

DATE: January 11, 2022

TO: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

RE: IE27.6 Review of City of Toronto Golf Courses

To the members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee:

My name is Diana Yoon and I am a Climate Specialist with Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA). As you may know, TEA is a local environmental organization that's committed to building a greener city for all. We focus on finding environmental solutions that simultaneously tackle rising social and economic inequalities in Toronto.

As the pandemic continues to impact our communities, it's critical to rethink how City-owned and public spaces can best benefit people and the environment. When the operating leases for the City golf courses came up for renewal, we advocated for a public consultation process with meaningful community engagement to determine how these 150 hectares of parkland could best serve the public good.

We appreciated the work done by City Staff to engage members of the public, especially local communities, in this important decision-making process about future opportunities at all of the City's golf course parklands.

In particular, we feel that the proposed Master Plan development for a renewed Dentonia Park has great potential to meaningfully involve community members in shaping the park to better serve local priorities. We support the recommendation to initiate a master planning process as soon as possible – and would like to request a timeline from City Staff for the start and estimated completion date for this process.

However, the direction proposed in the Report to Action, an 'improved status quo' model, does not sufficiently respond to what communities asked for in terms of complementary and alternative uses. The City can implement several recommendations from the EY report, and our recommendations below, to ensure more equitable and fairer access to these public spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the consultation report describes that the City held an Indigenous leaders and communities focus group, and received feedback at a City of Toronto Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) Meeting.

We strongly support recommendations to pursue Indigenous placekeeping in the operational review and alternative/complementary use analysis reports. However, we believe the City could make clearer commitments on how the City will involve Indigenous communities and local communities in the place-based decision-making processes for each of the courses/parklands, and adopt the recommendations already provided (e.g. incorporate and make space for Indigenous uses of the land and water), especially in the proposed master plan for Dentonia.

Second, stronger measures are needed to ensure equitable access and fairness.

As you know, the pandemic has highlighted the realities of social inequities regarding access to green space. This is especially true of low-income, racialized communities such as those who live in the neighbourhoods surrounding some of the parklands in question. Four out of the five courses are in areas that are high (Dentonia, Humber, Tam) to medium (Scarlett) on the “Equity-Deserving Index” according to the Appendix 2 staff report.

We strongly encourage the City to adopt a truly equitable and authentic approach to further developing plans for each site. This requires listening to local community members, especially those from equity deserving groups, to understand what their priorities are. Requests for golf programming focused on equity-deserving groups must come from communities, and not simply be used as justification for the status quo.

In addition, local priorities from the consultations need to be better integrated – such as a need for food security and urban agriculture. Despite really strong public feedback on food growing, this use appears to have been dismissed for all courses, except at Dentonia. We request staff to reconsider this option and its alignment with the City's obligations under the Toronto food charter and other food-related policies. The equity lens could also be applied to types of alternative land use (including Indigenous placekeeping & BIPOC-led urban agriculture).

We also want to see clear plans on how the City will proactively remove barriers to equitable access to these parklands - per each location (entrance fees, physical barriers, perceived social barriers e.g. feeling unwelcome). Based on the feedback from the community engagement, the existing complementary uses are not well known or understood. Local residents do not perceive these as “public” spaces but as spaces where people need to pay to access. As proposed, an awareness campaign for alternate/complementary uses for local communities could also help.

To make equitable decisions about the use and resourcing of these lands on an ongoing basis, the City must be informed by stronger data about who is actually accessing golf facilities and programs. The engagement report is very revealing about who is using the golf facilities based on self-reported data in the City survey (the majority of course users reported middle to high incomes, and over half of users reported travelling to these courses from over 3km away). What metrics will be used to track & measure access and usage going forward?

Finally, we request that the City outline how a 'climate lens' will be applied at these parklands.

The City should appreciate this immense opportunity to use this parkland to advance and accelerate the Net Zero Strategy goals and actions (e.g. through electrification, reduced energy use, and waste reduction in operations). There is also an opportunity to use these green spaces to build resilience to extreme weather (such as both natural green infrastructure like stormwater management & by meeting community needs for respite during heat waves).

The climate lens can also be embedded into the procurement process. We'd like to request the City outline how a 'climate lens' will be applied to the plans for the courses. The City should appreciate this immense opportunity



to use this parkland to advance and accelerate the Net Zero Strategy goals and actions (e.g. through electrification, reduced energy use, waste reduction in operations). We'd like to request that the negotiated RFP process is for shorter contracts and/or would include provisions so the City can change how those sites are used based on new information (e.g. from the Dentonia master planning process).

Overall, there needs to be better accountability for the environmental impact of these golf courses. We want to highlight that 80% of respondents to the consultation survey indicated that the golf courses should prioritize environmental stewardship, sustainability, and advancing the City's climate change goals. Unfortunately, the recommendations do not provide any direction or details on how the City plans to do so on these lands, but there is an opportunity to address this moving forward.

Ultimately, Toronto can and must reimagine these golf courses to better serve community needs and build a more healthy, resilient and sustainable city. This review of City golf courses is an opportunity to reimagine how public green space in our city is used, who has a say in what it is used for, and ensuring public land serves the greatest public good.

We encourage the City to collaborate with communities to build a more healthy, resilient, and sustainable Toronto. Thanks for your time and consideration of our recommendations.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DY".

Diana Yoon, Climate Specialist
Toronto Environmental Alliance