

Westport Light State Park – Westport Golf LLC Proposal Comments

October 23, 2023- February 5, 2024

Greetings

These are comments on the Westport Light golf proposal presentation at the study session on October 18, 2023.

Westport Light Golf Team, Inc., indicated that golf courses ‘of this type’ were fiscally strong. I am skeptical of this statement. The proponents did not offer any supporting documents or data. I offer two examples which contradict that claim.

First, The National Recreation and Park Association has a different analysis on the health of golf as a recreation in the US:

“Why Has Golf Declined? While McKinsey continued to be optimistic in its updated 1999 report, that optimism ultimately proved to be unfounded. (In 1987, the McKinsey & Company consulting firm published ‘Strategic Plan for the Growth of the Game’, which projected substantial increases in the number of golfers). Since 2003, there has been a consistent annual decline in the number of golf players. There were 6.8 million fewer golfers in 2018 compared to 2003 — a loss of 22 percent. The decline is a function of the high cost of playing, difficulty of courses, and the game’s incompatibility with contemporary lifestyles. (While some courses have experienced a spike during Covid, it remains to be seen if this level of interest remains).”

Here’s a link to the article : <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreationmagazine/2020/july/implications-of-the-rise-and-decline-of-golf/>

Second, we have a comparison within our state in Chambers Bay Golf Course which is a 72 mile drive from Aberdeen. I offer a summary discussion by Pierce County of the history of the golf course from their report: “Chambers Bay Hotel-Resort Information Package” by Don Anderson, Senior Counsel, Office of the Pierce County Executive, Feb 4, 2019.

“Discussion:

In 2007, the County represented that the construction cost was \$21,177,251 . A golf maintenance building and common improvements benefiting the golf course were built with sewer utility funds. This made the true cost of construction \$25 Million: exclusive of the cost of land.

The golf course has never made money. At the end of 2008, the public was told that the first year of Chamber's Bay operations resulted in a profit of \$45,212. This depiction did not accurately reflect the course operations. The golf course's 2008 financial statement represented a positive cash flow in that amount because a one-time \$930,000 advance from the USGA was booked as 2008 revenue while the associated costs were booked in 2009. By 2011 the accumulated negative cash flow reached \$3,433,175. At the end of 2011 a retroactive "in lieu of maintenance" payment of \$3,431,250 was made by the sewer utility to the golf course.

The County's investment in the Chambers Bay Golf Course is now nearly \$40 Million, exclusive of land. . . After accounting for debt reduction, golf course operations have lost an average of \$1 Million a year. Unattributed indirect expenses such as depreciation and administrative overhead make the true loss larger.” End of quoted material. Here’s the link to the document:

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/79124/Council-information-packet>
In 2019, Pierce County entered into a lease agreement with a developer to build a resort hotel, event center and restaurant. In 2023, the resort was discontinued due to lack of an ability to secure financing.

<https://www.piercecountywa.gov/4858/Chambers-Bay-Resort>

If Chambers Bay golf course loses \$1M per year, how can proponents indicate that links style courses are doing financially well? I'd like to see the data to support this claim.

I hope this is informative and thank you for your consideration of these comments. ¹

Hello,

I am concerned this project, although of some short term economic gains, will be a disaster for the long term. That is, climate change is a reality and will affect a development so close to the rising sea.

Of course, the pleasure of walking the cement path in that area will be greatly diminished by flying golf balls and any structures or buildings taking over open "wild and wonderful" space.

Thank you for considering these concerns. (I have written more details comments awhile ago now. ²

Greetings:

I am writing regarding commissioner comments regarding the October 18, 2023 Parks Commissioners work session meeting. At this meeting the golf course proponents gave a sales presentation on the Westport Light State Park golf course proposal and the outgoing Commissioner also gave a speech regarding his support.

The Commissioner stated that he hoped that most of the other Commissioners agreed with his sentiment that the golf course would be a significant boon—transformative—to the region's economy. The Commissioner stated some statistics while he also said he didn't verify them. You can view the Commissioner's statement at the recording here: <https://youtu.be/X5lwqLdxTzQ?feature=shared>. The Commissioner speech begins at 2 hours 59 minutes. The entire proponent presentation begins at 2 hours 4 minutes.

The Commissioner stated that unemployment in Grays Harbor County (GHC) "was at one time knocking on 12%, and I don't know exactly where it is today, but I can promise you it's much

higher than the state-wide average." The Commissioner also stated that "I do know the average income level is at \$43,000 per year". and that the region had not recovered after a number of historic events. My research indicates these statements are only partly true.

2009-2010 unemployment, the worst years of The Great Recession in Washington, did reach 13.3%. Other rural counties also ranged from 8-15% while urban counties ranged 6-9%, based on my review. The state average was 9.2%, 4 points lower than GHC. The historical mapping referenced here can reveal many statistics:

Washington State Employment Security Department

<https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/county-unemployment-map>

Today, September unemployment is low at 4.9% for GHC. It is not "much higher" than the state-wide average. King County's current unemployment is 3.6%, which is only 1.3 points lower than GHC. Current monthly unemployment reporting can be found here:

<https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/monthly-employment-report>

Rural counties tend to have higher unemployment than urban counties for obvious reasons.

State median income is \$82,000. GHC is \$53,000. Rural counties generally have lower incomes than urban counties, again for obvious reasons. Go to the census.gov site:

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/piercecountywashington,pacificcountywashington,kittitascountywashington,grantcountywashington,graysharborcountywashington,WA/VET605221>

I would suggest that topics like unemployment and income deserve comprehensive evaluation.

I would ask the Commissioners to please perform due diligence in your work.

cc: Governor Inslee's Office ³

Good morning

Hope this message finds you well. I have been almost a year and was curious to know what's the status on the golf course. Any update would be greatly appreciated. Thanks ⁴

This just came to my attention. We visit the area at least a few times a year and walk the area every chance we are near the coast. I am heart broken that this is being considered and progressing as far as it is. As far as my family is concerned... this is a breach of trust with the

public. This area should be a protected ecosystem. Not a playground for the wealthy.⁵

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I am commenting in opposition to the proposed golf course at Westport Light State Park. My wife and I live in Alaska and recently purchased a lot on Forest Street in Westport. We plan to build a small home there so we can spend time with our daughter, her husband, and our two Grandsons who live nearby. The park as it exists today is a wonderful asset. When we are there we enjoy walking the trails together. The loss of this undeveloped space would be unfortunate in my view.⁷