



PUBLIC FORUM

MAY 20, 2010 • 5:30 P.M.
Owensboro Community & Technical College
Advanced Technology Center Multipurpose Room

Food and drinks will be served.

Reservations are appreciated:
kathy.strobel@plfo.org • 685-2652

ISSUE BRIEF-DIALOGUE GUIDE to be used during the forum

HILLCREST GOLF COURSE

Best use for golf, a park, or a subdivision?

Local officials were recently advised that the City of Owensboro would be required to assume the operations and maintenance of Ben Hawes State Park, including its golf courses. To gain efficiencies and reduce public subsidies, the city announced its intent to close Hillcrest Golf Course.

In response, citizens opposed to this decision are mobilizing, circulating petitions and attempting to make Hillcrest a pivotal issue in the upcoming political campaigns.

The Hillcrest Golf Course controversy is another opportunity to demonstrate how our community would be well-served through broad citizen and stakeholder participation in decision making. The following guide reflects an effort to provide citizens with balanced information and a tool for community dialogue.

In so doing, we can reduce divisiveness and cynicism, foster mutual respect and a positive sense of community.

information → deliberation → action

INFORMATION

Jaycees led effort to build city's first municipal course

In 1952, the Owensboro Jaycees, a young men's leadership development organization, leased 70 acres in the southeast section of the city off Old Hartford Road from Mr. and Mrs. Walter Johnston for \$3,000 per year. This enabled our community to open Hillcrest, Owensboro's first municipal golf course. In-kind and cash contributions were vital to the construction of the nine-hole course: for example, Texas Gas Transmission Corporation provided earth moving equipment; the Jaycees sprigged the greens.

Two years later the lease was assigned to the City of Owensboro and the city parks and recreation department assumed management of the course. In 1969, the property was sold to the City for \$161,822.

Compared to other golf courses, Hillcrest is relatively short and not as challenging. Consequently, the course has always had special appeal to beginners and seniors.

Ben Hawes Park offered an 18-hole public course

In 1962, when the City of Owensboro purchased the Kurz farm in the Bon Harbor area west of the city for \$350,000, the 298 acre Ben Hawes Park was added to its park system. By 1964, golfers had another public option, an 18-hole course that was longer and more

difficult. A nine-hole par-three course was built there as well, along with an assortment of standard park facilities: tennis courts, ball fields, hiking trail, picnic shelter and more.

State takes ownership

In 1974, in one his final acts as Kentucky Governor, Owensboro native Wendell Ford announced that Ben Hawes would be incorporated into the state parks system and enhanced with camping facilities, horseback trails, cabins and more. Through the years, many improvements were made to the park, although many citizens do not consider Ben Hawes to offer facilities that typify a first-rate Kentucky state park.

Back to the city

In 2010, the state sold its downtown Owensboro office building to the City of Owensboro to construct a new downtown hotel and convention center on a site recommended as part of a new downtown master plan. As part of the deal, the state required the City to take back Ben Hawes, including the golf courses.

The City's agreement with the state has been complicated by concerns over soil contamination on the state building property, but there is no expectation that the transfer of the park and golf course will be reversed.

PUBLICLY-OWNED COURSE COMPARISONS

	Hillcrest	Ben Hawes
Course	9-Hole	18-Hole, 9-Hole (Par 3)
Number of golf rounds (2009)	26,504 (9-hole)	20,000-24,000 est. <i>Plus high school and college golf teams that supplant public use</i>
Average number of golf rounds over last five years (2005-2009)	29,590 (9-hole)	decreasing
Golfers from where: City residents County residents Outside Daviess County residents	60 percent* 40 percent** n/a	most from O-DC some from IN and state park passes
Number of Members/Passholders Average number of members (last five years)	165 220	150 n/a
Green fees (18 holes with a cart) For Members/Passholders For Non-Members	\$10 (cart fee) \$22	\$12.75 (cart fee) \$32.75 (weekday) \$34.75 (weekend)
Annual Membership/Passholders Junior Senior Adult Family	\$200 \$300 \$400 \$500	\$300 \$475 \$700 \$1,000
Number of staff (2009)	2 full time 5 part time 1 seasonal	8 full time 10 seasonal
2009 Revenue (before subsidy)	\$250,905	\$429,256
2009 Expenses	\$351,321	\$671,424
Net Revenue (Deficit)	(\$100,416)	(\$242,169)

**Passholders only*

***Passholders from outside the city limits*

Assuming expenses cannot be cut, Hillcrest would need to increase revenue by 40 percent to break even.

PRIVATELY-OWNED COURSE COMPARISONS

Local privately owned courses in Daviess County provide other options for golfers.

	General Adult Membership		Greens Fees	
	Number	Cost	Members	Non-Members
Owensboro Country Club	400	\$3,000* +\$265/mo**	included	\$40***
Panther Creek Golf Course	200+	0	\$229/\$379 5/7-day pass (2 years)	\$15 weekday +\$10 cart \$29 weekend
Summit Country Club	285	\$2,000 +\$200/mo**	included	\$36-\$39***
Windridge Country Club	200	\$1,000* +\$155/mo	included	\$27 weekday*** \$32 weekend*** \$15 cart

*Before discount special promotions

**Monthly dues-food minimum

***Must be guest of member



PARKS AND COMMUNITY AMENITIES

Golf courses are but one type of recreation facility that contribute to the livability and appeal of our community. Parks and recreation programs enhance the quality of life, and the land set aside for that purpose can significantly improve a community's image.

City	Parks*
Bowling Green	1,561 acres
Bloomington, IN	1,854 acres
Evansville	2,600 acres
Owensboro	670 acres**
Louisville	15,902 acres
Lexington	5,840 acres
Covington	1,000 acres
Elizabethtown	695 acres
Paducah	1,065 acres

* Not verified, but acreage

probably includes golf courses.

**Includes Hillcrest (70 acres) and Ben Hawes (298 acres).



Seldom are community parks and recreation facilities feasible as private enterprises. Consequently, most are developed, maintained and subsidized by the public through governments.

The 2009-2010 city parks and recreation facilities budget projections:

City Parks/ Recreation Facility	2009-10 Excess or (Loss)*
Hillcrest Golf Course	(\$100,416)
Ice Rink	(\$10,979)
Pools	(\$91,676)
Softball Complex	(\$141, 329)
Sportscenter	(\$198,421)
Total Facilities Budget	(\$539,907)
Total Departmental Budget	
2009-2010	(\$3,280,637)
2008-2009	(\$3,258,253)
2007-2008	(\$2,921,379)

* Numbers may not include all maintenance costs or debt service.



The market for golf

Golf courses are expensive to build and maintain. Courses typically cover at least 300 acres, and in many instances, homebuilding lots, particularly along fairways, are sold as part of the development as a separate source of revenue. There are residences along or near Owensboro’s two public golf courses, but they were not developed in conjunction with the golf courses and city government does not receive any revenue from them.

“I think nationally... there is an abundance of courses,” said Florida homebuilder Jim Bowen. In 2006, 2007 and 2008, more golf courses closed than opened. (Data for 2009 was not available.)

According to the National Golf Foundation, it takes a population of 40,000 to support an 18-hole golf course. Consequently, Owensboro-Daviess County should be able to support 2.4 18-hole courses. Owensboro-Daviess County has twice that many courses.

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Owensboro-Daviess County has five 18-hole courses, plus a 9-hole Par-3 course.



DELIBERATION

Option #1: Leave Hillcrest Golf Course as it is

Under this option, Hillcrest would remain a golf course under the ownership and management of the City of Owensboro. As taxpayers, we would accept the maintenance and operating costs as we do for other parks and recreation amenities that serve our community.

Those who support this option may say...

- Hillcrest was built to serve this community as a golf course. Many volunteers were involved in building the course. It should remain a golf course.
- Hillcrest has many loyal customers. They should not be penalized for shortfalls they had nothing to do with.
- Hillcrest fills a need in this community by serving beginners and senior citizens who prefer a shorter course than the Ben Hawes course. The senior population is increasing, so there will be a growing need for facilities to serve them.
- The subsidy for Hillcrest is no different than those provided to other parks and recreation facilities. Those facilities are not expected to make money, neither should Hillcrest.

Those who oppose this option may say...

- Hillcrest has run its course as a golfing facility. There were not as many options for golfers when Hillcrest was built.
- Hillcrest golfers may be loyal, but there are far too few of them. We have more courses in this community than we can support. There are plenty of other options for the Hillcrest golfers. It would be more efficient to move Hillcrest golfers to the Ben Hawes course.
- Young people can learn to play golf anywhere. Many seniors play at the Ben Hawes course and generally use carts and do not walk the courses.
- Taxpayers expect governments to be prudent. Hillcrest costs too much to serve such a small number of people.

Option #2: Convert Hillcrest to a park

Under this option, Hillcrest would be added to the city parks system. Rather than be filled with sports facilities, it would likely be a “passive” park for walking, biking, picnicking, etc.

Those who support this option may say...

- Hillcrest would quickly become Owensboro’s premiere park with rolling hills, mature trees and lakes. Adding a park there would be a long-term investment in our community’s quality of life.
- Compared to other cities, we lack park space in Owensboro, particularly passive parks. It would be nice to have open green space that is not cluttered with ball fields and tennis courts.
- The park would not be as much of a financial drain on the taxpayers as is the golf course.

Those who oppose this option may say...

- Hillcrest was designed as a golf course, not a park. This change would not be fair to residents along the perimeter of the park who moved there to overlook a golf course.
- We have plenty of parks in Owensboro-Daviess County and the Hillcrest area is already served by Legion Park and Horse Fork Creek Park.
- To maintain a nice park, a resident park keeper would be needed to handle mowing, trash pick-up and security. Several shelters may need to be built. More walking paths and parking spaces in other areas of the park may be needed and would need to be maintained. Insurance premiums may increase with more public use.

Option #3: Lease the course to a private manager

Under this option, the City would lease the course to a private manager who would absorb maintenance responsibilities and assume the risk for losses. The City could cancel the agreement at some point if it wanted to sell the property, use it for some other purpose or once again run the golf course.

Those who support this option may say...

- This could be a win-win: good for the devoted Hillcrest golfers and good for the taxpayers.
- There is no downside to this option. If appealing bids do not come forth, the City is not out anything.

Those who oppose this option may say...

- Given the losses Hillcrest has been experiencing and the number of golf courses that serve this area, it is doubtful that a private manager would step forward.
- When the City loses control of the property, we could see the property fall into disrepair.

Option #4: Convert the Hillcrest property to a subdivision

Given the beauty of the grounds and its proximity to affluent residential developments, homebuilders would certainly jump at the opportunity to develop the Hillcrest property. The City could sell the property outright or subdivide it and sell lots.

Those who support this option may say...

- This option would get the property back on the tax rolls, generate property and payroll taxes, school taxes and more.
- A major residential development on that site would create many construction jobs.
- Such a development would greatly enhance the aesthetic appeal of Owensboro.

Those who oppose this option may say...

- It would take the City and County many years to recover their investment in public infrastructure costs: utilities, sewers, water lines, streets, sidewalks, streetlights and more. Such a large scale residential development would need better access. Old Hartford Road and Fours Lane would be inadequate.
- The housing market is weak and it may take many years to develop the property.
- A park or golf course would be more aesthetically appealing than a subdivision.

Are there other options?

- Is the property suited for commercial development: office park or retail center?
- Could the City donate Hillcrest to a new nonprofit corporation to run the golf course? Private donations and grants could be solicited.
- Could the City use volunteers at the Hillcrest course in order to cut costs?
- Your own ideas: _____

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which points “pro” and “con” do you think outweigh the others?
- Do you have other points “pro” or “con” to add? Do you have additional options?
- How important is green space to a community?
- Should community amenities like golf courses and parks pay their own way?
- Which option(s) do you prefer?

ACTION

As a result of the information you received and what you may have learned by deliberating with others, you may have gained a greater appreciation of people from different perspectives. You are better prepared to come to an informed judgment and to take responsible action.

Whatever your position, you are encouraged to take action. Some options to consider:

- Contact a City or County official
- Contact a candidate for public office
- Appear before relevant governmental bodies
- Sign a petition
- Support or volunteer for a candidate who shares your views
- Write a letter to the editor or an “In My View” column
- Stage a rally
- Start a network through a newsletter, email, Facebook, etc.
- Participate in activities of supporters/opponents
- Speak to a civic or service club
- Speak to a student group
- Make a contribution to a group that supports your point of view
- Other _____
- Other _____
- Other _____

Contact List:

Mayor and City Commission

Ron Payne ● Mayor
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Hillcrest Golf Association

Bob Williams ● President
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City and County Parks

Amanda Rogers ● Parks and Recreation Manager
Owensboro Parks and Recreation
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Greater Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission

Gary Noffsinger ● Executive Director
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Sources:

Boberg, Glenn R. Evansville Parks and Recreation

Cary, Chris, City of Owensboro Golf Course Manager

Evans, Daniel Panther Creek Golf Course

Flesher, Greg, Owensboro Country Club

Fulkerson, J. T., City of Owensboro Finance Director

Hillcrest Golf Course staff

Kellogg, Chris, Kentucky State Parks Communications Director

Lee, Walter, former Ben Hawes golf course employee

Lanham, Barry, Manager, The Summit Country Club

National Golf Foundation (www.ccfj.net/HOAindgolfdemand.html)

Rogers, Amanda, City of Owensboro Parks and Recreation Manager

Russell, Evan Ray, History of Owensboro Parks and Recreation (1815-1990)

Scott, Amy, Elizabethtown Parks and Recreation

Swegles, Cindy, Covington Neighborhoods, Parks and Recreation

Thompson, Mark H., Paducah Parks Services

Windridge Country Club staff