

WHY IS THE CITY ASKING SO MUCH MONEY FROM THE COUNTY FOR TREES AT THE GOLF COURSE?

An explanation to the Taxpayers of the City of Fredericksburg

Regarding the issue you've all read about concerning the negotiations between the City and County on the airport and the golf course, we at the City want to take this opportunity for you to hear directly from us. We want to clearly inform you what's at stake here for one simple reason: however this is decided will impact the use of your money - your City taxes.

In spite of the headline above, this issue is **not about trees**. It's about the devaluation of a City asset. Here's how the trees factor in: they are especially important to this particular area of the golf course because their presence maintains major components of quality and safety on the course. In other words, the loss of the trees is only the tip of the iceberg to the damage we believe would be caused.

Background: FAA regulations requires more clearance in runway approaches than is currently available for private jet traffic at the Gillespie County Airport. Part of the obstruction is due to the height of trees in a portion of our golf course at the end of a runway, which became an issue because of the expansion of the runway completed in 2003. The airport must correct this problem or risk the loss of private jet traffic that relies on instrument controls to land.

Airport officials informed the City in April 2009 that to qualify for Instrument Flight Rules jet traffic under FAA regulations, they need us to allow a significant number of our golf course trees to be chopped off as much as 20-plus feet. Within days of being informed of this and through the next few months, we made it a priority to aggressively seek from outside experts the answer to only one question: What will fixing this problem do to the value of the golf course?

What We Did to Reach Agreement: The City hired an expert arborist to value the trees in question. We hired one professional golf course architect and consulted with another to give us a report on what impact the loss of these trees would have on the course, and how much it will cost to make it whole. We also hired an attorney with extensive expertise in FAA requirements hoping to find an alternate solution.

We did these things because any damage to the golf course created by allowing the airport its clearance will have to be paid for by someone. It's our position that the City taxpayers should not have to bear the main burden of paying for the damage.

Our expert consultants detailed three options to restore the course after the chopping of these trees, and they were all over a million dollars. We then started trying to find ways to reduce those estimates to reach an agreement. We looked for several creative ways to mitigate the damage while maintaining the value of the course. In a goodwill effort to resolve this back in November, we lowered the number to \$800,000 and agreed that the City would pay the difference to make the course whole again. The County Commissioners rejected that at their meeting on Monday and instead offered \$400,000 recommended by the report they commissioned. Our options now are to hold firm, take their offer, or continue to work for a compromise amount.

According to our detailed reports from experts who do this for a living, it will cost much more than \$400,000 to bring the golf course back to its original condition after accommodating the airport's need. If we do not receive enough money from the County, then the remainder will come strictly from the taxpayers of the City of Fredericksburg. Since you also make up 45% of the County's tax base, you'll be paying for it twice. You'll pay for it with your County taxes and with your City taxes.

Why don't we just accept the \$400,000, stretch that as far as it will go to fix the golf course and be done with it?

We could do that. We could settle for that amount for the sake of finally resolving this, but we'd be doing so knowing that every expert we hired to advise us told us it will cost more to bring the golf course back to its original condition. It is our position that there could be a permanent loss of value to this asset suffered by the City.

We know that most of the City's residents are not users of the golf course or the airport, but we all benefit indirectly. They are both major economic assets to the community, top notch in every respect, and they are also expensive to maintain.

In this negotiation the City Council has operated with one assignment, that is to represent the best interests of City taxpayers. And we have operated with one goal, which is to keep you from having to pay more than your fair share to fix this problem.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. If you'd like to contact us on this matter you can do so by calling City Hall, or you can email Mayor Hoover and the entire Council at council@fbgtx.org