

Summary of Lester Park Golf & Recreation Working Group Proposals

Report on Proposed Projects for Lester Park Golf Course Redevelopment Introduction

The Lester Park golf course has been closed for five years, leaving 260 acres of land available for refurbishment or repurposing. While various ideas have been proposed on how to best utilize the property, the working group heard presentations on three distinct proposals, ranging from a plan that aims to restart golf quickly to a more comprehensive plan that includes golf, housing, and commercial/retail options. The plans, without recommendations, are summarized below.

1. Sunnarborg Plan

This plan, put together by developer Tom Sunnarborg, proposes a large-scale, professionally executed mixed-use development that would transform the area significantly. It includes a hotel, two restaurants, various shops, office spaces, ample public gathering areas, and 455 housing units. The project emphasizes connectivity by potentially integrating the local trail system and adding recreational access, including a bike path and link to the Lakewalk. It promises major economic benefits, including generating over \$10 million annually in tax revenue, creating jobs, and delivering a new 18-hole golf course and clubhouse at no cost to the city. The project is financially self-sustaining and does not require establishing a TIF district.

2. Barrier Free Golf / COGGS Rec Plan

This proposal, driven by the nonprofits Barrier Free Golf and COGGS, envisions a golf-centric recreational development focused on accessibility and inclusivity. The design features a simplified course suitable for disabled golfers, as well as young and elderly players. The plan is modest in scope and does not include adjacent housing. It seeks to lease land from the city rather than purchase it, potentially preserving public ownership. Barrier Golf also aims to raise over \$13 million through industry connections, with some potential for city partnership. Chaska is home to a course developed by Barrier Free Golf, which was funded by private donations and bond proceeds from the City of Chaska.

3. Quick-Start Golf and Multi-Use Plan

This proposal offers a flexible, community-oriented approach that emphasizes quick activation of a golf course and gradual development of additional recreational features. Managed by a single nonprofit, the project would lease city land and operate with cost-saving strategies, such as using city-owned equipment and a temporary clubhouse. It aims to incorporate a wide range of uses over time—housing, courts for various sports, hiking and biking trails, winter sports amenities, and more—while fostering community engagement through jobs and volunteerism. Full realization of its goals may take over a decade, and fundraising is essential even to begin the golf operations.