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Putting greens to green space?

By ANDREA WOO

Vancouver looks at transforming city-owned Langara Golf Course into public park on south slope

Vancouver is looking to transform putting greens into green space, as the park board debates transforming the oldest city-owned golf course into a public park.

In what he calls "a very cautious first step," Vision Vancouver park commissioner Aaron Jasper will introduce a motion on Monday asking staff to "compile and report back usage and revenue metrics" for the 86-year-old Langara Golf Course.

If the evaluation determines a golf course is not the best use for the land, the board could move to replace either some or all of the 48.6-hectare course with public park space, Mr. Jasper said.

"We know that's a part of the city that's going to see a lot of growth, a lot of density," he said. "Instead of just looking at the next two, three, five, 10 years, let's look beyond that, in terms of what opportunities we are going to have to provide quality green space, park space, for that part of the city."

Mr. Jasper stressed the board has no interest in selling any park space for condo development.

The city depends primarily on two methods to acquire park space: buying up lots adjacent to existing park space under a land-acquisition program, or negotiating public amenities packages with developments, such as Olympic Village.

The Langara Golf Course is one of three 18-hole golf courses owned and operated by the park board, along with Fraserview and McCleery.

The net revenue across all three is only about \$1-million per year, Mr. Jasper said.

Should the plan go through, the site could be partially or entirely replaced with a "passive park," comparable to Queen Elizabeth Park, or an "active park," composed of playing fields. A golfing area could potentially remain as an executive nine-hole course.

City staff are expected to present the report in the fall. If approved, the transformation would take between five and 10 years.

Langara Golf Course, located on the south slope of Vancouver, is popular with families in large part due to its affordability. A round of golf costs between \$50 to \$56 for adults, depending on the day; children and seniors get a discounted rate of \$35.25 from Monday to Thursday.

NPA park commissioner Melissa De Genova said the pricing makes accessible to seniors and children "a sport that's always been considered elitist." She is supportive of improving the course – looking at bettering amenities such as the clubhouse, for instance – but concerned about its full or partial closing.

Several golfers at the course on Tuesday told The Globe and Mail they would not return should the course be reduced to nine holes.

"Become smaller? Nobody would come ... if they play golf," said Yoobok Kwon, who has golfed at Langara for 15 years. "You cannot make it smaller than this."

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