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By newspaper537 / February 28, 2018 / [News](#)

March 10 Forum To Explore Future Of The Park Hill Golf Course

By Woody Garnsey

Special to the GPHN

Are you concerned about the open space future of the 155-acre Park Hill Golf Course land? If so, plan to participate in the community informational forum on Saturday, March 10 starting at 1 p.m. at the Park Hill Congregational Church at 2600 Leyden St.

Here's some background: In 1997, during the Mayor Wellington Webb administration, the City of Denver paid the Clayton Trust \$2 million for a perpetual open space conservation easement on the PHGC land. And, today, pursuant to an agency agreement with the City made in 2000, Clayton holds title to the golf course land "as agent of the City, to hold for the benefit of the citizens of the City and the general public."

The Park Hill Golf Course land is at Colorado Boulevard and 35th Avenue, stretching northeast to Interstate 70. (It should not be confused with the City Park Golf Course, which is approximately a mile to the south and currently closed for construction of a stormwater drainage project.)

Clayton currently leases the Park Hill Golf Course land to a subsidiary of Arcis Equity Partners, LLC, a Texas private equity firm. The golf course lease expires Dec. 31, 2018, but Arcis has two options to renew for additional five-year terms. It must exercise the first option by June 30, 2018; its renewal intentions are currently unclear.

The present dynamics of the land situation are complicated by the City's Platte to Park Hill drainage project that – as is currently the case with the City Park course – will close in early 2019 to install a stormwater detention facility on that property. If Arcis exercises its five-year renewal option, the Park Hill Golf Course would re-open in mid-2020. On the other hand, if Arcis does not exercise its option, the currently protected open space future for the land could soon be in jeopardy.

If the golf course lease terminates, Clayton is expected to ask the City to relinquish the open space protections of the 1997 conservation easement and the 2000 agency agreement and allow rezoning and development of all or a portion of the land. Clayton would want to generate revenues at least to replace the annual \$700,000 golf course lease payments that have provided approximately 7 percent of its operating budget for its early childhood education programs.

Starting in early 2017, Clayton formed the Park Hill Golf Course Citizen's Advisory Committee (PCAC) to engage in a "visioning" process regarding desired uses of the land after a possible golf course lease termination. The advisory committee is comprised of community members selected by Clayton.

Clayton has retained the high-powered Denver consulting firm CRL Associates to advise and lead the PCAC process. Clayton's legal counsel is Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, whose lead attorney Bruce James co-chaired Mayor Michael B. Hancock's first two election campaigns.

The advisory committee met monthly through September, when Clayton surprisingly announced a complex agreement between Clayton and the City that the administration planned to present to City Council for immediate approval. This agreement effectively tore up both the 1997 conservation easement and the 2000 agency agreement and provided a framework for rezoning and development of all or a portion of the land.

But—acknowledging the reality of Arcis' continuing lease renewal rights—the City administration promptly withdrew its request for Council approval. Clayton is now continuing the advisory committee process.

The future of the land continues to be in limbo with a serious future threat to the open space requirements of the 1997 conservation easement and the 2000 agency agreement.

The purpose of the March 10 forum is to inform the broader community about the current Park Hill Golf Course land situation and to engage in substantive community discussions about the future of this important 155-acre land parcel. Current forum sponsors are Greater Park Hill Community, Inc., Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC), Park Hill Village HOA and RNO, The Overlook HOA and RNO, and City Park Friends and Neighbors.

Everyone is welcome, and encouraged to attend.

The forum format will include panelists making brief presentations and a moderated discussion among panelists and the other meeting attendees. The moderator will be GPHC Board Chair Tracey MacDermott. Currently scheduled panelists are Brad Cameron (INC), Charlotte Brantley (Clayton President/CEO), Jeff Romeo (The Overlook HOA and RNO), and Kevin Doyle (the Overlook HOA and RNO).

Forum organizers have invited City Councilmen Albus Brooks and Chris Herndon and Mayor Hancock and/or a member of his senior staff to participate as panelists. Disappointingly, the councilmembers have said they will not be participating. As of this writing the organizers have no participation commitment from the Mayor or any senior member of his staff.

Woody Garnsey is a retired attorney and longtime Park Hill resident.