

# SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC GOLF ALLIANCE

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November 19, 2009

San Francisco Parks and Recreation Commission  
Jim Lazarus, Chairman  
McLaren Lodge  
501 Stanyan St.  
San Francisco, CA. 94117

Re: San Francisco Public Golf Alliance  
Supports Park & Rec Department Report's  
"Win/Win" Solution at Sharp Park

Dear President Lazarus and Commission Members,

The San Francisco Public Golf Alliance supports the Rec and Park Department's "Sharp Park Conceptual Restoration Alternatives Report," November 6, 2009 (the "Sharp Park Report"), and asks the Commission to approve and recommend that Report to the Board of Supervisors.

The Sharp Park Report recommends keeping the popular, affordable, historic and acclaimed Sharp Park Golf Course, while simultaneously creating over 26 acres--more than 25 percent of the golf course property west of Highway One--of new and restored breeding, foraging, and upland habitat for the threatened California Red-legged Frog and the endangered San Francisco Garter Snake. (Sharp Park Report, Table 3, at p. 50.)

This level of voluntary habitat restoration cannot fairly be characterized as an "all-golf solution," as golf's opponents would have it. Nor can the Department's methodology or its six-month, 400-plus-page study be accurately characterized as a "rush to judgment," as golf's opponents say. This is the Department's third golf study since February, 2007; all of them have recommended continued operation of the Sharp Park course.

**1. Sharp Park is a Rarity: a Well-Loved, Modestly-priced, Classic Golf Course.**

Public golf is popular recreation across all age, gender, ethnic, and social groups in San Francisco and San Mateo County, which is one of the oldest and most prominent golf areas in America. In addition to serving San Francisco, Sharp Park serves golfers in San Mateo County, with a population over 700,000, but only one other public course with regular weekend greens fees under \$80.00. Both the San Francisco Chronicle (endorsing the 18-hole course in a September 3, 2009 editorial entitled "Let Golfers Play Through on Sharp Park") and the San Francisco Bay Guardian (in Editor Tim Richmond's November 10, 2009 post to his article entitled "Golfers and Garter Snakes") identify Sharp Park as a regional golf asset.

This is consistent with both the National Golf Foundation study, "Operational Review and Recommendations for City of San Francisco Golf Operations," February, 2007 ("NGF Study") (at p. 23) and the August, 2008 "San Francisco Recreational Opportunities Study," authored by the Department's longtime consultant Leon Younger and PROS Consulting ("PROS Study") (at pp. 7-8), both of which found that the San Francisco/San Mateo County area has too few courses to serve the market demand for public golf courses.

In Fiscal Year 2008-2009, 54,073 18-hole rounds were played at Sharp Park, and Park & Rec Department figures show that revenues exceeded operating expenses there by \$99,142.00, even after Department accountants deducted a \$245,816.00 "overhead" assessment to contribute towards the Department's headquarters and other overhead expenses. (See Sharp Park financial documents presented to the November 4, 2009 meeting of the PROSAC committee by Rec & Park Planning Director Dawn Kamalanathan.)

**2. Congressional, San Mateo County, and City of Pacifica Support for the Golf Course.**

Both the County of San Mateo Board of Supervisors and City of Pacifica City Council have adopted resolutions in favor of keeping the Sharp Park course open, as has the Pacifica Chamber of Commerce. Congresswoman Jackie Speier, whose district includes San Francisco west of Twin Peaks, and most of San Mateo County, has commended the Sharp Park Report, and announced in a November 9, 2009 Press Release

her intent to convene a Study Group "with all the relevant parties to help identify the resources necessary to complete this very worthwhile project."

The Congresswoman's drive to save Sharp Park is consistent with all three of the Department's studies since February, 2007, none of which have recommended that the course be closed or cut to 9 holes. As discussed above, both prior studies (NGF and PROS) pointed to an undersupply of affordably-priced public golf courses in the area.

### **3. Legacy of the Great Dr. Alister MacKenzie.**

Sharp Park, built in 1931-1932, is the legacy of history's best-known, and many would say "greatest" golf architect, Dr. Alister MacKenzie, who also designed many of the world's greatest courses, including Cypress Point, Augusta, and the consulting architect at St. Andrews in Scotland. San Francisco favorite son, Lincoln High School graduate and 1964 United States Open Champion Ken Venturi calls Sharp Park "Dr. MacKenzie's great gift to the American public golfer." (Ken Venturi letter, October 12, 2009), while prominent MacKenzie restoration architect Mike DeVries labels it "the world's greatest golf course architect's most significant public course." (Mike DeVries letter, November 18, 2009.)

The August, 2008 "San Francisco Recreational Opportunities Study," authored by the Department's longtime consultant Leon Younger and PROS Consulting, pointed to Sharp Park's "... potential to be one of the best public golf courses in the nation... a great resource for the Recreation and Parks Department, much like having an existing park designed by Olmstead or a Frank Lloyd Wright home.... One of the few golf courses in America that a private fundraising (or endowment) for restoration could be accomplished.... (Id., pp. 14 and 44.)

Virtually all of the existing holes on the ocean side of Highway One are of MacKenzie's original design. The vast majority of a major international work of art and cultural landscape is still there. This fact is well-known, virtually unanimously accepted among golf architecture experts, and documented by MacKenzie's original routing drawings and hole descriptions, and aerial photographs. (See: Letters from Alister MacKenzie Society, April 28, 2009, Ken Venturi, October 12, 2009 and

Mike DeVries, November 18, 2009; and Golf Club Atlas, July, 2009.)

#### **4. Attention from the World Golf Community.**

Because of Dr. MacKenzie's prominence, the beauty and significance of his work at Sharp Park, and the popularity of the course, the threat of closure has brought, and will continue to bring, international concern and attention among preservationists, and throughout the golf world. (See, among others: "Sharp Park Golf Course," Cultural Landscape Foundation, Washington, D.C., July, 2009; "Sharply Divided," Golf World Magazine, July 20, 2009; and "Sharp Elbows," Sports Illustrated, Golf Plus, May 11, 2009.)

Major state, national, and international golf organizations have weighed-in with public officials to save Sharp Park Golf Course. See the letters of support from the World Golf Foundation, July 18, 2009; California Alliance for Golf, September 28, 2009; and Alister MacKenzie Society of Great Britain and Ireland, April 28, 2009.

Against weight of this evidence, spokespersons for the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity, which wants to close the golf course, repeatedly charge that "... no trace of MacKenzie's design exists at Sharp Park." (See, "Take a Mulligan...", Brent Plater, San Jose Mercury-News online, posted November 4, 2009.) This is denied by the only two "authorities"--Daniel Wexler and Joe Faulkner--that CBD cites to support its claim. Both men have written letters denouncing the mischaracterizations and misrepresentations of their work. (See letters from Mr. Wexler and Mr. Faulkner, dated respectively July 18 and 31, 2009.)

#### **5. Hole 12 and Course Realignment Proposals Should Be Subject to a Golf Design Competition.**

Because Sharp Park is legacy work of a master designer, any realignment of the golf course to accommodate habitat restoration should be done with great care. The Sharp Park Report's golf design appears to be the work of a single designer, whose ideas include closing the current Hole No. 12 (widely considered to be the course's "signature hole"), building a replacement new 3-par hole to

the east of Highway One near the now-closed rifle range, shortening Holes 11 and 13, and raising the level of the fairways on Holes 14 and 18.

Design alternatives clearly exist, which would have lesser costs and equal or greater habitat benefits for the frog and snake. To find the best solution to the golf design issues, consistent with habitat restoration, we believe a design fair or competition or "charette" should be convened. Without doubt, the world's outstanding architects would participate in such a design review process at MacKenzie's public golf shrine.

Because the environmental review and permitting processes will likely not be speedy (Sharp Park's Laguna Salada and Horse Stable Pond are the subject of a pending EIR process in connection with the Department's Significant Natural Resource Areas Management Plan, for which a Final EIR is not expected until Fall, 2010), there will be time for fresh ideas on the art of golf course rehabilitation in sensitive environments. Such a design fair or competition would continue to focus the golf world's attention on Sharp Park, to the benefit of San Francisco, Pacifica, San Mateo County, and anyone involved in the project.

**6. The Sharp Park Report Seeks to Balance The City's Discretionary Effort to Create New Habitat, with the Preservation of the 77-year Historic Pre-existing Golf Course.**

The San Francisco Garter Snake and the California Red-legged Frog are freshwater species, and historic maps and photos show that before the golf course, the land was largely barren sand dunes, in a valley named "Salt Valley," surrounding the brackish Laguna Salada (Spanish for "Salty Lake"), which was open to the sea. According to the definitive Williams & Associates report, "Laguna Salada Resource Enhancement Plan," June, 1992, the lagoon was historically "unlikely" to have been home to either species before the golf course, because of the high salinity of the water. *Id.*, pp. 2-3. The first scientific reports of the San Francisco Garter Snake at the property are from the mid-1940's, long after the course was completed in 1932 and the sea wall built in 1941. Sharp Park Report, *supra*, Appendix "C," at p. 9.

So the golf course not only created the conditions for the frog and snake, the golfers have been coexisting with the creatures at the property since the freshwater frogs and snakes moved-in.

No lawsuit has been filed, and no court has compelled the city to do anything here. The city's apparent willingness to spend a substantial sums to restore habitat is discretionary, as is the decision about how much of the pre-existing golf course to compromise. There are competing protected interests here: the historically-significant golf course, with its long-standing and loyal clientele who are dependent upon it for their recreation, social life, and happiness, vis-à-vis the frogs and the snakes.

Golfers are environmentalists, too. And there is willingness in the golf community to support the efforts of Congresswoman Speier, the Recreation and Parks Department, and others of good will, to find a win/win solution here for golf and nature. However, as discussed above, there are very significant historic and architectural values to defend at Sharp Park, and it is important to retain and restore absolutely as much as possible of the great Dr. MacKenzie's creation. The golf community and its allies are determined about this.

#### **7. There is Broad Public Support**

##### **For a "Win/Win" Option to Save the Golf Course, While Benefitting Natural Habitat.**

Golf's detractors appear not to much appreciate the great historic, artistic, cultural, and public recreational values of Sharp Park Golf Course—or the strong voices of the local political leaders.

But historic preservationists, local residents, newspaper editorial writers, San Francisco and San Mateo County political leaders, and golfers from San Francisco to Pacifica to San Mateo to London to Manila and Tokyo clearly do appreciate the MacKenzie course at Sharp Park.

As Congresswoman Speier points out in her November 9, 2009 Press Release supporting the compromise plan, "... what is best for the threatened species is also the most cost-effective and best for the local community,

who overwhelmingly support keeping the golf course at Sharp Park."

Listed below are some of the governmental entities, civic organizations, and publications that are calling for preserving the Sharp Park Golf Course, together with links to their herein-referenced endorsements, articles, and studies.

Respectfully submitted,

s/  
Richard Harris  
San Francisco Public Golf Alliance

encls.

cc: Congresswoman Jackie Speier  
Mayor Gavin Newsom  
Mayor Julie Lancelle  
Assemblyman Jerry Hill  
Supervisor Sean Elsbernd  
Supervisor Adrienne Tissier  
Supervisor Carole Groom  
Mr. Phil Ginsburg  
Ms. Dawn Kamalanathan  
PROSAC Committee

**PARTIAL LIST OF SHARP PARK GOLF COURSE  
ENDORSEMENTS, AND CITED REFERENCES**

**Governmental Entities**

City of Pacifica, Resolution of City Council,  
December 10, 2007

[http://sharppark.savegolf.net/data/cop\\_res.pdf](http://sharppark.savegolf.net/data/cop_res.pdf)

County of San Mateo, Resolution of Board of  
Supervisors, December 18, 2007

[http://sharppark.savegolf.net/data/smbos\\_res.pdf](http://sharppark.savegolf.net/data/smbos_res.pdf)

Congresswoman Jackie Speier, 12<sup>th</sup> U.S.  
Congressional District, November 9, 2009

<http://speier.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=48&parentid=46&sectiontree=46,48&itemid=330>

**PARTIAL LIST OF SHARP PARK GOLF COURSE  
ENDORSEMENTS AND CITED REFERENCES, cont.**

**Preservation Organizations**

Cultural Landscape Foundation, Washington, D.C.,  
July, 2009 (watch-listing Sharp Park as an at-risk,  
nationally-significant cultural landscape)

<http://www.tclf.org/landslides/sharp-park-golf-course-threatened-closure>

**Civic Organizations**

Pacifica Chamber of Commerce (undated)  
<http://sharppark.savegolf.net/data/ChamberSupportSP.pdf>

**Newspaper Editorial**

San Francisco Chronicle, "Let Golfers Play  
Through on Sharp Park," September 3, 2009

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2009/09/03/EDN019GUJ6.DTL>

San Francisco Bay Guardian, "Golfers and Garter  
Snakes," Tim Redmond, November 10, 2009

[http://www.sfbg.com/blogs/politics/2009/11/golfers\\_and\\_garter\\_snakes.html](http://www.sfbg.com/blogs/politics/2009/11/golfers_and_garter_snakes.html)

**Golf Organizations**

Alister MacKenzie Society, April 28, 2009

<http://www.pacificaripside.com/.a/6a00d8341c795b53ef01156f6f286c970c-pi>

World Golf Foundation, July 23, 2009  
<http://sfpublicgolf.com/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=43233>

California Alliance for Golf, September 28, 2009  
<http://sfpublicgolf.com/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=43245>

**PARTIAL LIST OF SHARP PARK GOLF COURSE  
ENDORSEMENTS, AND CITED REFERENCES, cont.**

**Golf Letters**

Dan Wexler, July 19, 2009

[http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/recpark/meetings/Park\\_Recreation\\_and\\_Open\\_Space\\_Advisory\\_Committee\\_%28PROSAC%29/supporting/2009/SFPGA.PDF](http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/recpark/meetings/Park_Recreation_and_Open_Space_Advisory_Committee_%28PROSAC%29/supporting/2009/SFPGA.PDF)

Joe Faulkner, July 31, 2009

[http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/recpark/meetings/Park\\_Recreation\\_and\\_Open\\_Space\\_Advisory\\_Committee\\_%28PROSAC%29/supporting/2009/Faulkner\\_letter.pdf](http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/recpark/meetings/Park_Recreation_and_Open_Space_Advisory_Committee_%28PROSAC%29/supporting/2009/Faulkner_letter.pdf)

Ken Venturi, October 12, 2009

<http://sfpublicgolf.com/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=40561>

Mike DeVries, November 18, 2009

<http://sfpublicgolf.com/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=43267>

**San Francisco Golf Studies**

National Golf Foundation, "Operational Review and Recommendations for City of San Francisco Golf Operations, February, 2007

[http://www.parks.sfgov.org/wcm\\_recpark/Golf/NGF/NGFFinal.pdf](http://www.parks.sfgov.org/wcm_recpark/Golf/NGF/NGFFinal.pdf)

Leon Younger & PROS Consulting, "San Francisco Recreational Opportunities Study Summary Report," August, 2008

[http://www.parks.sfgov.org/wcm\\_recpark/Golf\\_Taskforce/Final\\_report\\_August\\_26\\_2008.pdf](http://www.parks.sfgov.org/wcm_recpark/Golf_Taskforce/Final_report_August_26_2008.pdf)

Dawn Kamalanathan, Sharp Park Financials presented to PROSAC, November 4, 2009

<http://sfpublicgolf.com/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=43298>

**Environmental Studies**

Laguna Salada Resource Enhancement Plan, Williams & Associates, June, 1992.

[http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/restoring\\_sharp\\_park\\_california/pdfs/PWALagunaSaladaResourceEnhancementPlan.pdf](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/restoring_sharp_park_california/pdfs/PWALagunaSaladaResourceEnhancementPlan.pdf)

**PARTIAL LIST OF SHARP PARK GOLF COURSE  
ENDORSEMENTS, AND CITED REFERENCES, cont.**

**National Golf and Sports Magazine Coverage**

Golf Club Atlas, "MacKenzie's Sharp Park Under Siege," Bo Links and Richard Harris, September, 2009

<http://golfclubatlas.com/in-my-opinion/sharp-park>

Golf World, "Sharply Divided," Geoff Shackelford, July 20, 2009

[http://www.golfdigest.com/golfworld/columnists/2009/07/golf\\_sharp\\_park\\_shackelford\\_0720?printable=true](http://www.golfdigest.com/golfworld/columnists/2009/07/golf_sharp_park_shackelford_0720?printable=true)

Sports Illustrated, "Sharp Elbows," May 5, 2009,

[http://www.golf.com/golf/courses\\_travel/article/0,28136,1895794-0,00.html](http://www.golf.com/golf/courses_travel/article/0,28136,1895794-0,00.html)