



Hancock Golf Course Future Planning

In an attempt to provide clarity and transparency among the community regarding future plans at Hancock Golf Course, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) has assembled this document as a resource to address some of the frequent questions or to respond to misinformation circulating throughout the community.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Q. Why is PARD discussing change at Hancock Golf Course? What if I don't want anything to change at Hancock Golf Course?

A. Golf has been present at the Hancock Golf Course since 1899. It has been operated by the City of Austin as a public golf course since 1951. Hancock Golf Course is a beloved golf course. Generations of Austinites have been raised learning to play golf at Hancock. However, for many years Hancock has required the use of General funds to supplement the financial shortfall, which is a fund generated by city taxes. The GolfATX division of PARD operates Hancock Golf Course under the enterprise fund. Shifting GolfATX to an enterprise fund occurred in 1974 in order to focus general funds from tax revenue to other PARD programs. Despite making significant improvements since 2012, Hancock Golf Course still requires more than \$100,000 additional funds in supplemented general funds to fully fund operational needs.

In order to be accountable for the tax dollars generated by residents, PARD has made the decision to pursue a Request for Proposal process to identify a concessionaire to make improvements, at no additional cost to Austin residents and to operate the facility at no additional cost to the City moving forward.

Q. What is the difference between an enterprise fund and general fund? Can't we just cover the overage with the general fund?

A. GolfATX, a division of PARD, operates 6 golf courses under the enterprise model. This decision was made in 1974 in order to focus general funds from tax revenue on other programs for the community. Funds generated by fees in an enterprise fund program return to that program to cover maintenance, improvements, and other expenses.

When enterprise funded programs do not cover their expenses, additional funding must be supplemented from the general fund to offset expenditures.

The general fund is funded by city property and sales taxes. These dollars are budgeted and distributed each year by City Council. Some general fund programs generate revenue through fees. However, these fees return to the general fund, which funds most City of Austin departments. General fund fees do not necessarily return to the program that generated them.

Additional fund options exist, but City Council would make those decisions.

Q. What is a Request for Proposal (RFP)?

A. As defined by the City of Austin Purchasing Office: This is the process used to solicit proposals from potential providers for both goods and services when a method to achieve a desired outcome cannot be clearly defined and where price is not the dominant evaluation factor. RFPs allow the *negotiation of all terms*, including price, prior to contract award and may include a provision for the negotiation of Best and Final Offers.

The recommendation for award is to the best evaluated proposal.

RFPs often result in a negotiated agreement with non-standard provisions, terms and language. This will typically require early input from Contract Administration/Legal for development of the contract and negotiation of the final terms. Due to these additional requirements, the RFP process will usually require considerably more time to complete than other solicitation process.

Additional information can be found on the [Purchasing website](#).

This solicitation may receive numerous responses. PARD does not need to select any of the RFP responses. If a response is selected, this does not constitute a final agreement.

The RFP will require City Council approval.

Q. Why does PARD want a public golf course operated by a concession agreement?

A. As part of the GolfATX enterprise fund, the goal for this golf course is to cover all expenses through fees to play. Despite making significant improvements since 2012, Hancock Golf Course is still supplemented by more than \$100,000 additional funds from the general fund.

The cost of modernizing the golf course to increase its financial sustainability was priced by the [National Golf Foundation](#) to be between \$700,000 and \$1 million. Since GolfATX operates as an enterprise fund, general fund dollars are not able to be used for improvements to this extent.

The RFP process allows PARD to seek a concessionaire entity to invest in the facility at no impact to the general fund and taxpayers. This will allow the City to modernize golf while also retaining community influence in the key elements of the solicitation. The facility must remain open to public. This process is also governed by law to maintain transparency where legally required.

In addition, the RFP process requires the awarded concessionaire to adhere to City standards and policies such as the Living Minimum Wage standard.

Q. Are other PARD facilities operated by a concession agreement?

A. The first public golf facility operated by a concessionaire is Butler Pitch & Putt, which began operation in the 1950s. The most recent is Grey Rock Golf Course, which was acquired by the City of Austin in 2014. In addition to these two entities, numerous concessionaires operate throughout the Austin parks system under the Earned Revenue model. This model allows PARD to support additional park amenities as well as small local businesses through a competitive bidding process. Other examples include Texas Rowing Center, Zilker Café, Zilker Botanical Garden giftshop, and more.

Q. Is PARD planning to sell Hancock Golf Course?

A. No. Hancock Golf Course is on designated parkland. PARD values all greenspace and works hard to acquire more each year. PARD does not plan to lose this valuable community asset.

Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code provide state guidance on parkland, and [Austin City Charter](#) requires going to voters for approval of any sale of the land.

When the back 9 holes of Hancock Golf Course were sold by the City, the process ended up going to a public vote in 1962. The City of Austin and Texas highly value public land used as parks for recreation.

Q. Does PARD plan on developing Hancock Golf Course or allowing other private entities to develop it?

A. The RFP process will call for proposals to modernize the golf facility while also including other elements the community would like to see. This may be perceived as limited “development.” However, this property will not be developed for any other activity than outdoor recreational use. Multiple City of Austin departments will be a part of the process to assess any concept’s environmental impact on the watershed as well as impact on natural turf and trees. Any future improvements will require approval by PARD.

PARD recognizes that the connotation of “development” referring to the loss of natural or historical spaces into modern condominiums or hotels or shopping districts is a significant concern to neighbors and all of Austin. These types of development will not occur at Hancock Golf Course.

Q. What will happen to the Hancock Recreation Center?

A. Hancock Recreation Center will continue to function as it is. Any improvements to that space will be separate from the golf course.

Q. The Recreation Center and Golf Course are listed to the National Register of Historic Places. Will any changes affect these listings?

A. Adaptive use of the golf course will not affect these listings. PARD’s Historic Preservation Unit will work closely with any concessionaire to ensure appropriate documenting of historic layout occurs as well as any interpretive elements that should be present. Key elements, such as historic viewsheds, will be identified ahead of time.

Q. Why is PARD not considering changing the use of the entire course to a passive park?

A. PARD highly values passive park space and recognizes the need in this area as well as throughout the city. The PARD [“Our Parks, Our Future: Long Range Plan”](#) was adopted by City Council in 2019. This identifies the priorities for the next 10 years. Hancock Golf Course was identified to “study feasibility of golf and other recreational opportunities that can enhance sustainability of course” (p. 156). The NGF study identified the modernization of the facility in order to preserve golf.

The study also identified transitioning the course to a passive park as an alternative to the current course. While a passive park element is something that can be considered for the RFP, the complete shift of use from golf to passive park is not something PARD is considering at this time.

A significant shift of use from golf to passive park would be a policy decision that does not align with the current long range plan, which governs the park priorities through 2020. Policy shifts such as this can occur with City Council direction. As a citywide and regional amenity, this would trigger a significant community engagement effort to include stakeholders throughout the city.

Q. Why “modernize” golf and not keep it as the 9-hole course currently is?

A. In the 9-hole format as it is, Hancock Golf Course is not financially sustainable. As part of GolfATX, an enterprise fund, the goal for this golf course is to cover all expenses through fees to play. Despite making significant improvements since 2012, Hancock Golf Course is still supplemented more than \$100,000 additional funds from the general fund. A modernized golf program would provide enhanced areas to teach and learn this outdoor activity and provide improved safety corridors to area homes and the surrounding roads around Hancock.

Q. Will having a private entity seeking to make a profit make the course less accessible for community members with less income?

A. Accessibility to people of all backgrounds and income levels is important to PARD. Any concessionaire will also need to be sustainable and maintain the Minimum Living Wage standard set by the City of Austin. Without knowing the new concept design, costs of maintenance, and other factors, it is impossible to know what potential fees will be. The facility will remain open to the public; however, it will also remain a fee based park activity.

PARD will work with the concessionaire to ensure that accessibility and affordability at all levels is a priority.

Q. Why are you including input from people who are not immediate or nearby neighbors of Hancock Golf course?

A. The golf course is a citywide entity that draws people from around the region. As those who are most directly and indirectly impacted by use of Hancock Golf Course, who also use some of its amenities, input from neighbors is necessary and key to this process. Input from the neighborhood is considered along with input from community members throughout Austin.

Q. Will the trail around Hancock Golf Course remain?

A. Back in 2008, PARD and Hancock Neighborhood Association partnered to create the trail around Hancock Golf Course with a plan to share in maintenance. The trail will remain as a neighborhood amenity.

Q. Will there be fencing or netting around an updated facility?

A. It is too soon to know. However, safety of people in and around Hancock Golf Course will be a high priority. PARD will work closely with the selected concessionaire in relaying concerns of neighbors and golfers.