
From: jack kershaw
Sent: Thursday, 2 September 2010 2:34 PM
To: Committees
Subject: VTP No 298. and ACT golf clubs generally

Dear Secretary, President and Members, Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and TAMS,

Territory Plan Variation No. 298, Holt, Belconnen Golf Club, (and golf clubs in the ACT generally).

Thank you for your invitation of 18 August 2010 to make a submission on this topic.

This expands upon my submission to ACTPLA on the Draft Variation (attached copy). You can decide whether ACTPLA's cryptic criticisms of my submission, in its assessment and approval papers, are valid or not. I don't think so.

My submission on the Draft Variation was intended to be constructive critique, by suggesting a better format of redevelopment. i.e. using the existing golf land to the **east** side of the course, closer to and more able to be integrated into existing Holt, for limited carefully designed residential development, rather than excessive development on the exposed, steep, isolated, poorly serviced, former golf course land to the west (which would revert to golf use in my alternative scenario).

However, the following suggestions could be even more preferable and achievable, as explained below.

A high-profile neighbour of the already truncated Capital Golf Club course, is right, as reported recently in *The Canberra Times*, that such clubs tend to "chase their tails" when selling land to developers (who are not in it for their health).

Pretty soon the club is back in debt.

That is apparently the case with Capital and Belconnen, which were larger in area, and sold some of their land several years ago for residential development.

So flogging off land is rarely a long-term viable option - and, contrary to ACTPLA's opinion in this case, real equity problems are revealed when you follow the trail of the original concessional lease.

Those golf clubs that have sufficient on-going membership/usage potential, but are going backwards financially, seem to have only three viable options:

1. Markedly increase membership/playing fees,
2. Close down, or,
3. Exploiting their unique settings, develop a consistent and sustaining income stream from functions, conferences, allied food services, and additional sports, etc. utilising renovated existing and/or extended premises, and, sometimes if appropriate, spare grounds, usually as permitted by their leases.

Virtually no clubs here can pull off the first option (except maybe Royal Canberra). The second option may be short sighted given current plans to "densify" existing suburbs (thus potentially increasing the membership pool), and will deprive the locality of valued open space, possibly dropping neighbouring property values in the process.

In the third scenario, a golf club may let itself be taken over a larger similar organisation (say a football club, as is the case with Capital, Belconnen, Gungahlin Lakes, and maybe Murrumbidgee soon), but risk losing control over its unique relaxed "golf" character, getting a flashy, noisy but moribund pokie palace, and alienating/relegating its core golfing membership and visiting players.

Alternatively and preferably, in the third scenario, it could grasp the nettle and borrow money against known demand (I understand golf clubs in attractive settings receive many enquiries each week for weddings, functions and conferences), and a proved-up financial plan, to professionally modify existing (often decrepit or ad hoc) facilities and operate, with suitable management, a function/conference/restaurant/sports business to subsidise the core golf activities which would remain untrammelled.

In the case of the Belconnen Golf Club course, the argument for changing the existing arrangement along the lines I have suggested in my submission on the Draft Variation (see below) clearly has planning merit in its own right, beyond the mere financial expectations of the Club and the developer.

This is because the existing newer residential development, including its main access roads, bisecting

the golf course was ill conceived, being physically isolated by, and excessively close to intrusive parts of the course, like tees, greens, and even fairways at several points.

Plan Variation 298 is therefore unacceptable on several fronts.

In the public interest, because at the end of the day, it's the ACT community that pays for the consequences of poor planning and development, and to rectify them, the Committee should recommend against the Variation.

The Committee recommendations should be that:

1. The Club disentangle itself from the current developer (no doubt any "ownership" of the Club by the developer is conditional upon the Variation to the Territory Plan 298 being allowable), and not engage with it or any other private-sector developer.
2. The Club transfers its land on the east side of its course (10th hole and beyond to the north) to the ACT Land Development Agency so that that land can be correctly planned, released and developed for residential uses, incorporating open space buffers between that new development and the existing residential developments to its east and west, all in consultation with the local and broader community.
3. The Club be accordingly compensated by the LDA (Government) to enable the reinstatement of an 18-hole course by re-commissioning the former course on the west side, and improvements to the intrusive or dangerous interfaces of the course with existing residential development and roads. and,
4. In the interests of community and social engagement, well-being and fitness, the Government support the continuation and individuality of nature of ACT golf clubs, by encouraging them to be perpetually financially self sufficient, independent of other clubs with non-golf bases, or property developers etc.; and that to that end, that Government materially encourage golf clubs to set up and operate an on-site business responding to their ubiquitous pleasant open-space landscaped settings, lakes, and views, their often interesting premises with potential for renovation and/or extension, good car parking, etc., focussing on say, social functions, conferences, displays, ancillary family sports and recreational activities, and the like, without significantly interfering with the clubs' core golfing activities.

I'd be happy to give evidence in person to the committee.

Yours faithfully

Jack Kershaw FRAIA

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2 September 2010

ATTACHMENT

Dear ACTPLA

Re Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No 298, Part Block 11, Section 99 Holt, Belconnen Golf Course.

Comments.

1. This variation to the Territory Plan should be abandoned. It fails as good planning, comprehensively, and perpetuates a compromised, even dangerous golf course.
2. The site is too remote from existing residential, community and commercial facilities, especially for the main target demographic - the ageing. The site is very exposed to the west with its cold winds, hot afternoon summer sun, and bushfire sources.
3. If some deconcessionalising and rezoning of golf land is to occur for the benefit of the club, then it should at least be, and be seen to be, golf course land currently in use, not land the club doesn't use. Otherwise, major questions of equity will continue to be fairly raised.
4. Instead of developing the subject land, the existing eastern section of the golf course could reasonably be developed for residential. The club could then achieve an improved 18-hole course, un-bisected by roads and houses, by using the Section 99 land (which, it is understood, was formerly part of the earlier 27-hole course).
5. In that arrangement, the power lines won't have to be relocated. The wonderfully elevated clubhouse and pro shop, the car park, etc. can remain in-situ and could be upgraded. Their address road shouldn't need upgrading. The clubhouse etc. would remain best sited to suit the new membership catchment area of the Molonglo Valley as it emerges.
6. Development on the eastern land (existing 10th hole and beyond to the north) would become desirably integrated with "old" Holt and its community and commercial facilities, as well as the strips of residential development currently bisecting the existing course. Buffers of open space could be incorporated to preserve outlooks if necessary.

7. The design of the new estate needs to be more sustainable and attractive than that proposed, with respect to dwelling-number and infrastructure excesses, block sizes, densities, potentially unkempt and dangerous parkland that would be better allocated to house plots, topographical efficiencies, passive and active solar orientation and proportion (aspect ratio of roofs), etc. etc. Generally, it should be in accordance with a comprehensive submission I made to the Residential Policy Review on 27/11/'09.

Jack Kershaw FRAIA