



March 31, 2016

Derek Dureka, CPRP
Upper Dublin Dir. of Parks and Recreation
c/o: Upper Dublin Twp. Board of Commissioners
Upper Dublin Township
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Fort Washington, PA 19034

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Conshohocken, PA 19428
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Re: Twining Valley Land Use Feasibility Study

www.cmceng.com

Dear Board of Commissioners:

This letter is being written as requested by Ira S. Tackel at the March 8, 2016, Board of Commissioners meeting. This message is in response to Hugh Reilly's (Owner of Links Golf Course Management) letter to the Ambler Gazette, dated March 7, 2016. In Mr. Reilly's letter he makes several references as to why Upper Dublin Township should retain golf as an amenity within their community, contrary to the final Master Plan Report that our offices had presented to the Commissioner's at their February 23rd and March 8th, 2016 meetings. Listed below are our professional responses to each of Hugh's comments.

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Kimberton, PA 19442
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Upper St. Clair, PA 15241
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189 Market Street
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Suite 304
Duncansville, PA 16635
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856.667.7495

200 Marsh Lane
Suite 200
New Castle, DE 19720
302.654.0273

Mr. Reilly states in his letter that he has remained silent throughout the entire Master planning process. Mr. Reilly was given the opportunity to voice his opinion at an initial tour of the golf course facility (at which he was present), when he was interviewed by our staff as one of the key-person interviewees and at any one of the public meetings or on-line forums. Mr. Reilly stated at both the golf course tour and in his interview, how wonderful an amenity the Upper Dublin Golf Course is for the community and that the only underlying issue preventing the course from generating more interest/revenue was the lack of water for irrigation.

The golf course was reviewed by our golf course architect from Shearon Golf. In their review, they produced a multitude of issues as they relate to the condition of the course and its playability. Safety, according to our golf course architect, is the single most important consideration on any golf course. When modern safety standards are applied to the layout of Upper Dublin Golf Course, twelve of the eighteen holes contain significant safety issues. There are numerous occasions where golfers pose a substantial safety risk to vehicles traveling along Twining Road. The driving range being positioned within the center of the course poses a safety hazard to other golfers regardless of the fencing that is provided. Many of the cart path

routes conflict with oncoming shots from existing tee boxes. These safety issues must be addressed if any modification to the course is undertaken in the future.

The lack of proper irrigation has hampered the condition of the fairways, greens and tees. The size of the on-site ponds are too small and the depth of the current well is too shallow to provide sufficient water for irrigation. Currently, only the tees and greens are irrigated. During a dry summer, the fairways turn to straw/ become heavily compacted and the tees/greens may not be irrigated if the on-site well runs dry. The installation of new water wells and the enlargement of the containment ponds must be addressed in the very near future in order to retain the remaining users of the course. Should new water wells be installed and the ponds made larger, there is no guarantee that sufficient water will be available to irrigate the entire golf course. The cost to install a new well (650 feet deep), expand the existing ponds, install new pumps and a new commercial irrigation system would be approximately \$250,000.

Our golf course architect stated that the routing of the course (the way a golfer meanders through the course) is very ordinary in its layout, not providing a variety of doglegs or offering holes of differing lengths. A good golf course will provide a variety of hole types with hazards throughout the course, allowing for different shot types. A good golf course will hold a players interest throughout an entire round of golf, making play a challenge for the beginner as well as the above average golfer, encouraging them to return to the course for future rounds of golf. Upper Dublin Golf Course is a very mundane, linear style course with hazards that are not appropriately placed for a minimally challenging round of golf. This layout may appeal to the very beginner golfer, because of its ease of use, but the average to more advanced player will find the course very repetitive and unmemorable. The lack of varying hole/shot types and challenging course layout will dramatically reduce the appeal for repeat business. The layout of the course should be reconfigured to provide for a more challenging, memorable round of golf that will encourage more users to frequent the course. Due to the limited size and boundary constraints of Twining Road and the adjoining rail road, it would be very difficult to modify the existing course layout. If undertaken, the cost to modify the layout of Upper Dublin Golf Course could easily exceed 3 million dollars.

The practice green, greens, tees, bunkers, cart paths, “out of play areas” and water hazards are all in fair to poor condition. The practice green is poorly located and lacks playability. The greens are constructed of native soil and should be reconstructed using more advanced materials. The tees are all very old and require

reconstruction. The bunkers are all in very poor condition and require reconstruction/relocation to provide a more challenging round of golf. The cart paths are all worn/deteriorated and should be completely replaced. The out of play areas, wood lines and mature specimen trees are all being poorly maintained and require maintenance/pruning to encourage playability of the course. The water hazards are poorly maintained and inadequately sized to provide irrigation for the course. The size, quantity and quality of water hazards should be expanded.

Our estimated cost to correct the safety concerns (discussed within the first page of this letter), the poor condition of the practice green, greens, tees, bunkers, cart paths, and “out of play areas” is 1.5 million dollars. Should all of the improvements, identified above, be completed as one project, the total cost could easily surpass 5 million dollars, not including ongoing maintenance and capital improvement costs. The addition of a new golf course superintendent and the meager investment (New sand for the bunkers, new seeding and spray herbicides for the fairways) that Mr. Reilly discusses in his letter to the Ambler Gazette will make little impact to the ongoing issues that plague this course.

The clubhouse, Pro Shop, Snack Bar and fitness facility were reviewed as a part of our 14-month long master planning study. The size of the clubhouse, Pro Shop and Snack Bar are appropriate to the overall size of the course, however, the condition of these spaces and variety of food types is lackluster. The indoor lesson area has a low ceiling height, making it problematic for teaching indoor golf lessons. The snack bar and Pro Shop contained a significant amount of broken or used golf equipment/fitness equipment, making the space appear cluttered and unattractive to the golf course user. The free weight & aerobic rooms are housed within the lower, basement level of the clubhouse. Both areas contain a relatively low ceiling height with little to no windows, exaggerating the basement like feel of these spaces. There is a history of water damage within these areas, which we have been told has recently been corrected. The 2nd floor fitness area is an assemblage of smaller rooms, one of which is an old converted outdoor deck/indoor dance floor area. A significant amount of aerobic equipment is contained within these relatively cramped spaces.

Our review of the building had revealed that numerous renovations and alterations have occurred over the years. It is difficult to distinguish the extents of the original building and the degree of the alterations. A full architectural evaluation of the structure was not a component of our analysis, however, it is our recommendation that one be performed, if any consideration is to be given to retaining the structure. It was our recommendation within the Master Plan report to demolish the existing building and supply only the facilities necessary

for the park to adequately function. It is the opinion of the planning team that any ongoing renovations, estimated to be \$100 per square foot (1.5 million dollars if renovating the entire facility) to an already heavily modified structure, would be an unwise investment for Upper Dublin Township.

Mr. Reilly's offer, as of March 15th, 2016, to "provide Upper Dublin (UD) Township residents (as well as all municipal employees, UD police, fireman, and school staff, whether or not they live in the Township) which will include unlimited golf, including beginner lessons for the entire family for those who do not already play golf, as well as unlimited fitness, should they choose to participate, for a monthly fee of \$35 per family" is a fair offer. Mr. Reilly does not state that his offer is ongoing, expiring next month or next year.

The Commissioner's need to keep in mind that a monthly fee of \$35, equates to \$420 per year. This is equivalent to the typical fee that an average household may pay at a national fitness chain or slightly more than the fee that an individual may pay at a well rated local golf course for the year. For instance, the monthly cost to join the Planet Fitness, located less than 2-miles from Upper Dublin Golf Course, would be \$30, \$360 yearly, for a family of three. The average household size in Upper Dublin Township is 2.78 people as of the YR2010 census data. The cost to play a round of golf at a well rated local public course would be \$45 (weekend rate) per round. The typical golfer, which responded to the paper surveys, played an average of five-(5) rounds of golf per year for a total expense of \$225 per year.

59% of the survey respondents stated that they belonged to a local fitness facility while 93% of those users stated that they exercise at facilities other than the Upper Dublin Fitness Club. 57% of the local residents that were surveyed stated that they don't play golf. The overwhelming majority of residents that either golf or exercise and responded to the paper/on-line surveys stated that they choose to play golf/exercise at other surrounding facilities, rather than utilize the amenities offered at Upper Dublin Golf Course.

Based upon the financial records supplied to our design team, revenues paid to Upper Dublin Township since YR2004 have remained stagnant or decreased. The yearly greens fees that Mr. Reilly's management company have accumulated since YR2004 have reduced by almost 52%. The memberships have reduced by 22% and the food/beverage sales have reduced by 46%, all since YR2004. A significant drop in memberships occurred between the YR2010 and YR2014 (\$516,619 to \$78,996).

The details stated above, combined with the fact that many more challenging golf courses and nationally recognized fitness facilities are located within very close proximity to Upper Dublin Golf Course and the fact that the sport of golf has seen a reduction in attendance, creates a very compelling argument for the Commissioners to no longer offer golf at this location and invest in the future of the community by affording access to this facility to all residents.

Feel free to call our office with any additional questions that you may have.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Gryga', written over a horizontal dashed line.

Aloysius T. Gryga, RLA
Director of Landscape Architecture & Planning