

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. This is Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, June 27, 2023.

The City of Port Townsend hosted Public Open House #3 for the Port Townsend Golf Course and Mountain View Commons Concept Planning Effort last Thursday, June 22 at the Fort Worden Commons. This meeting was to summarize public feedback received to date, share the final two design concepts, host a community conversation and discussion about priorities and desired next steps. The two so-called “final design concepts” were vastly different, but according to Groundswell, the landscape architecture firm leading the public engagement effort, are based upon feedback from previous open houses, online surveys, and input on the City’s website, under the heading “Engage PT”.

One concept, called Central Park, is to replace the golf course entirely with a large city park with amenities, including an amphitheater, trails, a playground, a dog park, among other things. The dog park at the corner of 19th, Blaine Street, and San Juan Avenue might be placed there regardless, as the new Mountain View Pool might be placed at the site of the current dog park on the Mountain View Commons.

The other concept is to remove the driving range, and “fold” the golf course by moving two of the fairways closer to the other seven and have multiple features at the end of the property closest to Blaine Street and Mountain View Commons. These amenities might include an amphitheater which would occupy part of the hill where the driving range now sits, a dog park, an expansion of the Kah Tai Prairie ,and maybe even a community garden.

There were an estimated 150 citizens at the meeting, down from the last meeting with an estimated 200 people and the first meeting which had in excess of 300 people attending. During a question-and-answer session, several people who spoke up for leaving the golf course where it is, expressed dismay that the driving range might be taken away. Some had stories about their first jobs as teenagers picking up golf balls on the driving range and learning to play golf.

When the attendees were asked, by a show of hands, if they supported one concept or the other, quite a lot of shouting ensued, as many of those in attendance favored neither plan, and kept their hands up while shouting at the speaker at the front, an employee of Groundswell. It’s possible that Groundswell or the City came away with no consensus.

That was an interesting feature of the meeting: TWO members of the stakeholder committee stood at the front and claimed that at the last stakeholder meeting that they had reached consensus to endorse the hybrid plan. When Q and A started, another member of the stakeholder group protested that no such consensus had taken place and was visibly upset that two members of the committee would make a statement like that.

Another citizen who commented, Robert Horner, talked about the long history of the Port Townsend Golf Course. He said a well-known (at that time, almost a hundred years ago) designer created the plan for it, and that the golf course for those who know it presents unique challenges. He said that simply re-arranging the course would be a great disservice to the original design and to any golfer who would play on it. In fact, Mr. Horner has developed his own “hybrid plan” for the course, which keeps the original footprint mostly in place, shortens hole #5, and includes trails, a boardwalk, alternative use of the driving range, seasonally, for concerts, a prairie expansion, a redesigned clubhouse/restaurant with a view of the Olympics, a community garden, and a miniature golf course.

All of the plans, both Groundswell's and Mr. Horner's, include new housing on the Cherry Street side of the land, and City Manager John Mauro said the housing would not be developed by the City, but by private developers, as the City has no business being a landlord. There was widespread agreement in the open house on that point.

This was the final Open House of the concept planning effort. The planning effort began in early 2020 following the development of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan which showed the community's desire to explore different uses for the golf course property owned by the City. In November 2020, City Council unanimously directed staff to engage the community to explore the feasibility of alternate uses, in addition to continued use for golf. For More Information you can go to <https://cityofpt.us/engagept/page/envision-port-townsend-golf-course-and-mountain-view-commons>.

There is also a new survey for anybody who wants to give feedback on the latest design iterations.

Dr. Allison Berry will be speaking to the Jefferson County BOCC on Monday July 3 (next Monday), so if listeners have questions about anything to do with COVID-19 or public health, send an email to CONTACTUS@KPTZ.ORG by this Friday, June 30 at noon.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening!