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Supes Hearing On Proposed Closure Of Sharp Park Golf Course Gets Heated

by [Bay City News](#)

December 5, 2011 6:05 PM



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A proposal that could lead to the closure of Sharp Park Golf Course in Pacifica brought more than 100 supporters and opponents who spoke at a San Francisco Board of Supervisors committee hearing today.

The golf course is part of the 417-acre Sharp Park, which is owned by the city of San Francisco and has served as an 18-hole public golf course since it opened in 1932.

But a proposed ordinance by Supervisor John Avalos calls on the city's Recreation and Park Department to offer a long-term management agreement to the National Park Service that would likely involve the closure of the golf course.

Avalos said at a meeting of the board's City Operations and Neighborhood Services committee that the golf course has accumulated a deficit of about \$1.2 million over the past five years and the city is also the target of a lawsuit over alleged harm by the course to two imperiled species in the area.

"We cannot continue being able to fund golf in certain places that we can't afford," he said.

A majority of the speakers at the five-hour hearing sided with Avalos, citing the financial and environmental costs to the city and the opportunity to open up the space to other recreational activities besides golf.

Jeff Miller, a conservation advocate with the Center for Biological Diversity, said "this course is bleeding funds that should be going toward other parks."

Miller said the golf course is also adversely affecting the San Francisco garter snake, an endangered species, and the California red-legged frog, a threatened species.

That issue is the topic of a federal court case in which environmental groups are seeking to stop pumping and mowing activities at the course.



Last week a judge ruled against the groups, which had sought an injunction to stop the activities prior to the results of a trial set for July 2012.

U.S. District Judge Susan Illston ruled that the frog population had actually increased in the area in the past 20 years, and that there has only been one confirmed case of a snake killed on the course six years ago.

Some of the speakers who attended today's committee hearing in opposition to the proposal cited the judge's ruling and said the environmental impacts of the golf course are overblown.

Others, including Mike Wallach, a San Francisco resident of 25 years, said the course is a historical resource that must be maintained. The course was designed by Alister MacKenzie, who has also designed several world-famous courses, including Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia.

"Sharp Park is a gift to the people of San Francisco," Wallach said. "It's a historic landmark by any standard, and doesn't belong to the Board of Supervisors, it belongs to the people."

Several other speakers cited it as one of the few cheap, full-sized golf courses in the area, referring to it by its nickname, "the poor man's Pebble Beach."

Along with opposing viewpoints among the speakers, things got chippy during the hearing between Avalos and fellow committee member Sean Elsbernd, who opposes the plan.

Elsbernd accused Avalos of "gamesmanship" by only calling up supporters of the proposal in the first dozen or so speakers.

Avalos called the remark "completely unnecessary," then referred to it again--as well as the environmental concerns surrounding the course -- when he took a bathroom break during the hearing.

"Part of my gamesmanship involves responding to nature," he quipped.

The committee decided at the end of the meeting to forward the proposal without a recommendation to the full board, which will consider it on Tuesday.

Dan McMenamin, Bay City News

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