

(1) Jennifer Keesmaat proposes converting 3 Toronto-owned golf courses into year-round open spaces - Toronto

By Nick Westoll Digital Broadcast Journalist Global News

WATCH ABOVE: Toronto mayoral candidate Jennifer Keesmaat explains her plans to transform city owned golf courses into “spaces for everyone in our city.”

Mayoral candidate [Jennifer Keesmaat](#) says she wants to see three “under-utilized” City of Toronto public golf courses turned into publicly accessible, year-round spaces.

Keesmaat said if elected, her plan would apply to the Don Valley, Scarlett Woods and Dentonia Park golf courses, which she said are running at a net loss “amid ongoing trends of declining usage.”

“Today, our golf courses operate at a loss. They’re only accessible through a fee, and not only that, they’re only used half of the year,” Keesmaat told reporters on Monday.

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“The usage has been declining. They’re operating at a subsidy and a net loss in our city. We should be looking to the future and proposing uses that create spaces for everyone in our city and recognizing that our communities are changing, and the types of things that we do in our public space ought to be changing, too.”

Keesmaat said under her plan, proposals would be developed through public consultations. She said each site would address gaps in services and amenities based on residents’ feedback.

“We have this incredible opportunity to use our city-owned resources to ensure that we’re creating spaces for new arenas and cricket patches and bike trails and skating rinks and cross-country skiing trails. We can do this on golf courses that are on transit corridors,” Keesmaat said.

WATCH: Jennifer Keesmaat proposes converting 3 Toronto golf courses. Sean O’Shea reports.



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Sean Kavanaugh was playing a round at the Don Valley Golf Course Monday afternoon and said he is against the idea of converting the property.

"I've been coming here since I was a child growing up in Leaside. It's been a great course to learn how to play golf," he said, adding the course is usually busy and that it can be hard to get a tee time.

"It's so close to home ... You really can't beat [the cost] otherwise you've got to drive to the outskirts of the city."

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According to a background report, municipal staff said golf participation is declining in Toronto. In 2007, there were approximately 187,000 rounds of golf played at city-owned courses, compared to less than 158,000 in 2016 — a decrease of 15.5 per cent. Officials said this is largely driven by the increasing number of golf courses in the Greater Toronto Area.

City staff said golf operations mean a net loss to the city annually. In order to counter visitor trends and be financially viable, officials said the courses need be "competitive" when it comes to course quality, membership pricing, food, drink and ancillary services. Staff said a regular season at City of Toronto golf courses sees about \$5 million in revenue but rainy seasons, such as 2017, see about a decline of about \$500,000.

"It is anticipated that without significant investment in city-run golf courses, this downward trend in rounds is expected to continue," the report said.

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When asked about Keesmaat's proposal, Mayor [John Tory](#) cited an external review being done by the City of Toronto of its golf operations. The consultant is looking at the affordability of accessing the courses, visitor demographics, attendance trends and the possibility of using the courses during the winter. He said the golf courses have an important environmental role to play.

"The golf courses can be, and are, a contributor to our ravine strategy and to our tree canopy strategy," Tory said.

He said he hoped the change of use wouldn't mean condo towers at any of the properties. A spokesperson for Keesmaat told Global News her proposal would only see recreation uses contemplated and no residential units. The five courses are designated as parkland and are protected under Toronto's Ravine and Natural Feature Protection Bylaw.

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Mayoral candidate [Saron Gebresellassi](#) told Global News she is against spending money on converting the golf courses. She said any money potentially spent on the initiative should be redirected toward affordable housing for residents.

"The priority for people in the city of Toronto is affordable housing ... I am on a very different page from Jennifer Keesmaat in this respect," Gebresellassi said, adding Indigenous communities should be consulted on any possible changes.

Earlier this year, Toronto city council extended a private-sector operating agreement for the three golf courses — plus the Humber Valley and Tam O'Shanter courses — until the end of November 2019. Currently, the golf courses are maintained by City of Toronto staff, while ticketing, golf cart rentals, pro shops and food and beverage operations are contracted out.