

Park Hill Golf Course - Greater Park Hill Community, Inc. (GPHC), est. 1961

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How Does Your Candidate Stack Up On Open Space?

By Woody Garnsey

Special to the GPHN

The citizens group Save Open Space Denver! submitted questionnaires to all candidates for mayor and city council regarding the future of the Park Hill Golf Course open space (for more, see last month's opinion piece "Park Hill Golf Course Open Space in Jeopardy," at greaterparkhill.org/2019/03/opinion-park-hill-golf-course-open-space-in-jeopardy/).

Both Mayor Michael Hancock and Councilman Chris Herndon failed to answer the questions. These were the questions:

1. Do you believe that the City and County of Denver must protect its perpetual open space conservation easement that covers the Park Hill Golf Course land and for which Denver taxpayers paid the Clayton Trust \$2 million in 1997?
2. The 155-acre Park Hill Golf Course land is the largest remaining undeveloped tract that potentially could be available to fill the park shortages in Denver. Would you support the potential acquisition of the Park Hill Golf Course land by the City and County of Denver for designation as a city park?

Here are the results for the mayor, at-large city council and District 8 city council races:

Mayor: Challengers Lisa Calderón, Jaime Giellis, and Penfield Tate gave unqualified "yes" answers to both questions. Incumbent Michael B. Hancock declined to answer, claiming "pending litigation involving the Park Hill Golf Course land" prevented him from answering. This is pure political evasion. The only such pending litigation is the lawsuit between the golf course operator Arcis and the Clayton Trust in which the city is not a party, and nothing legally prevents the mayor from answering these questions. Also, it's appropriate to note that in 2017 the Hancock administration proposed having the city possibly tear up the perpetual open space conservation easement (for which taxpayers paid \$2 million in 1997) and purchase the land in order to sell significant portions for real estate development. The two other candidates, Stephan "Seku" Evans and Kalyn Rose Heffeman, did not respond.

At-Large City Council: Challenger Tony Pigford gave unqualified "yes" answers to both questions. Incumbent Deborah Ortega qualified her "yes" answers saying redevelopment should include "affordable housing" and incumbent Robin Kniech said "while open space is important, I could not support that as the only use for the site." Other candidates did not respond.

District 8 City Council: Challengers Miguel Ceballos-Ruiz, LaMone Noles, Erik Penn, Blair Taylor, and Patrick Thibault all gave unqualified “yes” answers to both questions. Councilman Herndon failed to respond.

You can find all candidate questionnaire responses at sosdenver.net.

Let’s financially support and vote for candidates who champion preservation of the conservation easement and this invaluable 155-acre open space in the northwest portion of the neighborhood. Whether it’s a park or a golf course, this large parcel of Denver tree-filled open space improves air quality and enhances the lungs of the city along with the health and well being of all its citizens. And, if surrounding underutilized properties were repurposed for some affordable housing, new residents would have access to all the benefits and joys of living near open space. Preserving the Park Hill Golf Course open space is truly a win-win solution for the needs of our burgeoning Denver community.

Woody Garnsey is a retired attorney who has lived in Park Hill for 48 years.