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HEADLINE: North Livermore residents on edge over new land use report

BYLINE: By Eric Kurhi, Staff Writer

BODY:

North Livermore residents warily listened to a consultant's report on possible renovations to public facilities in their neighborhood at Monday's City Council meeting.

And their beloved Springtown Golf Course is once again a target.

David Early of Berkeley-based Design, Community and Environment assured residents that the report is "only regarding the process of how to go forward, nothing in it is final."

However, some residents felt there were indications the consultants had their own idea of how to move forward. "You already have opinions on what's viable and what's not viable," said Jason Cain.

The largest area of concern is the fate of the Springtown Golf Course. It has been underperforming for years and is primarily a local draw, according to the report.

"The course gets mixed reviews, even from the small group that uses it," Early said. "People graded it a 'D+' for overall experience, and an 'A' for convenience. People are there simply because of the proximity."

However, Early said they understand the vital neighborhood role it serves, although even the quality of soil isn't ideal for such a course.

"Scientists involved in a UC Berkeley soil study of area soil recently proclaimed the soil at the park nearly unsuitable for growing green grass," states the report.

Early said the idea of selling a portion of the 90-acre course should remain on the table.

"It's a significant asset, and selling 10 to 20 acres would bring a large amount of money to city coffers," he said. "Given the needs for the area, including a library and playing fields, it can be looked at as not just a source of land but also a possible financial contribution."

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However, longtime Livermore activists Bob Balzer and John Stein both objected to that idea.

"Now is not a good time to sell land," Stein said at Monday's meeting. "You're not going to get a lot of money right now for what you are calling 'alkaline swampland.' The focus should be on finding new funding sources, not selling public land."

There will be three community meetings, most likely in April and May. Early said they are looking for spaces with enough room to host an expected large turnout.

The study includes the area of Livermore from Springtown east to the city limits. It also looks at plans to renovate the aging Springtown Library, possibly moving it farther east to the area around Vasco Road. The area also lacks adequate fields for team sports, according to the report.

"There's a very low supply relative to the area's demand," said Early.

The report was based on conversations with Springtown homeowner groups, the library board, parent teacher associations, the Chamber of Commerce, parks district and Friends of Springtown advocacy group.

Three main goals were developed: The plan should serve the broad public interest of the neighborhoods, maximize efficient use of resources and have a minimal net impact on the city's general fund.

Vice mayor John Marchand repeated the consultant's statement that Monday's report was for "inventory only" and urged residents to attend the upcoming meetings.

"Springtown folks, stay involved," said vice mayor John Marchand. "This is your opportunity to make yourselves heard."

Eric Kurhi can be reached at 925-847-2184 or e-mail ekurhi@bayareanewsgroup.com

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