Position Statement on Proposed
Nicklaus Designed golf features
within Buffalo’s Olmsted Park System

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (BOPC) has continued interest in the proposal submitted by K. Gaughan for the involvement of Nicklaus Companies with two of the park system’s golf courses. We are excited that the world-class and award-winning reputation of our Buffalo Olmsted parks is further attracting this caliber of attention, particularly as we pursue the restoration of the South Park Arboretum.

The BOPC’s position on the proposed golf enhancements and/or relocation of course amenities within the Olmsted Park System is two-fold. First relates to South Park and the restoration of the Olmsted-designed Arboretum; the second is the proposed redesign of the Delaware Park Golf Course. Both components are unique in intent, and both scopes relate to specific elements identified in the BOPC’s Plan for the 21st Century (its System Plan), and are ideas worthwhile of continued exploration.

**Assignment:**

The current topic of golf course modification as it pertains to the System Plan, resides with the Long Range Planning Committee of the BOPC Board of Trustees. If/when this moves into specification or site design considerations, it will then transfer to the Design Review Committee for their input, review and recommendations. The topic will remain as a standing item at the Executive Committee of the Board. In addition to the Executive Director, the Director of Park Administration is the senior staff member assigned as liaison for this topic.

**Current Position Statement**

*as of October 2016*

In Summary –

- BOPC is pursuing its priorities for the Arboretum restoration at South Park.
- BOPC supports the proposal of a new golf amenity outside of South Park.
- BOPC supports the relative restoration of the Meadow at Delaware Park as per the System Plan and its directive to maintain historic integrity of the park.
- BOPC is willing to collaborate with an outside agency on both golf proposals so long as a thorough public engagement process is conducted and proposals are proven to be socially equitable, financially sustainable, and adhere to the organizational mission of the BOPC, and are supported by the City of Buffalo.
History of the Two Park Features

1.) South Park Arboretum:

Frederick Law Olmsted and the Olmsted Firm drafted planting plans for an arboretum at South Park in 1894-95. The BOPC retains the original arboretum drawings in its archives. That plan includes the layout for a botanical conservancy which was built in 1901, now home to the Buffalo and Erie County Botanical Gardens. In 1915 an unplanned 9-hole golf course was inserted into the historic landscape. 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 2003, with great influence by former BOPC Chairman, David Colligan, the pursuit of the arboretum has been a desired feature for restoration. The South Park Arboretum Restoration Project (SPARP) team is now steering and fundraising for the project. In 2009 after the publishing of BOPC’s System Plan, a feasibility study was brought forth in collaboration with other stakeholders to consider the removal of the 9-hole golf course at South Park, and the possibility to relocate it as a brand new golf amenity on an adjacent brownfield property unaffiliated with the BOPC.

This feasibility study was published in 2014, and although the reclaimed brownfield site was deemed suitable for recreation, the cost for land acquisition and relocation were beyond capacity for the BOPC. Additionally, the BOPC does not wish to own, operate or maintain the relocated course, as its mission resides solely in the advocacy and care of historic Olmsted properties. Acknowledging the South Park golf operation has been a modest revenue generator in sustaining marginal maintenance costs, 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.

Thus in 2016, solicitation of qualified arboretum designers and consultants was activated with a Request for Proposal (RFP) in commencing that feasibility study. A consultant will be selected to engage the study by end of October with a completion date in late spring to early summer of 2017.

BOPC’s Current View - South Park Arboretum & External Golf Site

As a top project priority, the BOPC will be pursuing the restoration of the Arboretum either with or without the existing golf course feature at South Park. The feasibility study being conducted is currently examining both golf scenarios.

With the anticipation of any proposed amenity relocation, the establishment of a new golf course and its operation in the vicinity are matters for another organization, and would require external commitment and professional planning. The ability of an outside organization to acquire and maintain land, and design a regional or world-class attraction is at the full discretion of the owner. The BOPC will collaboratively work with any such agency or organization as it directly pertains to fulfilling the BOPC’s mission and long-time vision of restoring the Arboretum.
2.) Delaware Park Golf Course:

Olmsted’s design vision for “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 found or planned for in public parks. The first record of golf being played in Delaware Park was 1894, with an 18-hole golf course inserted into the meadow.

Today there are numerous instances of conflicting uses in the meadow. A later placed war monument to the soldiers of 1812 sits on a burial site amidst the golf tees and greens in the center of the course. The adjacent zoo, also 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 cyclists along the inner Ring Road, and with cars parked on the road edge. The 198 expressway which cut through the park in the 60’s also runs very close to a couple of the fairways. Furthermore, a once unique and inspiring quarry garden just outside the Parkside Lodge was filled in due to the highway’s construction, and two golf holes have taken shape upon that landscape.

Generations of golfers have learned to play on the Delaware Park course. Today many diverse leagues and golfers use the course regularly. Youth golf programs, such as The First Tee, are also taught and held at the course. The public golf courses in the Olmsted parks, are the City of Buffalo’s (City) only courses. There are two other public courses operated by Erie County just outside city limits.

The BOPC’s Plan for the 21st Century (which was composed and adopted with significant public input from 2004-2008) calls for the 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 or relocation of a comparable 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 given in the System Plan.

**BOPC’s Current View - Delaware Park Golf Course**

While the BOPC supports restoration efforts for the meadow feature in Delaware Park with a reduction or modification of golf holes as described in the BOPC Plan for the 21st Century, it is a position that this effort is a secondary priority to the Arboretum restoration. Noted, this priority is reduced due to the intensive nature anticipated via future studies, assessments, design review, and a full public process with community engagement, etc. These elements and more are required along with compliance on BOPC’s mission to maintain historic integrity. Delaware Park is one of Olmsted’s masterpieces; it is City of Buffalo property and, along with the entire park system, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The BOPC would only support any modification or redesign which is reflective of Olmsted’s original intent and demonstrates sensitivity for the character and preservation of historic parkland.
A full business prospectus developed in conjunction with the process will be critical to outlining and identifying the funding mechanisms, design implications, revenue generation, historic preservation and environmental impacts, maintenance and equipment requirements, and other long term sustainability measures. This business plan must include a market analysis in ensuring the enhanced or modified golf amenity will continue to serve the public equitably and not become a burden to the City, its residents, or the BOPC.

Feasibility and Phasing:

The BOPC anticipates its provision of collaborative support via a multi-phased approach to this proposal, starting in South Park and then Delaware Park.

As stated above, the BOPC is committed to the Arboretum development as its own priority, and has been pursuing that goal with or without the existing 9-hole course.

BOPC supports the proposal of course relocation and design by an outside entity. The potential removal of the existing course at South Park, however, would depend entirely upon the City of Buffalo’s conditions and approval. Additionally, course removal per the BOPC Plan for the 21st Century would not occur without the supported acquisition, complete funding and construction of a suitable or improved golf amenity nearby. Knowing that a site has been identified in the vicinity, this proposed project could potentially come to fruition in a more definitive timeframe.

Again as stated, with regard to support for Delaware Park, the successful completion of required studies, assessments, and positive public engagement activities for majority consensus would be essential. The City as the property owner would also need to provide approval, and requires strong assurances from 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.

Other Affiliated Topics: The supplemental proposal elements related to an educational component with a brick and mortar facility and instructive programs is not a part of this Olmsted position on the golf course proposals. Those elements are not part of Conservancy’s historic restoration or preservation plans.

This position statement is intended to be fluid in nature as this proposal and project scope evolves with third party interest and support. It may be updated periodically.