

Fort Sheridan Master Plan Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

November 17, 2010

The Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve Master Plan Advisory Committee held its final meeting November 17. A majority of the group favored sending a recommendation to the Forest Preserve Board that they put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) from private developers to gauge their interest in building and operating a 9-hole golf course, blended public trails and open space at Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve.

The recommendation from this final session was a compromise reached after the committee met six times since December 2009. The committee has been striving to bring divergent interests together to form a common goal for future public uses for the Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve.

Members have debated 9-hole versus 18-hole golf concepts, developing a traditional forest preserve with no golf course, or holding off for several years to see what happens with the economy and the ailing golf industry. Some members were concerned that a new course would hurt business at existing public courses in surrounding communities and at other Forest Preserve courses, potentially causing operating deficits at those courses that would need to be subsidized with tax dollars. Others expressed varying opinions over how much a course would cost to build and operate.

Regardless of their preference, the committee agreed at the final session that an RFP would help demonstrate if there is a market for a financially sustainable Fort Sheridan golf course, given the struggling economy and a marked downturn in golf popularity. Using a private operator rather than taxpayer funds to build the course would reduce public financial risk, members agreed.

The committee recommendation will be presented to relevant Standing Committees and the Board of Commissioners of the Forest Preserve District. The recommendation will include a summary of the varying opinions expressed by the members, and include details about projected golf course construction costs, operating expenditures and revenues and other considerations reviewed by the Advisory Committee over the past year. The recommendation also will summarize the public input that has been received and what took place at each of the six Advisory Committee meetings.

The meeting was conducted by Susan Parks, an independent facilitator. Committee members include representatives from neighboring cities and park districts, Forest Preserve Commissioners from those communities, and the Fort Sheridan Homeowners Association, with ex-officio representation from the U.S. Department of the Army and the 10th District Congressional office.