

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION

The Task Force supports a two-track approach to support the continued operation of Sligo Creek Golf Course.

Track One (REOI)

The Task Force has agreed that a viable way of keeping Sligo Creek Golf Course operational without General Fund taxpayer dollars could be to find a private operator who would bear the costs for managing the day-to-day operation and regular maintenance needs of the course. The larger challenge is finding a way to address future capital improvements needed at the course. The exact cost and timeframe for these improvements requires further study although initial estimates are between \$500,000 and \$1.5M over the next five to seven years. Given that MCRA has determined that golf at Sligo Creek would not be self-sustaining under the MCRA's **current** management process, the Task Force recommends exploring the feasibility of another manager pursuing self-sustainability.

Specifically, The Maryland National Park and Planning Commission should begin the process to seek a request for expressions of interest (REOI) and thereafter a request for proposals (RFP) to operate the Sligo Creek Golf Course.

There should be community involvement in the process by selecting 2-3 representatives to actively work with the Commission. There would be no preconditions for any expression of interest except as follows: 1) no public funds would be available, 2) any capital improvements to the course must not impact the quality of life in the neighboring community **or adversely impact the sensitive environmental watershed**, 3) only the real estate and its current improvements would be the subject of the lease, and 4) the revenue and conditions for Holy Cross's parking would be available to the new manager.

The REOI would be intended to inform the development of appropriate terms and conditions for an RFP. The REOI should indicate that a final RFP would be subject to the approval of M-NCPPC, MCRA, and MCRA's lender as required by M-NCPPC's current lease with MCRA.

Structuring an arrangement with a private operator that includes capital improvements is feasible, but the timeframe to pursue this course of action will necessitate negotiating an interim operating agreement during the process. There are also contractual limitations involving the lender that need to be resolved.

The Task Force supports the Montgomery County Revenue Authority's continued operation of Sligo Creek Golf Course through **the process**. The existing operating agreement that identifies the terms and conditions of the MCRA's operation of the course **could** remain in effect during this time. **To avoid additional tax payer subsidies for golf operations**, the MCRA **can suspend charging Sligo Creek Golf Course any management fee and temporarily offset any costs through overall golf revenue**. **Meanwhile** the Sligo Creek Golf Association will begin fundraising for the course's capital needs.

Track Two (MCRA)

While the REOI and RFP process is underway, the County Council and County Executive should work with the Montgomery County Revenue Authority and the community groups on changes that could result in continued operation of Sligo Creek Golf Course by MCRA in case the private operator plan does not prove feasible.

The lease agreement should be reexamined, **as well as the impact of** the system that establishes the management fee assessed by MCRA on its facilities.

Specifically:

- Clarify the intent of the contract for whether the public park-owned courses must be sustainable as a group or each individual course must stand alone. Sligo may always have a lower revenue profile than the other courses but that would be supported by and balanced in a portfolio of golf facilities that serve a public interest. (From Mary Bradford)
- Renegotiate the process for determining “adverse” to include a) an independent determination by a party not chosen by the operator; and b) consideration of community/citizen’s needs as represented by elected officials.
- Examine the management fee system to define how or how not it may impact the financial “health” of a facility.

This recommendation is necessary because pursuing an RFP proposal to investigate the use a private contractor (Recommendation #1) is precluded under the terms of this lease between Parks & Planning and MCRA, this presents an obstacle for County Council to finding ways to keep the Sligo Creek golf course open.

The Task Force believes that if these questions are answered, it can better determine what options should be implemented for Sligo **as well as other courses in the system.**

There are additional recommendations that should be pursued in support of both track one and track two as follows:

Recommendation 1: Form a new group with community representation to begin detailing capital needs and costs.

There is general agreement that Sligo Creek Golf Course has capital improvement needs. However, the available studies of those needs and the associated costs are not current. A plan needs to be established for the prioritization and timing of improvements, which reflects a balance of available money and is based on updated estimates of costs.

This plan will be necessary no matter who will be the long-term operator of the course and work should begin as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2: Have operator establish a “fast-start” program for the upcoming season to maximize the course revenue and community involvement.

- improve marketing for the clubhouse facility, snack bar, and the course in general
- engage the supportive community “friends” group to provide supplementary amenities
- support communities’ fund-raising to preserve the course
- launch programs for Veteran groups (and others)