

Parkland trumps golf course

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I have to tell you straight out: I'm a golfer. I've never played the UBC course, the one that's caused such a fuss after Premier Gordon Campbell said he was giving it to the Musqueam.

In fact the only course I play is a rugged little nine-hole spot up the coast that was cut out of the bush by a guy named Dowling as his retirement project.

In the summer the greens are as hard and as pitted as rough concrete. In the spring my buddies and I wear rubber boots to make it through the puddles that consume the course.

I play with a set of clubs I picked up at a garage sale for \$25. A round of golf costs \$10.

Nonetheless, I can appreciate the joy you can get chasing that little white ball around a lush green course with well-tended fairways and manicured greens. I don't doubt that the UBC golf course is an institution, a community amenity enjoyed by duffers from near and far.

That said, I've made up my mind. Given the choice of turning over the course to the Musqueam who guarantee to keep it the way it is for 30 years, or slicing out an equivalent 120 acres of urban forest from the adjacent Pacific Spirit Regional Park, I'd rather lose the golf course.

Who uses a golf course but golfers? Yes, I know that people enjoy dining out there. But you don't need 18 holes to break bread.

Call me a traitor, but a forested regional park has a broader potential public use. It would be presumptuous to think that wouldn't be even more important to future generations. Besides, that's not the land the Musqueam are claiming.

But why give the Musqueam any land at all? That's the question raised by Burnaby mayor Derek Corrigan. He chairs Metro Vancouver's land use and transportation committee. Metro owns the regional park.

In 2003, Campbell's Liberal government agreed to sell the golf course to UBC for \$11 million. The Musqueam took the province to court arguing that this land was the last piece of Crown land within their traditional territory and that they had a legitimate claim on it. Sold to UBC, it would cease to be Crown land, which would make it harder for the Musqueam to obtain in a land claim deal.

Finally, two years ago, the B.C. Court of Appeal agreed and blocked the transaction. The court directed the province to resolve the matter of the golf course with the Musqueam within two years.

The court did not tell the province it had to give the land to the Musqueam. But after two years of closed-door back and forth, and in a climate where Campbell seemed increasingly intent on resolving aboriginal grievances, the announcement came last summer that the golf course would go to the Musqueam.

The duffers did not take the news well. Led by NPA parks board commissioner Marty Zlotnik--a provincial Liberal bagman, avid golfer and one-time close associate of Campbell--they launched a campaign to change the deal.

Thousands of people have apparently signed Zlotnik's petitions. The majority of people polled across the region said they didn't like the deal.

Zlotnik's fellow NPA parks commissioners have kept their lips buttoned. But the two COPE commissioners, Spencer Herbert and Loretta Woodcock, have pushed to preserve the parkland even though it is beyond their jurisdiction. Independent Commissioner Allan De Genova is inclined to quietly agree.

Given Zlotnik's relationship to Campbell and the fact that the golf course is in the premier's riding of Vancouver-Point Grey, you can imagine he has been feeling a little unwelcome heat.

Yet for all of Zlotnik's lobbying, it seems that neither the Musqueam nor the provincial government is budging on the deal. It is a deal, by the way, that would also satisfy the courts.

All to the good I say. And sometime within the next three decades, I must get out there to play a round.

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