

Questions Submitted to the Parks Board of the City of South Bend  
Regarding the History and Future Possible Status of Elbel Park/Golf Course  
At the Public Meeting, February 11, 2016

This statement constitutes a formal request that this document be entered into the minutes of this meeting.

1) What is the history and legal status of the Elbel property? Any restrictions set at purchase of land? What does it say on the deed? What are the exact boundaries of the land? Is the city's \$747K appraisal a reasonable one (need comment from real estate experts, possible reappraisal -- especially if the city is serious about the lease, because current appraisal doesn't cover lease value)? What is the current status of the other land in the immediate area (some is owned by the state, I believe.)

2) Can the administration explain how a potential lease would benefit the public at large/the common good, and how it would be in harmony with the South Bend Parks Master Plan? Given the city's history with leases, how can citizens trust that a lease would be something other than privatization by another name? How would it even be a good financial deal for the city, moral questions of public access aside? Why would it be a better option than, for example, seeking appropriate funding for the parks department so that we do not need to feel forced into a choice between maintaining inner city playgrounds and preserving a vast green space unlike any other in the area? How would it be possible to structure a lease in such a way as to protect sensitive ecological areas, maintain public access, and keep golf accessible to all residents of the city?

3) I request an independent audit of the past 10 years of Elbel's financials. It is unclear at this point exactly how much money Elbel has been losing. I've seen everything from a few thousand dollars a year to "hundreds of thousands" in the occasional news article -- which I'm assuming is cumulative insofar as it's accurate at all. Additionally, financially knowledgeable people who've seen the city's numbers have noted that there may be problems with capital improvement expenditures being treated as losses rather than investments. [I am not a financially knowledgeable person but I would really like to see an independent accountant answer this question.]

4) If the golf course is run responsibly by the city going forward, what are some best, expected, and worst-case scenarios, financially, over the next 10 years. This would include expected outgo in capital and regular maintenance, staffing, and marketing, along with expected income. Reasonable projection of players, rounds, etc should look at long-term historical trends and demonstrate awareness of the "Tiger Woods bump." It should also take into account that for whatever reason, the city has not been properly maintaining the course for the last two years (at least), so that it is currently less appealing than it could be to golfers. Presumably, if maintenance issues are addressed, players will increase as well, and could well include tourists.

5) What can you find out about the economics of other proposed models for the golf course: a co-op with buy-in; a green golf course; a St. Andrews-type model; creative/responsive pricing models.

6) How much of a buffer is needed between the ecologically sensitive parts of the area and the golf course and/or other proposed activities? How (if at all) would the course need to be altered in order to protect the wetlands/wildlife? Are golf and ecological goals mutually exclusive? (Question has to be asked though I am optimistic we can get both)

7) What would a best-practices plan for fending off invasive species and general wetlands management look like? How much would it cost? Would a model where the city donates the wetlands and buffer zone to a land trust, while continuing to manage the golf course itself, be feasible?

8) How would any activity we undertake affect water table levels, septic systems, etc, etc -- in other words, we need an ecological analysis that would explain what might happen in the region at large if there are major changes in the use/maintenance of Elbel.

9) What kind of ecological analysis is needed to answer these questions? In other words, do we need a six-month or year-long study? Who would perform that? How much would it cost & where would that money come from (parks budget? donations? grant? city/council discretionary funds if any?)

10) How can we ensure that, regardless of how the city uses the property otherwise, permanent protections are put in place for ecologically sensitive areas?

11) Is there a land-management solution that accommodates environmental goals, golfers' goals of keeping the course open and playable from March-October (or so), and everyone else's interest in having hiking trails and nature education? Is it possible to create a trail around the perimeter of the property that would be accessible to walkers, kids, etc even during golf season? To hire part-time staff or solicit volunteers to lead public bird-watching or wildlife walks a couple times a month?

12) How much would it cost to link Elbel via a SB Transpo line (I'm guessing not much as the #18 bus already gets out to Olive Rd -- presumably pretty cheap to extend the run just a little further). How about making sure there are a few safe ways to get there by bike (bike lanes on streets headed out there -- one roughly parallel to Cleveland/Brick Rd from the river, one that runs north from the West Side.)

13) Is there room for a cafe/public restrooms on the site, preferably one with a nice view. Could be privately operated.

14) Feasibility of parks bond and/or 1% food-beverage tax to fund parks & rec (zoo, Elbel, other underfunded projects). The city keeps saying it doesn't have enough money to maintain Elbel AND inner city parks; how much do they think they need, and how can we get that for

them. Creatively. Other funding options mentioned at our public meetings that could be explored: Bicentennial Trust Funds? Other?

15) How can the business community use its creative expertise in marketing and problem-solving in developing Elbel for more attractive golf and other forms of recreation, within the limits set by ecological and wetlands-management concerns, as well as fiscal realism.

Questions submitted by:

Catherine R. Osborne  
517 River Ave  
South Bend, IN 46601  
osbornefcr@gmail.com

