



## PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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### CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Meeting: October 17, 2023

#### Subject

Blackberry Farm (BBF) Golf Course Feasibility Study, considering options to complete minimal repairs and improvements to the BBF Golf Course (Option 1) or convert BBF Golf Course to a Natural Habitat (Option 3).

#### Recommended Action

Direct staff to proceed with minimal repairs to maintain the BBF Golf Course (Option 1).

#### Reasons for Recommendation

The Blackberry Farm Golf Course needs repairs and updates to the 50+ year old irrigation system and course modifications to enhance functionality. Following the initial work on the Stevens Creek Corridor Master Plan (SCCMP) and the completion of the Parks and Recreation System Master Plan (PRSMP) the City of Cupertino reinitiated the discussion regarding the future of BBF Golf Course. City Council directed staff to investigate two options, one on minimal repairs to the BBF Golf Course (Option 1) and the second to convert the golf course to a natural habitat (Option 3). Having concluded the investigations and having collected significant public input, staff asks the City Council to provide direction to advance Option 1, minimal repairs to the facility.

#### Background

The Blackberry Farm Golf Course was constructed in 1962 and the City has owned the facility since 1991. The site is approximately 16 acres and contains a nine-hole golf course, a parking lot, one main building and a maintenance facility. The main building houses a pro shop and a restaurant facility that is leased by the Blue Pheasant (see Attachment A - Existing Site Conditions for site overview.) Most of the property is located within a designated floodplain and is adjacent to Stevens Creek, which contains protected and sensitive wildlife species, such as steelhead trout.

In the early 2000's, the SCCMP was initiated. While the plan was never completed, the goal was to create an updated vision for the public lands along Stevens Creek, between McClellan Road to Stevens Creek Boulevard. In 2014, in parallel to the work on the SCCMP, the City hired National Golf Foundation Consulting (NGF) to assess various options for improvements to the golf course. In 2015 and 2016 several golf course

improvement options were presented to City Council for consideration. Alternatives ranged from minor repairs to the golf course, to a full reconfiguration, including construction of a new clubhouse. During those meetings, comments about converting the golf course back to natural habitat were also raised.

The efforts associated with the SCCMP and improvements to the golf course were suspended due to City Council's decision to focus on completion of the Citywide PRSMP. Since the adoption of the PRSMP in 2020, the City reinitiated the project to investigate options for the golf course (see Attachment F – Selected Pages from Parks Master Plan). The objective of the project was to determine short-term and long-term improvements to the golf course, including amenities. The project was part of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 City Work Program.

At the June 3, 2021, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, the Commission unanimously recommended to City Council to update the Feasibility Study for Option 1 (minimal repairs) and to continue with a Feasibility Study for Option 3 (convert to natural habitat). At the July 20, 2021, City Council meeting, Council unanimously agreed to have staff update the Feasibility Study for Option 1 (see Attachment B - NGF Report – Minimal Repairs to Golf Course) and to continue with a Feasibility Study for Option 3 (see Attachment C – MIG Report – Convert to Natural Habitat.).

A summary of the points made in the two reports is included as (Attachment K – Reports Summary.)

Both reports were presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission at the May 18, 2022, special meeting. The Commission was given the opportunity to provide feedback on the reports, including next steps regarding public outreach. The draft survey questions related to the two alternatives were shared with the Commission (Attachment G – Public Survey Questions). Minutes from that meeting are included as Attachment H - Parks Rec Commission Minutes 05-18-22.

Following input from the Commission, a survey was published online for public input via the Engage Cupertino website from May 25 through July 15, 2022. Cascadia Consulting was hired to assist with the public outreach process and has summarized findings in the Public Survey and Outreach Summary report. See Attachment D – Public Survey and Outreach Summary.

The reports and the results of the survey were presented to a special Joint Commission on September 9, 2022. The Sustainability Commission, Bicycle Pedestrian Commission, and Parks and Recreation Commission were in attendance as part of the Joint Commission Meeting. The Joint Commission received public comment, asked clarifying questions, and made comments on the findings. Minutes and communications from this meeting are included as Attachment I - Joint Commission Minutes 09-08-2022 and Attachment J - Written Communications Joint Commission 09-08-2022.

### Discussion

The BBF Golf Course requires improvements to the irrigation system to minimize costly ongoing repairs, to increase water efficiency, and to improve recreational functionality. Prior to expending funds to make these necessary improvements, the City considered the costs and impacts of returning the facility to natural habitat. The investigation of the two options discussed above has shown that the 10-year overall cost impacts of these options are similar. Further, the public outreach results were not conclusive, as public support for both options was roughly equivalent.

While the conversion to natural habitat might provide environmental/sustainable benefits, the City would need a compelling reason, either cost benefit or a clear directive from the community, in order to dismantle an established public facility that is strongly supported by a significant segment of the community. While balancing the desirability of the existing recreational use with the potential to restore natural habitat is a policy decision that is within Council's discretion, the research and public outreach conducted by staff has not provided a compelling reason to remove the existing golf course.

The City has since performed a comparative analysis of the fees being charged for other similar municipal golf courses in the area and has concluded that the rates charged for BBF are the lowest among the surveyed jurisdictions. Based on this information, the City will evaluate the option of increasing these fees to enhance cost recovery, including capital costs, for the facility.

Given the high usage of the golf course and the recreational need that it meets, combined with opportunities to reduce costs through water efficiency and increased revenue through fee adjustments, staff recommends that the golf course be retained and that Council direct staff to proceed with Option 1.

With the recommended direction, staff will pursue:

- a. An updated scope, schedule of work, and cost estimate relating to Option 1 (minimal repairs to the golf course);
- b. Evaluate operational and fee rate changes that may improve revenue generation and cost recovery;
- c. Investigate golf course and facility improvements that may increase revenue, further reduce water use, and to for opportunities to increase natural habitat areas where feasible; and
- d. Explore the potential of leasing the golf course to an outside vendor to further reduce expenditures and increase City revenues.

### Sustainability Impact

The recommended action to proceed with Option 1 (Minimal Repairs to the Golf Course) with the associated improvement to irrigation efficiency supports the Climate Action Plan 2.0 goal of "Reducing per capita water consumption by 15 percent compared to

2019 levels by 2030 and maintain through 2040" (Measure WW-1). The proposed irrigation system improvements could decrease water use by up to 21 percent of the current level, potentially avoiding use of 1,804,450 gallons per year based on 2022 usage.

#### Fiscal Impact

The pre-COVID annual subsidy for operation of the golf course averaged \$272,000. After accounting for projected revenues, costs over a 25-year period for each option are summarized below:

- A. Repair the Golf Course
    - a. \$1.97 million (Total Capital Cost)
    - b. \$8.12 million (Total Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Cost)
    - c. Average Annual O&M Cost = \$324,705
  - B. Converting the Site to Natural Habitat
    - a. \$1.88 million (Total Capital Cost)
    - b. \$10.22 million (Total O&M Cost)
    - c. Average Annual O&M Cost = \$408,824
- (Note: Potential grant funding or fee increases may affect projected costs)*

Attachment E provides a summary of 2022 costs associated with each option.

If Council gives direction, a project proposal could be included in the proposed FY24-25 CIP budget. Given limited ongoing capital funding, the project would be considered and prioritized in relation to other project needs.

#### California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15301 (maintenance of existing facilities).

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Reviewed by: Chad Mosley, Director of Public Works

Reviewed by: Matt Morley, Assistant City Manager

Approved for Submission by: Pamela Wu, City Manager

#### Attachments:

A – Existing Site Conditions

B – NGF Report – Minimal Repairs to Golf Course

C – MIG Report – Convert to Natural Habitat

D - Public Survey and Outreach Summary

E – Blackberry Farm Golf Course Use Analysis Comparative Costs – 25 Year Outlook

F – Selected Pages from Parks Master Plan

G – Public Survey Questions

H - Parks Recreation Commission Minutes 05-18-22

I - Joint Commission Minutes 09-08-2022

J - Written Communications Joint Commission 09-08-2022  
K – Reports Summary