



**Date:** May 17, 2016

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**From:** Ann Kattreh  
Parks & Recreation Director

**Subject:** Braemar Park Winter Recreation Proposal

## **Information / Background:**

On June 2, 2015 the City Council voted to approve Option #5 of the master plan of Braemar Golf Course. Option #5 includes a new 18 hole regulation course with minimal disturbance. Minimal disturbance in this case means that the hill on the east side of the golf course will not be removed either partially or totally. This option allows us to spread 18 holes over the existing 27-hole footprint to improve play and safety by widening fairways and eliminating forced carries. This also leaves some golf course property to convert to park land for all residents to utilize for a variety of recreational pursuits.

## **Project Opportunities**

Staff will present a preliminary proposal to add cross country ski trails and snow tubing with man-made snow at Braemar Park. Braemar Park has the potential to be a popular winter recreation area with tubing, sledding, walking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, skijoring and fat tire biking on both man-made and natural snow while utilizing the beauty and varied terrain of the park. Braemar Park potentially has the ability to create a 2.5k loop of man-made snow for skiing with approximately 30% beginner, 20% intermediate and 50% advanced trails. The loop could be used by the high school cross country ski team and distances in multiples of 5k could be created. The trail could be used for practices and competition and could potentially be lighted. The lower level of the clubhouse could also be renovated to house the high school cross country ski program to include storage, changing and waxing areas. The high school coaches and athletic director have been included in all discussions to date and are very interested in moving their operations to Braemar. The Nine Mile Creek Trail and construction on the high school campus will be significantly impacting the cross country ski trails at the high school.

Due to the steep terrain and in order to construct the trail in the most cost effective manner, a 50' wide trail may be created up and on the top of the hill to create an out and back ski trail for skate

and classic style nordic skiing. The man-made loop could also connect to a natural snow trail that could meander around the golf course, significantly increasing the percentage of beginner level trails. As many as 10 – 12 snow tube lanes could be added on the hill on the east side of the golf course at the current location of hole 21 on the Clunie 9. These new areas could also be utilized during the non-snow months for walking, biking, running and scenic overlooks.

The large, adjacent parking lot is a tremendous asset to a winter recreation destination as are the clubhouse, the Tin Fish restaurant and the city-owned well on the east side of the property that could be used for snowmaking. This project also utilizes the opportunity to design and construct the winter trails at the same time that the golf course is under construction. Trails around the golf course, which would not impact play areas, are also being defined. Staffing efficiencies would also be realized because Braemar Golf Course staff would be able to lead the snowmaking, grooming and administrative duties of the winter recreation area. Braemar Park is the largest park in Edina. This provides significant winter recreation opportunities for all residents of Edina that does not focus around skating or hockey, while also creating year-round recreational areas. Winter recreation at Braemar would provide a significant boost to Braemar Golf course by opening its doors to more Edina residents during the winter months for the Tin Fish restaurant, from which Braemar Golf Course receives 15% of gross sales. Skis, snowshoes, snow tubes and potentially fat tire bikes could be rented at the clubhouse.

### **Consulting Team**

SEH's Statement of Qualifications and agreement is attached. The team would be led by Paul Pasko. Paul has worked on several projects that involved trail design and snow making, particularly in tight urban environments. Mike Horn would be the project manager. Prior to joining SEH, Mike was the Project Manager for the Winter Recreation Areas at Elm Creek Park Reserve, Clifton E. French Regional Park, Hyland Lake Park Reserve and the Hyland Ski and Snowboard Area. The City of Edina has extensive positive experience working with SEH on a variety of parks and recreation, street and utility projects. The city is currently working with SEH on the driving range and par 3 renovations and also the regulation course renovation projects, specifically on the wetland delineations and Nine Mile Creek Watershed District and Army Corps of Engineers permitting processes and ecological enhancements. SEH has also added Morton Trails to the team. Founded by two-time Olympian John Morton, Morton Trails provides expert guidance in the planning, design, and construction of sport and recreational trail systems for cross country skiing, walking, running, hiking, biking, snowshoeing, equestrian and other outdoor activities. They work with private landowners, state and local governments, developers, non-profits, and other organizations to create sustainable, economically vibrant, active outdoor communities. RRC Associates out of Boulder Colorado has been added to assist with the operational feasibility study. RRC Associates has particular expertise with parks, recreation, open space, and trails needs assessment studies for cities, counties, recreation districts, and states throughout the US on a variety of outdoor recreation projects. Torrent Engineering and Equipment and HDR Engineering would complete snowmaking engineering and noise impact studies.

**Potential Project Timeline:**

Park Board Review and Comment	April 2016
City Council Presentation	May 2016
Hire Design and Consulting Team	May 2016
Feasibility and Design	May - June 2016
City Council Feasibility Study Check In	June 7, 2016
Public Open House	Late June 2016
Park Board Review	July 12, 2016
Complete Study	July 25, 2016
City Council Presentation/Bid Authorization	Aug. 2, 2016
Bid Project	August 2016
Bid Award	Sept. 20, 2016
Bond Sale	December 2016 – January 2017
Construction	Winter 2016 – Fall 2017
Open	December 2017

**Potential Project Funding**

The winter recreation area at Braemar could be constructed utilizing bonds sold by the city at the same time as the bond sale for the renovation of Braemar Golf Course, the purchase of the 40<sup>th</sup> & France property and waterslide and toddler play structure improvements at the Aquatic Center. Braemar Golf Course and the Edina Aquatic Center would utilize bonds which we would intend to pay back directly from the revenue generated from the respective facilities. The 2017 tax impact of the additional approximately \$3 million would be approximately \$360,000 or 1.5% in addition to the 4.9% tax increase estimate included in the 2016-2017 adopted budget. This bond sale would take place in late 2016 to coincide with the beginning of the construction at the golf course.

**Project Challenges**

One challenge in completing this project within this timeframe is that trail design, public input and pro formas will all be completed at the same time. This creates some financial risk for the city in the event that it is decided not to move forward with trail construction since the trails will be designed at the same time that the financial feasibility is being studied. The feasibility study and trail design would be funded from proceeds from the bond sale at the end of the year. If it is determined not to move forward at this time, plans could always be used at a later date, but a funding source for the study would be needed.

Another challenge is to keep all winter activities off the playing surfaces of the golf course to eliminate damage caused by winter utilization of a golf course.

### **Park Board Review and Comment – April 2016**

**Koren Nelson** – Member Nelson thinks it's very exciting. She currently takes her kids to Theo Wirth; however, parking is not ideal or safe. They already love the snowshoeing part of it and think this is a great opportunity. Also, she echoes Chair McCormick. She is not a hockey family and feels everything winter in Edina is hockey so it's nice to see something that is not just hockey and encourages people to try something different. She indicated she does think it relates to the Strategic Plan; it connects in terms of the community part of it and there is a profitability part. She commented maybe the feasibility study would say it's a negative but it seems to her this is something they can for sure take a look at because a lot of other communities have done it and been successful. She feels there is enough to pursue more. This would also be a great opportunity for Tin Fish.

**Matt Dahlien** – Member Dahlien thinks this is good use of some other land that we are getting back from the golf course; he thinks it's good to reclaim some of that land. He is sensitive to other Park Board members who might live within light shot and traffic. Therefore, he thinks a feasibility study of lighting and the disruption of what it might do to the neighborhood is good. He is specifically concerned about the spring when the snow melts; he would hate to see them spend all of this money on the golf course and therefore wouldn't want this to be something that would preclude even a week from opening the golf course because of drainage issues. He informed the Park Board that some other communities have opened skating paths, where the walking path is groomed for ice skaters. He stated this community is very skating centric and this might be something new and different to try here in the mix of sports.

**Mike Miller** – Member Miller indicated he could see all of this happening every day and has three concerns. The noise would be one of them; also, if you are going to light that tubing hill that's going to be nasty for all of the neighbors that face that way and to maximize revenue that's what you are going to do. He could see lighting on the cross country skiing thing because it's going to be hidden by the trees, but the tubing hill is big and wide open and if there are lights on there that's going to really be bad for us neighbors. His other concern is traffic; he doesn't know if anyone has thought about if you are going to see any significant traffic. He knows when he went up to Elm

Creek there were millions of cars and they had an overflow parking lot and you had to take buses from places. It would be a great problem to have revenue wise but it would really be a bad problem for traffic in this area.

He added just as a reference point that he can see the golf course sign that flashes Tin Fish Tin Fish Mahi Mahi Monday.

He asked if there is a possibility or a thought in doing this study of separating the cross country skiing and tubing and looking at them individually instead of all just in one bucket.

He also noted he is concerned if the city would assess the liability risk.

**Dan Gieseke** – Member Gieseke thinks it's great and is something the city could definitely use. He thinks this would be popular. He is very sensitive to the neighbors and feels they need to be cognizant of their wishes.

**Brenda McCormick** – Chair McCormick agrees with everything that has been said. She thinks it's great for winter sports and would be able to use areas in Braemar that they haven't used before and would clean up that hill. She stated the key will be the feasibility study and understand what the noise would be, what the lighting might look like, and also potentially traffic and the hours of operation. Also, she doesn't feel like we have enough outdoor winter sports in Edina. She is very excited about this opportunity and would encourage Parks & Recreation to continue to look at it because it is a really unique opportunity and a really unique place. She indicated the golf course sub-committee had talked about what they could do with those other holes now that they are going down to 18 holes. They wanted to maximize the space and make it more like a park; more open to non-golfers. This is a great opportunity to at least look at it. She noted that she believes to do a feasibility study it needs to go to the City Council.

**Julie Strother** – Member Strother doesn't think a lot of people are aware there are snowshoeing and winter activities available in the Braemar area. She thinks it will be busy with these purposes but will also introduce residents to other activities that are available there.

**Lauren Crist** – Student Member Crist thinks it's exciting and that a lot of young adults and older kids would use the tubing hill if it were open at night with lights. This age group probably wouldn't use it as much during the day because it wouldn't be worth dealing with a bunch of little kids during the day.

**Aanik Lohani** – Student Member Lohani thinks it's a great idea and also likes how it would expand Edina's ski program to another place so they could practice more.

**Greg Good** – Member Good thinks it's a great idea and very interesting and at the same time it's so Edina, it feels over the top. He stated he has this vision of utilizing Braemar with more snowshoeing

and a little more cross country skiing. He noted now they are talking about huge trails, tubing, lights and grooming and that concerns him. Are they trying to plug into an area that truly is residential; it's right on the border of a residential area. He is also concerned with the overall capital costs it could take to get it up and running. He is also concerned they are going to have another situation where they might have an operating deficit if the tubing doesn't really offset it. Another concern of his is it doesn't really fit into the 12 key projects in the Strategic Plan. He is one who would say let's spend money on something that is in the strategic plan and not just the next great idea that someone came up with. He noted that he likes the idea but he doesn't see enough yet that tells him we need to go to the City Council and say we really have to do this. One place they could fit it in is around "Developed Community Driving Master Plans for Parks throughout the System"; however, if it's a true master plan, we actually don't have anything in our Strategic Plan that says we need to do all four winter sports. He stated he thinks there is a wellness factor in all of our strategies and this is a piece of wellness, that's where he stands. He added you can always tie something to something but if they truly look at this and say here are the 12 key projects of the Strategic Plan let's start moving forward, they need to ask themselves if they are comfortable with this because there is always going to be something else to chase and spend money on.

**Eileen McAwley** – Member McAwley thinks it's a great winter outdoor activity and it will be great for families. She does not think they will have any problems bringing in people and revenue.

### **Staff Request**

Approve a motion to begin the feasibility study for the financial feasibility and trail design for a snow tubing and cross country skiing operation at Braemar Park.

Approve the Agreement with the SEH team to proceed with the financial feasibility study and trail design.