

# The Times-Picayune

## Approval of City Park golf plan is important step in New Orleans' comeback

Posted by [Billy Turner, The Times-Picayune](#) May 26, 2009 9:21PM

You might have missed it Tuesday.

On a humid afternoon, with kids and parents pouring into City Park as they often do, the City Park Board of Commissioners took their assigned seats around a rectangular table in a cool, simple room. Those of us in attendance without place cards, felt, or should have felt, another sweet breath of recovery air blow.

It was just a whisper, a gentle solitary whisper of the winds of progress.

It is not unrealistic to say that what the commissioners voted for will one day be incredibly significant.

Oh, it's just golf, you might say. But it's about the location of the golf that is important.

Hurricane Katrina did its best to get rid of golf in this grand, old city, but it's coming back strong, that whisper told us.

Granted, you might say that devoting approximately 579 acres in the park to golf is a waste of green space. You might say, as many did, that this has been done under the table or that there wasn't enough public input.

But the board voted -- unanimously -- to build an 18-hole golf course as part of Phase I of a \$46 million project. That's all, really. But it's enough, because it's a step to a greater good that both phases of the Golf Master Plan will one day bring.

I believe golfers will come, even those out of the city, to a fine course that is near the French Quarter and other downtown areas, including our hotels.

But what I see is even more significant than that.

City Park, a public entity, is about to get private funding that will ensure repair of part of the park.

I believe that the first course, a championship course, will, along with the currently open and doing well North Course, produce funds that the park desperately needs. Commissioners pointed out that it behooves them to take this step for that, if no other, reason.

Therefore, I think that was a good day spent. Where else does anyone think that money would come from? The park's various entities need cash. When I play golf, they require cash.

Seems a win-win to me.

The ones who disagree have their right and their points. I've certainly seen much of their e-mails, and I talked to some critics Tuesday. They were mostly cordial to the process at the Pavilion of the Two Sisters, even if they felt like pulling out someone's hair by the roots.

This is the point: Make no mistake, the Request For Proposal process will begin soon. The Bayou District Foundation will make a proposal as part of that proposal. I believe that bid will be a knock-your-socks-off bid, and at that point this will get on the fast track.

When the vote happened around 4:40 p.m., soon thereafter Gerry Barousse, the chairman of the board of the Bayou District Foundation, received the yes vote from a text.

It was a joyous moment for him and his team.

"It has been a long time coming, " Barousse said. "We're obviously very pleased with the vote."

That said, let's dispense with the pleasantries and talking around the elephant in the room. Will the BDF make a proposal? No question. Does it have the money to make it happen? You betcha.

Friends, and those who would not call me friend, this deal is going to go through, and it will do this: There will be golf courses in the city that can be reached by streetcar. This will be done before the Super Bowl of 2013, and the tourism and hospitality boards can sell this like coffee and chicory and beignets.

"This is a great day for the park, " said Four!Kids board member Mike Rodrigue, who also is on the board of the BDF. "I can't wait for the next step to begin. It's another sign of the recovery (from Katrina) to not only rebuild but make it better."

In the end, those in attendance who booed the vote quite vocally, should continue their role. They should monitor each new step along the way because the process will be a long one. Bids for plans, bids for construction, all these things still are to come.

"I think we're heading in the right direction, " board chairman Mike Marsiglia said. "I think the presence of the board, and the vote of the board, shows we all agree that this is the direction we need to be going in. It was a lot of hard work. Everyone was involved. I'm very proud of what we did."

Agreeing to build and maintain Phase 1, as I suggested last week, before going forward with Phase 2, is wise and practical. But the preservationist and, well, all of us should watch to make sure that happens.

Maybe Phase 1 doesn't open till 2012 instead of 2011, despite the best efforts of the City Park and the BDF. Maybe the economy stays sour, and Phase 2 never opens. Maybe the local PGA Tournament way down the road never moves into the city again.

Maybe all these things go that way.

Maybe.

Said City Park CEO Bob Becker: "None of us are seers."

But as the day crawled to another warm conclusion, there was just a hint that a step toward progress had been taken.

Just a step.

Isn't that good? Isn't that hopeful? Isn't that where we all want to be?

.....

*Billy Turner can be reached at [bturner@timespicayune.com](mailto:bturner@timespicayune.com) or 985.645.2847.*