

Dec. 1, 2014 (new draft with additional signatories as of 1/25/2015)

Mayor Ralph Becker  
Salt Lake City Council  
451 S State St, Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Subject: Support for Converting Salt Lake Golf Courses to Nature Parks and Open Lands

The signatories to this letter wish to suggest that during your review of various scenarios for downsizing or closing municipal golf courses, you strongly consider repurposing these lands along the Jordan River into nature parks, nature reserves, and/or protected and restored wildlife habitat and wetlands, especially for migratory birds.

We understand that the Par 3 golf course has already been closed permanently, and that in addition, in various scenarios currently under study by city officials, part or all of the Glendale and/or Rose Park golf courses might be closed and repurposed. All three golf courses are situated along the Jordan River and the Rose Park golf course is on both sides of it.

There are many reasons to protect natural open space within the Jordan River corridor. Communities like Boise, Boston, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Dallas, Denver, Portland, Sacramento, and San Diego, which have already protected their riparian greenways, have found that such protected parkways help to make them competitive in attracting highly mobile technology innovation companies and other businesses of all kinds. Countless studies have shown that property values are on average about 20 percent higher along protected greenways in urban areas, whereas urban blight and sprawl tends to drive down property values as well as making cities less attractive to business owners and to the pool of educated workers needed by innovative growth companies.

The possible repurposing of existing golf courses along the Jordan River represents the best and indeed in all probability, the last opportunity to protect and restore natural open space along the river. During the past 18 years the pace of urbanization within the Jordan River corridor and indeed within its historic flood plain has been extremely intense. No less than 23 retail, dense housing, "mixed use", and/or transit oriented development centers have been built, recently completed, are still expanding or are on the drawing boards for Jordan River corridor land across Salt Lake Valley. Now commercial developers are targeting golf courses. And golf courses are at this point the last large blocks of open space on the river.

Preserving former golf course lands as nature parks or restoration areas for wildlife and native plants is highly consistent with the City's goal of balancing the golf fund's budget through cost control. Although native plant and wildlife restoration areas usually require site preparation and maintenance during their establishment, after about three years maintenance costs for open space--per the city's own calculations in a recent study--drop to about one tenth of the cost of maintaining golf courses. Natural areas do not require a large maintenance staff and they rarely require any water beyond that already on site.

Maintenance of existing open space within our city and especially along our river is of great importance to our community, whether the open space is ideal wildlife habitat or not. However

we believe that the added value of enhancing areas including existing golf courses, with native plants and other wildlife-friendly features, can hugely increase the value of open space assets, the livability and economic prosperity of our community and others along the river.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important planning effort.

With best regards,

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