

PARK HILL GOLF CLUB

City leaders can save this space

The Denver Post · 23 Jun 2019

Unless the prospective buyers of Park Hill Golf Club are indeed interested in operating a public golf course on the 155 acres of prime real estate in north Denver, they'd best pull out of the deal now.

The land is still under a city-held easement restriction that doesn't allow development. And the public sentiment these days, and for the foreseeable future, is strongly in the camp of increased parkland and open space. We can't imagine the City Council or Mayor Michael Hancock would be foolish enough to lift the restrictions.

Rare isn't a strong enough word for this opportunity. City leaders did the right thing years ago by paying \$2 million, a pittance by today's standards, to put an easement on that land. And now the city holds the power over what happens if it's no longer going to be a golf course. Council members and the mayor need to be vocal about their opposition to any development on the land that isn't a public facility (think of the zoo and museum at City Park just a few blocks south on Colorado Boulevard). Denver is becoming denser every day, rightfully so, to meet the demands of a growing population, and the city must respond by aggressively acquiring park land to compensate.

There was once a deal on the table for the city to purchase the land for \$20.5 million. The deal, unfortunately, also involved allowing some development on the land. Thankfully that deal fell through, and now this city's leaders can exert a strong influence over who Clayton Early Learning decides to sell to by voicing opposition.

We are sensitive to the fact that Clayton is a nonprofit that has been working in the field of early childhood education in Denver for decades, serving low-income children during their most critical ages of development. Yes, we hope Clayton can get a good price for the land to help them continue their mission. The city can and should pay a fair-market price, understanding that the price is severely hampered by the easement restrictions in place.

The potential buyer, as reported by The Denver Post's Andrew Kenney, is Westside Investment Partners. That group is building a strong reputation as it works to redevelop Loretto Heights in southwest Denver. That is a sensitive project that will transform a beloved campus with a history stretching back 120 years. But this situation is different. The city holds all the power for determining the future of this land, and our elected officials must not lose track of the ultimate goal — to vastly increase open space by acquiring one of the last remaining parcels of land available for such an endeavor.

Denver has been home to incredible, transformational projects in recent years, but most have been dominated by private development subsidized with taxpayer dollars. It's time for

our civic leaders to be bold and envision something spectacular for north Denver, something that is publicly owned and can compete with urban parks across the world. Taxpayers and donors would certainly chip in for the right vision.

Now is the time for Hancock and our city leaders to win this land battle for generations to come.