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Friday, September 1, 2017

Jackson Park Golf Association Support of the Restoration of the Jackson Park and South Shore Golf Courses

There has been much discussion recently, focused on whether community golfers, support the planned restoration of the Jackson Park (JP) and South Shore (SS) golf courses. The Jackson Park Golf Association (JPGA) will weigh in on this discussion by providing its perspective.

The JPGA is a coalition of a number of African American male and female golf leagues/clubs representing more than 500 golfers who have supported the courses for decades. Members play daily with weekly league/club play. Additionally, members sponsor instruction and mentorship to junior golfers.

JPGA surveyed its membership at-large and league/club Board of Director Presidents. Presently, the following expresses the collective viewpoints of JPGA golfers, relating to the restoration project and Chicago Parks Golf Alliance (CPGA) collaboration.

The collaboration between CPGA and JPGA began in April with a successful town hall catering to hundreds of golfers and community members to hear directly from the CPGA. CPGA provided project updates and concrete answers to questions and concerns. One area of concern—shared by the golfers whom will be impacted directly by this restoration—is “keeping future golfing related fees affordable for community golfers.” JPGA is confident in the Park District’s pledge to keep rates below \$50 and CPGA’s push to maintain rates near current levels so surrounding communities will not be priced out of the restored courses. In addition to juniors playing free, the proposed pricing models are acceptable to our golfers. All parties agree affordability, accessibility, and programs for our youth must be core components of this restoration project.

In addition to playing JP/SS courses, many of our golfers play suburban courses at higher rates due to deteriorating narrow fairways, small greens, and flooding “dirt” bunkers at JP/SS course, as well as unsafe street crossings for carts and foot traffic. Time has taken its toll on the century old courses and golfers demand quality and upgrades for a 21st century course. Most golfers will accept modest price increases for a world-class golf experience closer to home.

The CPGA invited two JPGA members, at JPGA’s request, to join its board providing ongoing engagement for JPGA in project phases, planning participation, reviewing restoration plans, and offering suggestions directly addressing golfers’ concerns.

Additionally, for your general information, JPGA is excited about a proposal of ours which has garnered strong support from CPGA. It comprises three initiatives to serve the community with a focus on youth. Our proposal, *A Proposal to Honor the Past, Mold the Present, and Realize a Strong Future for African American Golf* includes:

- **An African American Golf Exhibition to celebrate the complex history of the African American golf experience**
- **A *Tiger Woods Learning Center of Chicago* centered around STEM to serve the greater Midwest**
- **A nationwide initiative entitled *Youth-to-Tour Program™* to develop more competitive African American golfers and related careers**

Our financial goal is to establish an endowment to ensure our programs are available in perpetuity. CPGA has made a commitment to support JPGA with its programming and philanthropic fundraising efforts.

Members of the Jackson Park Golf Association are cognizant of past major Chicago projects with little community input and less interest in the needs of African American residents. Hence, JPGA decided to engage with CPGA early to represent golfer interests and the greater community. To date, CPGA has been receptive to JPGA inclusion and willing to respond to our concerns making them a solid community partner.

The restoration project has a long way to go, but from the perspective of our golfers this project has our full support and we look forward to the restoration of two historic gems on Chicago's south side.

Sincerely,

Ron Norris

Ron Norris
Board Chairperson
Jackson Park Golf Association