

## My Turn: Under the radar at Sharp Park

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Hundreds of people, including Sharp Park golfers, attended the San Francisco Supervisors' budget hearings on June 21 and heard from all the social service groups whose budgets were being cut. Surprisingly, Pacifica's City Manager Steve Rhodes was there to speak "on behalf of the mayor and City Council of Pacifica." He testified, "the city of Pacifica has been providing information and assistance to San Mateo County staff to support the county in developing a proposal to take over operation of the (Sharp Park golf) course, which would relieve San Francisco of this responsibility in the future."

Rhodes was asked, "Does that proposal include that you will indemnify San Francisco, too?"

Rhodes responded, "It's my understanding that it will. The county of San Mateo is working with Rec and Park to make a full proposal that would take over full operation and risk of operation."

The risks and liabilities that the city of San Francisco now faces at Sharp Park were listed by Congresswoman Jackie Speier at a recent town hall forum in San Francisco. San Francisco, she said, "is looking for a partner that will simultaneously take over the land and accept the liability that goes with owning a seawall, a sensitive habitat with a balky pumping system and a lead-polluted firing range

(as well as) the potential to"...flood nearby homes."

And Pacifica City Manager Rhodes says we San Mateo County residents are willing to accept that liability.

Gracious!

Whatever is he thinking? Does City Council know he spoke on their behalf? Did Council direct him to make that statement about indemnification? What is our City Council thinking?

Of course, San Mateo County only has a budget deficit of \$150 million, unlike San Francisco's multi millions, so maybe we, the wealthy San Mateo County taxpayers, can better afford the risks. Rhodes also mentioned there are private "interested parties" who believe they can make a profit. The private parties make money — perhaps — but we public underwrite millions of dollars of potential liabilities. This means private profit, and public risk in the form of additional taxes!

Are WE willing to take on those risks?

San Francisco has for years been avoiding the problem of lead contamination because of the high cost of removal. The balky pump has caused death by desiccation of untold Red-legged frog embryos and has been documented by San Francisco, also for years. Fines for killing of endangered species start at \$3,500 for the first kill and go up. (One dead snake at SFO recently cost the contractor over \$1 million.) An "improved" seawall itself will eventually cause loss of the beach in front of it due to erosion. What is the price for a beach that has disappeared? No one can predict what the loss of the Sharp Park beach will surely cost Pacifica in tourist revenue.

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Maybe the golfers themselves in their new role as protectors of frog and snake could assume all the risk. While golfers on their hands and knees pulling "Hawaiian grass" from the greens is an image to treasure, their volunteer work does not preserve habitat for the endangered snakes and frogs. Granted, not running "a mower through" eliminates the chance of chopping the frogs and snakes to pieces and does "offer a little bit of protection." Certainly these efforts are appreciated, but they do nothing to address the need identified by SFR&P for \$30 to \$50 million in restoration and renovations.

If public money, as Speier proposes, is to be spent on anything at the Sharp Park golf course, shouldn't we want our money used to restore the site and make it accessible to everyone, not merely to temporarily safeguard golf? Shouldn't we want a resilient wetland without artificial confines that can respond naturally to climate change and sea level rise? GGNRA could work its magic at Sharp Park with a new visitor center drawing more tourists to our coast.

Reason impels us to agree with the San Francisco League of Conservation Voters. They say "Restoration will provide access to hiking trails, picnicking spots, camping facilities and education opportunities sorely needed in San Mateo County; it will ensure the continued existence and abundance of endangered species that San Francisco is charged with protecting; it will improve access to precious coastal resources; and it will make the coastline more resistant to the expected environmental changes that will be wrought by global climate change and sea level rise."

Only a new National Park at Sharp Park can accomplish this vision of an adequate restoration and serve everyone's best interests.