

Comments on Boca National Status
Rick Heard, PGA

I would like to thank the Commissioners for their ongoing efforts to make the Boca National Golf Course a reality. I am a PGA golf professional, and I do not live on or around the proposed Boca National Golf Course. I have studied the City's letter and have many thoughts about the details. However, I am most troubled by the broader issues that led to the letter and which manifest themselves in questions 26-35 regarding development and operational costs.

There are many interrelated responsibilities that will require close teamwork to get the Boca National project done quickly and at minimum cost. Frankly, in my one year observing the City and the District with regard to this project, I haven't seen the needed level of cooperation happening. This "April Fool's" letter (yes, it is dated April 1) is all the evidence that anyone needs in order to see that our representative bodies are not working together as a team. Unfortunately, it is not a joke.

I teach that "TEAM" means Together Everyone Achieves More." There are many "EVERYONES" who care about this project: City residents, District residents, golfers, homeowners, area businesses, and others. We all need to achieve MORE.

Let's remember that this all began as a simple golf course / land swap: a \$65 million sale of one golf course in order to pay for the resurrection of another, with \$10-\$15 million left over as profit for the City. The City must understand that that is what their constituents expected would happen.

The very idea of Boca National only surfaced once it became apparent that housing would never be allowed on the Ocean Breeze property, and the swap idea and subsequent bidding war commenced for the Boca Municipal property. It is extremely disappointing to see how far from that simple idea we are today, to the detriment of all parties except for the City's bank account. And now this letter says, and I quote, "the City has significant concerns about the financial feasibility of the project, both in its implementation and in its ongoing operations."

Indeed, it was the City's unwillingness to abide by the "swap" agreement that makes these concerns a reality. The City should be a partner on the Boca National "TEAM."

There should be no financial concerns, since the sale of Boca Municipal provides more than enough funding to RELOCATE Boca Raton's golf course from Glades Road to 2nd Avenue. Simply put, the City must use the proceeds from the sale of Boca Municipal to pay for the relocation of Boca Raton's golf course. Any other use of this money is at best political sleight of hand, and at worst a travesty that could undermine the Boca National project.

Municipal golf courses can be financially viable. They generally have little or no debt and pay no property taxes. When they are also well-managed, beautiful and fun to play facilities that have high standards of customer service they also fill every tee time. Can Boca National do it? Yes, but not if its success is judged by its ability to generate golf revenues sufficient to cover \$52 million in debt in addition to normal operating expenses. The former Ocean Breeze Golf Course failed, not because it wasn't a good golf course or because it wasn't busy. It failed because golf revenues couldn't pay for its debt service, and its debt was "only," and I use that word very loosely, \$7.2 million.

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The goal, shared by the City and the District, should be the RELOCATION and IMPROVEMENT of Boca Raton's public golf facility to benefit residents, homeowners, tourists, businesses, local schools and universities, and of course, golfers.

Yet, we seem to be far from this simple goal today:

- We have the purchase of Ocean Breeze and the commitment to rebuild the golf course.
- We have \$65 million from the sale of Boca Municipal going somewhere other than to fund the project that created the \$65 million.
- We have the City issuing a letter that requires hours of work and multiple meetings to provide answers, when a simple meeting of key personnel could have answered and clarified the issues and saved 2 months of precious time.
- And, we have a need for the City to expedite administrative requirements, permits, etc. to reduce costs and save time. Many of the letter's questions illustrate the critical areas of the project that will require close TEAMwork and cooperation between the City and the District. These include:

Questions 5 & 13 regarding City approval of the abandonment of the Jeffrey Street extension and its major impact on the overall plan if the City does not approve. Why question that now? Does the City agree with abandonment or not?

Questions 6-12 & 19 regarding development schedule phasing and City dependencies that could cause delays and increased costs due to the need for temporary structures. Why does the City question cost increases that would be caused by its own lack of timely action?

Question 15 regarding the tunnel under 2nd Avenue and City dependencies that could cause delays, increased costs, and life-threatening street crossings if the tunnel is not ready when the course opens. Again, the City can prevent these delays and costs.

Questions 30-32 regarding staffing and the disposition of existing City employees. Lack of timely action by the City would delay the project, further negatively affecting its own staff.

It is evident from the City's letter and from the slow progress to date that there is currently no buy-in to the goal. It is also evident that the City has yet to understand the phenomenal asset that Boca National will be for Boca Raton. It's time to put politics aside and get this project going. Or, is it the City's goal to shut down public golf in Boca?

As a resident of Boca Raton, as a taxpayer, as a local businessman, as the father of a junior golfer, as a golfer, and on behalf of all those who have an interest in this project, I demand that the City recognize its responsibility to RELOCATE and IMPROVE its golf facility and work together with the District as a TEAM to get Boca National built as designed, on time, and on budget.