

Spirit moves COPE into golf course controversy

NPA parks board chair says board has no jurisdiction, accuses Woodcock, Spencer of playing politics

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The COPE members of the parks board have rejected a proposal to turn over a portion of Pacific Spirit Park to the Musqueam First Nation.

COPE commissioners Loretta Woodcock and Spencer Herbert held a press conference at the park Monday in the hopes of distancing the parks board from an August proposal by NPA commissioner Marty Zlotnik to remove the UBC golf course from a land claims settlement with the Musqueam. In its place, Zlotnik, the founder of the Save the Course campaign, suggested that in exchange the Musqueam be given a portion of the 2,000-acre Pacific Spirit Park.

Woodcock presented a motion she will take to the board asking that no portion of the park be given away for future development.

"Even though Marty is leading this campaign as a private citizen, he's still advocating using public park land to negotiate this deal," said Woodcock. "The people of Vancouver want to know what the position of the Vancouver park board is. Marty is in a position of influence, and the perception could be that the park board approves of the proposal. I find it disrespectful that Marty is telling the 1.5 million users who visited Pacific Spirit Park last year that that property is of lesser value than a golf fairway."

Pacific Spirit Park falls under the authority of the Metro Vancouver Regional District, formerly the Greater Vancouver Regional District. In 2003, the provincial government sold the 120-acre parcel of land on which the golf course sits to UBC on the condition the land only be used for golfing. In 2005, the Musqueam complained it had not been properly consulted and in June of this year the B.C. Court of Appeal agreed and the land was included in the band's land claims settlement. The deal included a provision the land will remain a golf course until at least 2033, when the Musqueam take it over.

On the Save the Course website, Zlotnik estimates that if the land remains a golf course until 2033, the Musqueam can expect approximately \$500,000 a year in revenue from the club. But, he writes, if the Musqueam are given property in Pacific Spirit Park they can immediately develop, the return could be \$600 million within a much shorter period. Zlotnik is out of town until Sept. 17 and was not available for comment before the Courier's press deadline.

Save the Course spokesperson Bob Hindmarch told the Courier the sooner the land is developed, the faster it will benefit the Musqueam.

"It could help the elders and the people of the Musqueam right now," said Hindmarch.

Hindmarch said the proposal makes sense because the parcel of Pacific Spirit land proposed for the trade is on the perimeter of the park and not in the middle.

"It's not in the heart of Pacific Spirit Park. It's near Shaughnessy golf course, so they wouldn't have to cut through the park to build sewers and roads to develop," he said.

He argued the parcel of land proposed for the swap is not particularly environmentally sensitive. And Hindmarch believes the green space at UBC golf course is just as valuable as the green space at Pacific Spirit Park and that a compromise can be reached. As for Woodcock's motion, he said the proposal has nothing to do with the parks board.

"It doesn't involve them," he said. "It's the provincial government that owns the land."

Woodcock's motion requests the NPA-dominated parks board ask city council to move a motion "to protect and preserve the integrity of Pacific Spirit Park." It also asks that the city's representative at the Metro Vancouver park committee, NPA Coun. Elizabeth Ball, present the motion to the committee at the first opportunity.

Ball told the Courier she couldn't comment because the land-exchange proposal hasn't been presented to Metro Vancouver.

"There's no point in responding or speculating in the press when no real proposal has been received," she said. "I was at a meeting of the [Metro Park Committee] this week and I can tell you that no proposal has been presented."

Like Ball, NPA commissioner Ian Robertson said it's premature to make a comment when there's no official proposal on the table. Robertson, who chairs the board, adds he checked with the parks board's general manager to see if he can rule Woodcock's motion out of order.

"COPE is using this opportunity to attract media attention and it's a waste of time," said Robertson.

Robertson adds the proposal has nothing to do with the parks board.

"Marty Zlotnik brought this proposal forward as a private citizen," he said.

Musqueam band manager Ken McGregor did not return a phone call before the Courier's press deadline.

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