save the course, and more
information can be found at www.savesligogolf.com.

Sligo Creek Golf Course serves an important community need and its closure would be
detrimental to Montgomery County. Re-establishing another golf course inside the
beltway would be nearly impossible and an extremely expensive task. Despite
Montgomery County’s dire budget constraints this year, I believe that we cannot be short­sighted about preserving this important community resource over the long-term.

These trying economic times call on all of us to think creatively. When I saw the
information about the American Lake View Golf Course, I knew this model is something
I wanted to explore for Sligo Creek Golf Course. While public use and golf course
access must be maintained, I know that by working together we can come up with a plan
to make the course an even greater community resource.

On a personal note, I grew up in a military family. I know what soldiers and their
families go through each and every day to serve our country. I think this proposed
partnership is a small way that I can help to give something back to those who have given
so much.
I would love the opportunity to take you and appropriate staff members on a tour of Sligo Creek Golf Course and to talk more about potential partnership opportunities. Please contact me at your earliest convenience so that we can begin discussing what is possible for our soldiers and Montgomery County residents at the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

Sincerely,

Valerie Ervin
Montgomery County Councilmember, District 5

cc: Anthony Brown, Lt. Governor
    Isiah Leggett, County Executive
    Phil Andrews, County Council President
    Roger Berliner, Councilmember—District 1
    Marc Elrich, Councilmember
    Nancy Floreen, Councilmember
    Mike Knapp, Councilmember—District 2
    George Leventhal, Councilmember
    Nancy Navarro, Councilmember—District 4
    Duchy Trachtenberg, Councilmember
    Royce Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
    Keith Miller, Executive Director, Montgomery County Revenue Authority
    Mary Bradford, Director of Parks, M-NCPPC
    Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator, M-NCPPC
    Ronald Kauffman, Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Jonathan Walker, Sr., County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Norman Locksley, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    William Gray, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Elizabeth Jane McCarthy, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Peter Esker, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Lorrie Knight-Major, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Mier Wolf, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Henry Richard Fales, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    J. Mauri Hamilton, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Susan Kirk, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Jacqueline Hunt Ogg, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Michael L. Subin, County Executive Designee, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Jerry Godwin, Dept. of Economic Development Designee, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Richard M. Schiffauer, Dept. of Health and Human Services Designee, County Commission on Veterans Affairs
    Shondell Foster, Research Associate, County Council
    Marlene Michaelson, Senior Legislative Analyst, County Council
    Mike Welsh, President, North Hills Civic Association
    Heather Phipps, Vice President, Neighbors of Northwest Branch
    Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association
    Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association
Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com
Lillian Louise Hall
To: Reye Hanson, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board  
    Mary Bradford, Director, M-NCPPC, Department of Parks

From: Valerie Ervin, Nancy Floreen, George Leventhal, Marc Elrich, and Nancy  
    Navarro

Date: August 25, 2009

Subject: Request that the Planning Board and Parks Staff Evaluate Short- and  
    Long-Term Options to Preserve Golf at Sligo Creek Golf Course

We are writing to request that you engage in discussions with the Revenue  
Authority to extend the lease at Sligo Creek Golf Course for 12 months and to work on  
long-term options for preserving golf at Sligo Creek Golf Course.

Various alternatives have been proposed for the use of the property. At this  
juncture, it does not seem to us that any alternative is preferable, nor more cost-effective,  
than the continued availability of golf. We request that Park and Planning staff evaluate  
as one possible option for use of the property – how we can maintain golf at Sligo  
Creek over the short- and long-term without a taxpayer subsidy. If Park and Planning  
does not evaluate this option among others, there is a chance that the Council will adopt  
an option that has not had the benefit of Park and Planning’s review.

As you know, the County Executive is planning to submit a supplemental  
appropriation to the Council in September that requires current revenue to maintain golf  
course operations at Sligo Creek Golf Course. We have concerns about spending  
taxpayer dollars to subsidize golf; however, possible alternative uses of the site will also  
require taxpayer dollars. For example, if golf operations do not continue, the Council  
will be expected to provide a $56,000 supplemental for short-term interim care of the  
Sligo Creek Golf Course property. A strong case can be made that this money would be  
better spent towards keeping the Sligo Creek Golf Course operational.

One long-term solution proposed by Councilmember Ervin is the feasibility of a  
partnership between the Parks Department and the Maryland Department of Veterans  
Affairs focused on therapeutic golf for veterans at Sligo Creek Golf Course.  
Councilmember Ervin has discussed this proposal with Deputy Secretary Wilbert Forbes.
He expressed support for this idea and is willing to work with us to find a solution that could benefit the public and veterans.

Another long-term solution could include an evaluation of how the three funding streams (the Revenue Authority golf income, the Park & Planning enterprise fund, and the Recreation Department Agency Fund) can be restructured to keep Sligo Creek Golf Course open with a cross-subsidy from other recreational activities.

As you know, these are not the only options. Since Councilmembers have no expertise in managing golf courses, we encourage you to think creatively on how we can preserve golf at Sligo Creek while minimizing the burden on taxpayers.

Sligo Creek Golf Course serves an important community need and its closure would be detrimental to the County. Despite the County’s dire budget constraints, we believe that we cannot be short-sighted about preserving this important resource. We hope that by working together we can come up with options to save the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

cc:  Ike Leggett, County Executive  
Keith Miller, Executive Director, Montgomery County Revenue Authority  
Rachel Newhouse, Department of Parks Planner Coordinator  
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate  
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst  
Mike Welsh, President of North Hills Civic Association  
Heather Phipps, Vice President of Neighbors of Northwest Branch  
Karen Howland, Woodside Forrest Civic Association  
Woody Brosnan, North Woodside Civic Association  
Jim Pierobon, Sligo Branview Civic Association  
Mark Suffanti, SaveSligoGolf.com  
Lillian Louise Hall
MEMORANDUM

August 31, 2009

To: Council Members Ervin, Leventhal, Navarro, Floreen, and Elrich

From: Royce Hanson, Chair, MCPB

Subject: Sligo Golf Course

We have participated in discussions with the Montgomery County Revenue Authority (MCRA) and the Executive Branch concerning the County Executive's proposal to continue operation of the Sligo Golf Course (Sligo) for two years while further study is conducted of ways to sustain the course without a subsidy.

In your memo of August 25, 2009, you asked that our staff evaluate how the Commission can maintain golf at Sligo without a taxpayer subsidy. The Revenue Authority as operator of the county's 9 public golf courses is best positioned to undertake that task and has spent considerable time evaluating such options.

We gently remind you that the Council strongly encouraged the transfer of golf management to MCRA because our Enterprise Division was not operating the courses, including management of its debt service, without a subsidy. (It has been strong Council policy that all enterprise programs, including their debt service for capital improvements, be self sufficient. In fact, general fund support for these facilities has been reduced each year by the Council with Executive support.) As a condition of accepting the four Commission-owned golf courses into its portfolio, MCRA insisted on a lease provision that permitted it to return a course to the Commission if its continued operation adversely affected the financial condition of the entire golf system. A course returned to the management of the Commission may not, under the lease, be operated as a golf course, as it would compete with the rest of the public system and continue to affect adversely the MCRA's ability to operate a financially self sufficient golf system. The Council approved this lease.

MCRA examined alternatives that could allow Sligo to operate without a cross-subsidy from its other operations. Following its assumption of management of the system, MCRA undertook a months-long process of working with the Sligo community to seek agreement on improvements to the course that would make it financially self-sufficient. Agreement could not be reached on...
a plan that was satisfactory to neighboring communities, or one that our board could endorse, because of its adverse impacts on nearby homes.

MCRA determined that it could not justify the capital investments necessary to sustain the course without more revenue-generating facilities. Early this year, MCRA advised the Commission that, based on an independent study by the National Golf Foundation of the entire system's finances, including each individual course, it would invoke the "return/no competition" clause of the lease and return Sligo to the Commission on April 1, 2009. We negotiated an agreement that the MCRA would delay the return until October 1, 2009, the end of the peak golfing season. The Council was informed of the situation and approved it.

The Parks Department began a process of community outreach and engaged in preliminary consideration of various options for short and long-term future uses for Sligo as a park once it was extracted from the golf system and returned to the Commission. The Parks Department made clear at each of these meetings than it could not operate the facility as a golf course unless the lease was amended to permit that to occur. And even in that event, an operating subsidy would be necessary, requiring an appropriation from the County Council.

At the Planning Board's hearing and work session on July 16th on alternative futures for Sligo, most of the testimony favored continuing operations as a golf course. The Board explained the situation, noting that absent (a) Council action that would underwrite its continued operation as a golf course after October 1, and (b) an agreement with MCRA, we could not operate it as such. Accordingly, we directed the staff to prepare interim and long term plans for the park that excluded golf operations.

Following that meeting the County Executive indicated that notwithstanding the current fiscal condition of the county, he would ask the Council to provide an operating subsidy to keep the course in operation while further efforts are undertaken to make it self-sustaining. I understand that he has now asked the Council for a special appropriation of $150,000 to subsidize golf operations at Sligo for the remainder of this fiscal year, and indicated a willingness to extend the subsidy for another year if agreement has not been reached on a means of making the course self-sustaining. No provision has been made for any capital repairs or replacements that may become necessary during this period.

We do not think it is possible to sustain golf at Sligo without either the kind of major improvements proposed by the MCRA or a continuing subsidy for operations and major capital improvements. Having the course improved so that it can serve disabled veterans is an attractive idea, but that is also likely to require both capital and operating subsidies. Only the Council can make a policy decision that taxpayers should subsidize golf. Absent that commitment it is not helpful to hold out hope to those that wish golf to remain at Sligo.

You are correct that conversion to other uses, including nature-centered and active recreation facilities, will involve both capital and operating costs. These uses, however, are traditional public park activities that are supported primarily by tax revenues, with some supplemental
support from permit and user fees, in contrast with park enterprise facilities and Revenue Authority facilities, which have historically been expected to cover all operating and capital costs from user fees.

We should expect that interim uses will continue for five or more years before the property undergoes any major alteration for another purpose. The $56,000 for 9 months that we reported during recent discussions was based on mothballing this valuable piece of real estate, which I do not believe is what we will actually do for the next 5 years. We will surely be asked to allow other uses that involve costs, and at a minimum we will have to police the property extensively, and maintain it for public use, whatever that is. It would, of course, be desirable to convert the property to its new park uses as soon as it is fiscally prudent to do so.

The Planning Board shares the dismay at closing the Sligo golf course. It has been an important asset of the park system for many years. Its use, however, has declined once again after a brief spike in usage. It remains underused and its infrastructure is well past its normal life and in need of major renovation and replacement. The Revenue Authority, which has been an effective and economical operator of the Commission's golf courses since assuming responsibility for them, found that Sligo's continuation, without major improvements that have been unacceptable to the neighboring community, was adverse to the financial viability of the overall public golf system. Golf courses across the country are closing due to rising costs and declining demand. The demographics of the service area for Sligo have changed substantially over the years, generating demand for more and different outdoor park activities. It may be time reluctantly to conclude that there can be a different and better future for this strategically located park.

Cc: Ike Leggett, County Executive  
Keith Miller, Executive Director, MCRA  
Shondell Foster, County Council Research Associate  
Marlene Michaelson, County Council Senior Legislative Analyst  
Mary Bradford, Director, Department of Parks
MEMORANDUM

TO: Councilmember Ervin
FROM: Keith Miller
DATE: July 22, 2009
RE: Sligo Creek Golf Course Demographic Information

As per the request of your staff, we are providing information regarding the patrons at Sligo Creek Golf Course. Please note this information was collected as part of previous customer service surveys and not a specific demographic study. However, the National Golf Foundation (NGF) has stated that they believe the demographics do represent the average Sligo customer.

The attached information is the percentage of customers that responded to each item. We have provided data for all of the golf courses as a means of comparison. The NGF also stated, “If you look at the total percentages of Sligo customer's demographics they do run average with the rest of your properties. This does show congruency and validity in the percentages even with the lower response rate”. After reviewing the percentages of female and senior golfers and the income percentages we agree with NGF’s assessment.

We have heard many of the accusations that the Sligo Creek Golf Course is a unique golf course that serves a more diverse patron then the other MCRA facilities. Although we do not conduct specific demographic studies of our patrons, we believe the above information confirms our outreach at all of the facilities.

The MCRA has worked extensively to grow the game of golf and it was not our intention to close Sligo Creek Golf Course. As you are aware, we originally presented a plan that would have renovated the facility and provided a state of the art learning center while still providing 9-holes of golf. One of our goals is to provide a sustainable golf course system without taxpayer subsidy. We can only accomplish this if we grow the game, which has been a main focus of the MCRA for many years. Some of our recent initiatives are:

Supply and Demand Pricing – In 2006, we introduced supply and demand pricing which has greatly increased accessibility to our golf courses. For example, prior to 2006 a golf course would have a posted price of $50 from 6AM to 6PM. We now analyze data
which, based on demand, allows us to offer multiple rates throughout the day. So now
the same golf course may charge: $55 from 6 – 10AM, $50 from 10 – 12, $40 from 12 –
2, $29 from 2 – 4PM, and $19 after 4PM.

Junior Golf – We are a strong supporter of junior golf through the programming we offer
directly and through our partnerships with the First Tee of Montgomery County and the
Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Laytonsville, Needwood, and Sligo Creek
are homes of the First Tee program with Laytonsville offering the largest program. In the
fall, we will offer The First Tee Program at Northwest. We have continued to grow our
relationship with MCPS by now offering a Middle School Program and based on a
partnership between Laytonsville Golf Course and Goshen Elementary School, golf is
part of the 5th grade physical education curriculum at all MCPS elementary schools.

Family Golf – In 2009 we introduced family golf to our system. This program offers a
course within a course for juniors. Tee markers have been set up at all of our facilities
that allow juniors to play from short yardages while the adults in the group can still play
from their full distance. Special scorecards are provided for family golf participants
making it a fun experience for the whole group. The program is available anytime and
we offer a special rate of $10 per person beginning 5PM at all of the golf courses.
Additionally, we have offered FREE 1 hour golf lessons on the 1st Saturday of each
month from May through August to families at all of the golf courses.

Get Golf Ready – This is a national program designed to introduce golf to adults. The
program is 5 one hour lessons for a cost of $95.00.

Summer Camps Program – In 2008, we partnered with the Recreation Department and
introduced golf to over 1000 kids through their summer camps program. Unfortunately,
due to staffing challenges we were not able to continue this program in 2009 but we are
optimistic we will do this again in the future.

We are currently working on other initiatives to grow the game in Montgomery County
such as a new ladies program.

In closing, the decision to return Sligo Creek was very difficult for the MCRA and we
understand the communities concerns. Sligo Creek Golf Course has provided a lot of
great memories and experiences for many people. However, Sligo Creek is not unique to
the golf system and does not provide golf to a distinctive group.
<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Falls Road</th>
<th>Hampshire Greens</th>
<th>Laytonsville</th>
<th>Little Bennett</th>
<th>Needwood</th>
<th>Northwest</th>
<th>Poolsville</th>
<th>Rattlesnake</th>
<th>Sligo Creek</th>
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<td>7%</td>
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<td>Prefer not to know</td>
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<th>Little Bennett</th>
<th>Needwood</th>
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<th>Sligo Creek</th>
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<td>Resident - County</td>
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<td>League player</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate Outing Player</td>
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<td>Member of an area club</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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## Total Rounds of Golf for All MCRA and M-NCPPC Courses

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<th>2000</th>
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<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<th>Yearly Average</th>
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<td>63,878</td>
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<td>47,214</td>
<td>54,616</td>
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<td>55,862</td>
<td>52,022</td>
<td>49,983</td>
<td>41,909</td>
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<td>Laytonsville</td>
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<td>51,118</td>
<td>40,656</td>
<td>41,539</td>
<td>40,526</td>
<td>38,097</td>
<td>47,789</td>
<td>43,331</td>
<td>44,509</td>
<td>44,675</td>
<td>44,959</td>
<td>46,308</td>
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<td>Rattlewood</td>
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<td>37,011</td>
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<td>37,315</td>
<td>47,565</td>
<td>30,864</td>
<td>30,526</td>
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<td>Hampshire Greens</td>
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<td>32,642</td>
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<td>32,046</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sligo Creek</td>
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<td>45,928</td>
<td>45,375</td>
<td>38,160</td>
<td>37,530</td>
<td>24,025</td>
<td>25,452</td>
<td>24,665</td>
<td>25,825</td>
<td>25,581</td>
<td>29,921</td>
<td>24,858</td>
<td>385,862</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needwood</td>
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<td>82,670</td>
<td>71,610</td>
<td>73,120</td>
<td>79,730</td>
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<td>71,238</td>
<td>65,240</td>
<td>838,728</td>
<td>69,894</td>
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<td>Northwest</td>
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<td>82,670</td>
<td>71,160</td>
<td>68,200</td>
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<td>63,388</td>
<td>65,175</td>
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<td>Little Bennett</td>
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<td>31,360</td>
<td>30,190</td>
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<td>31,657</td>
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<td>M-NCPPC Course Total</td>
<td>256,950</td>
<td>247,960</td>
<td>219,550</td>
<td>210,700</td>
<td>234,560</td>
<td>181,210</td>
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<td>195,460</td>
<td>189,360</td>
<td>2,050,656</td>
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<td>MCRA Total</td>
<td>160,535</td>
<td>137,440</td>
<td>233,217</td>
<td>148,003</td>
<td>213,143</td>
<td>166,925</td>
<td>174,418</td>
<td>168,138</td>
<td>159,008</td>
<td>187,156</td>
<td>196,279</td>
<td>173,511</td>
<td>2,202,251</td>
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<td>System Total</td>
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<td>385,380</td>
<td>452,777</td>
<td>358,202</td>
<td>447,841</td>
<td>337,234</td>
<td>338,658</td>
<td>357,238</td>
<td>365,628</td>
<td>379,703</td>
<td>389,899</td>
<td>369,661</td>
<td>4,253,177</td>
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### Yearly Average 394,991

---

**Rounds Per Year**

- Falls Road
- Laytonsville
- Poolesville
- Rattlewood
- Hampshire Greens
- Sligo Creek
- Needwood
- Northwest
- Little Bennett

**M-NCPPC Courses vs Revenue Authority Courses**

- M-NCPPC Course Total
- MCRA Total

**Combined System Totals**

- Combined System Totals
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
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<td>2,155</td>
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<td>1,049</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,191</td>
<td>1,904</td>
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<td>FY 2008</td>
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<td>558</td>
<td>599</td>
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<td>3,765</td>
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<td>2,263</td>
<td>3,115</td>
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**Sligo Creek Rounds FY 2007-2009**

- FY 2007
- FY 2008
- FY2009