



## **Position Statement on recently proposed Nicklaus Design of golf features within Buffalo's Olmsted Park System**

Updated January 2019

An independent proposal has come forth to the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy's (BOPC) on the topic of golf and its golf courses in the Olmsted landscape. Although the proposal embraces a topic of overarching golf improvements, the projects proposed occur in two separate Olmsted parks and are unrelated in scope. Thus the BOPC's position is two-fold. The first component of position relates to South Park and the restoration of the Olmsted-designed Arboretum; the second is the redesign of the Delaware Park Golf Course. The proposed golf improvements by the outside party are related to specific elements identified in the BOPC's Plan for 21<sup>st</sup> Century, thus these ideas, conceptually, are worthwhile of exploration.

### **History on the Two Parks**

South Park and its Arboretum:

The Olmsted Firm drafted planting plans for an arboretum at South Park in 1895. The BOPC retains the original arboretum drawings in its archives. That plan includes the layout for a conservatory, which was built in 1901, now home to the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens Society. In 1915 an unplanned 9-hole golf course was inserted into the historic landscape. The irony is that due to golf being an open landscape sport, the park has remained basically unchanged with historic alignments, views and grades intact. Therefore the restoration of the arboretum holds great promise for the integrity of the park.

Since the 1986 "South Park Master Plan" by Bruce Kelly, sponsored in part by the Buffalo Friends of Olmsted (and pushed with great earnestness by former BOPC Chair David Colligan for nearly the last two decades), the pursuit of the arboretum has been a desired feature for restoration. In 2009 after the publishing of the BOPC's Master Plan, Colligan helped to bring discussions and a feasibility study to the table in considering the removal of the 9-hole golf course at South Park. The study was commissioned to consider relocating golf as a brand new amenity on an adjacent brownfield. In 2016, the South Park Arboretum Restoration Project (SPARP) was

formed and the group has been engaged in the oversight of a feasibility plan specifically for the Arboretum and fundraising for the project.

#### Two Studies:

Published in 2014, the golf relocation feasibility study was commissioned by the BOPC, the City of Buffalo, and the Buffalo Urban Development Corp. and took nearly 3 years to complete. Although a nearby reclaimed brownfield site was deemed suitable for recreation, the cost for land acquisition and development were beyond capacity or mission for the BOPC. Additionally, the BOPC does not wish to own, operate or maintain a new course, as its goal is for the prioritized care of historic Olmsted properties.

Acknowledging the South Park golf operation has been a modest revenue generator in sustaining marginal maintenance costs, it does not net any significant profits for growth or course improvements. Thus it was felt that the feasibility for the arboretum should also assess whether operational, philanthropic and educational revenues of an arboretum feature could offset its construction and perpetual maintenance. In January 2018, the "Feasibility Study for the Restoration of the South Park Arboretum" conducted by Kyle Zick, LA was released. The study outlines 11 phases of Arboretum restoration work. The first 6 phases of restoration are intended to proceed with no impact on the existing golf course in South Park. On Arbor Day 2018 Phase 1-A of work, 'Safety - Hazard tree removal and pruning' was completed with the assistance of the NYS Arborists Association. Currently all phases are still in a stage of continued fundraising.

#### Delaware Park Golf Course:

Olmsted's design vision for Delaware or as he named it, "The Park," included a grand meadow similar to NYC's Central Park. Designed in 1868 as one of the original three parks of the Buffalo system, The Park's northern "Meadow" was intended for passive enjoyment, since at that time soccer, softball, basketball, tennis, playgrounds and other active field recreation were not readily found or planned for in public parks. Golf was first played in The Park in 1894. In the years following the 1901 Pan American Exposition, a 9-hole golf course was inserted into the Meadow, which was soon expanded to 18 holes due to great public demand after 1912 and the U.S. Men's Open held at Country Club of Buffalo, now known as the Grover Cleveland Golf Course.

With the many sports activities found today, there are numerous instances of conflicting uses in the meadow. A later placed war monument to the soldiers of 1812

sits amidst the golf tees and greens in the center of the course. The adjacent zoo, an outgrowth of the “Deer Paddock” which was an original feature of the Olmsted plan, has substantially grown in size and scope. Errant golf balls are often an issue for animal paddocks, joggers and cyclist on the Ring Road, and for cars parked along the road edge. The original park road was expanded in 1959 into the 198 expressway which cut further through the park and runs very close to a couple of the fairways. And finally, a once unique and inspiring quarry garden just outside the Parkside Lodge was filled in due to the highway’s construction, where two of the expanded golf holes later took shape upon that landscape.

Generations of golfers have learned to play on the Delaware Park course. Today diverse leagues and golfers use the course regularly. Youth golf programs, such as The First Tee, and the public school teams are also taught and held at the course. The three public golf courses within the Olmsted parks are the City’s only courses. Within the county, however there are two additional public courses owned and operated by Erie County.

The BOPC’s Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century calls for lessening of the golf intrusion at Delaware Park with either a modified reduction of holes, or the full removal. The removal of the course altogether would require the replacement/relocation of a comparable 18-hole public course in the immediate vicinity. With the limitation of land available for such new development, the adjustment to existing holes and layout is currently the most pragmatic alternative in addressing the restoration efforts of the BOPC’s Plan.

### **Current Position Statement**

In bullet format -

- BOPC is pursuing its priority for the Arboretum restoration at South Park.
- BOPC supports the proposal of a new golf amenity outside of South Park, and supports the future removal of the golf course to complete the restoration of the Olmsted Firm’s arboretum design. To be noted: Any removal must comply with the BOPC’s standard for comprehensive public engagement, City of Buffalo approvals, and the act of replacing a community asset with a like or better facility.
- BOPC supports the restoration of the Meadow at Delaware Park as per the BOPC Master Plan and its directive to maintain historic integrity of The Park.
- BOPC is willing to consider the interests of outside organizations on amending the existing course, so long as a thorough and partnered public engagement process is conducted, professional feasibility studies are produced, and proposals are proven to be socially equitable, financially sustainable, and adhere to Olmsted’s vision and the historic landscape design of The Park, along

with the guiding principles and mission of the BOPC, and requirements of the City of Buffalo.

**Other Details:**

**South Park Arboretum:**

The BOPC is pursuing the restoration of the Arboretum Phases 1-6. Phases 1-6 will not impact the existing golf course at South Park.

The establishment of a new golf course and its successful operation in the vicinity outside the Olmsted purview, are matters for another organization and would require no BOPC commitment, planning or development. The ability of an outside organization to acquire land, design a regional or world-class attraction, and operate it successfully, is at the full discretion of the owner.

If such an amenity was developed and operated successfully, and if the local community supported the course with a migration of golf leagues and higher usage, this activity could be the catalyst to appealing to the City of Buffalo for the removal of South Park's 9-hole course as obsolete. Thus BOPC will cooperatively support any directive in concert with any agency or organization as it directly pertains to fulfilling the BOPC's mission and the long-time goal of restoring the Arboretum.

**Delaware Park Golf Course:**

As a secondary initiative, as described in the BOPC Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, published in 2008, the BOPC supports restoration efforts for the Meadow in Delaware Park with a reduction or modification of golf holes. Noted, any such project proposal is subject to the intensive nature of feasibility studies, financial assessments, design review, and a full public process with community engagement, etc. These elements and more are required, along with compliance with BOPC's mission to maintain historic integrity. Delaware Park is one of Olmsted's masterpieces; it is City property and listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The BOPC only supports any proposed modification or redesign which is reflective of Olmsted's original intent and demonstrates sensitivity for the character and preservation of this historic parkland.

A full business plan developed in conjunction with the process, and the BOPC, will be critical to outlining and identifying the funding mechanisms, design implications, revenue generation, maintenance, equipment, and other long term sustainability measures. Any such plan must also ensure the enhanced or modified golf amenity would continue to serve the public equitably and not become a burden to the City, its residents, or the BOPC.

### **Feasibility and Phasing Considerations:**

It is recommended that any entity seeking support for golf modifications, prioritize efforts in sync with BOPC project priorities.

As stated above, the BOPC is committed to the Arboretum development as its own priority, and is currently pursuing that goal with or without the existing 9-hole golf course in effect. Again, course removal per Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century guidelines, cannot occur without the supported acquisition, complete funding, construction, and operation of a suitable or improved golf amenity nearby. However, as per the 2014 golf relocation study, knowing that a site has been identified in the vicinity, this proposed project could potentially come to fruition in a more definitive timeframe.

The BOPC remains aware of interests in modifying golf in Delaware Park, but this particular initiative is in its infancy as no prior study work has been performed with the BOPC. Successful completion of required studies, assessments, and positive public engagement activities are essential and require much investment of time and resources. The City as the property owner, requires certain assurances in the financial assessment for both user equity and long term maintenance provisions. Thus the timeline for this particular initiative is likely longer in scope and process duration than imagined.

As a final point of position and consideration, the sport of golf itself is currently seeing a transformation in the industry. The BOPC looks to experts like the National Golf Foundation to provide insight into the evolution of municipal golf, trends in usage and new opportunities. The potential impacts of just one golf course modification in the City could affect the other two existing courses as to operations and sustainability, whether for the positive or negative. Thus it is the position of the BOPC that the proposition of considering both golf projects simultaneously would require significant justification in demonstrating a factual, positive result for both Buffalo and its treasured Olmsted parks.

#### *Notations:*

*The City of Buffalo is the property owner and landlord authority of all public parks. The BOPC and City operate in a public-private partnership for the maintenance of the Olmsted parks, as well as collaborate on park capital projects and improvement priorities.*

*This position statement is fluid and ongoing in meeting the mission and resolve of the BOPC to preserve and restore the Olmsted Parks.*