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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Parks and Recreation Commissioners  
FROM: Wayne E. Gross, Director  
RE: Disc Golf Recommendation  
DATE: May 14, 2009

The purpose of this memorandum is to give you my thoughts and a recommendation regarding the proposal for a disc golf course in Leddy Park.

However, I first want to summarize the public input we received at the April 28 Public Hearing and the subsequent comments that the Department has received since this meeting. At the Public Hearing, a total of 60 people spoke with 38 opposing the project and 22 supporting it. Since the meeting, an additional 37 comments have been made via email with 25 supporting the project, six opposed and six providing information only without taking a position. Clearly there is great interest in this project with strongly held views on both sides of the issue.

Since the proposal from the BTown Disc Golf Club was first received we have heard from many Burlington residents and residents of nearby communities that a disc golf course in Burlington would be very popular and would receive considerable use as it would be far more convenient than the course in Waterbury which is currently the closest one to Burlington. I would agree that having a course in Burlington would be desirable as I believe disc golf is an enjoyable recreation activity that would benefit many residents. The question that needs to be answered is the appropriateness of such a course in Leddy Park.

The following is my view of the various issues that have been raised by members of the public and Department staff regarding the disc golf proposal:

- Alcohol Use – It is permissible to consume alcohol in Leddy Park and currently a variety of park users do drink generally after participating in an activity such as softball, hockey or as just part of a picnic. Based upon statements made by disc golfers and others, it is likely that some golfers would drink beer while playing

the course but most of this activity would more than likely take place in parking lots after playing. My belief is that the additional alcohol use in the park by disc golfers would not create a significant problem and should not be viewed as a major obstacle to allowing a course to operate in the park.

- Access to Bathrooms – Concern was expressed that there were inadequate bathroom facilities to accommodate the disc golf users. Leddy Park has public bathrooms within the Ice Arena and in a separate building near the tennis courts. The Arena is open 47 weeks of the year from early morning till late at night and would be available at nearly all the times the course would be used. The other bathroom facility is located in a convenient area and is open from mid-May thru early October. This facility would provide a second option during what would be the peak use time for the course. Leddy Park is better equipped to meet this need than most parks and I feel that access to bathroom facilities is not a reason to prohibit the disc golf course.
- Impact of Traffic - Estimates of up to 1000 disc golf players per week have been made for a course at Leddy Park. This is an average of 143 players per day with usage likely to be higher on weekends than weekdays. While this is a significant number of users, and a much higher number than I believe we expected when the project was first approved, the park does have adequate infrastructure to accommodate the number of vehicles that would use the roadway and parking lots. The park often has many more users during hockey tournaments and soccer games than the estimated number of daily users of the disc golf course. The main parking lot near the Arena can accommodate 300 vehicles by itself. I do agree that speeding on Leddy Park Road is currently an issue and that there is an existing conflict with pedestrians and vehicles on this narrow roadway. This situation would become somewhat more problematic with more users. Some degree of traffic calming could be implemented to mitigate part of this situation. Regardless, I believe that traffic in the park would increase to some degree but again, I do not feel this is a significant problem that should preclude creating a disc golf course.
- Course Layout and Its Impact on Private Property and Other Park Uses - I do believe that holes 12, 13, and 14 as proposed are too close to private property on the south side of the park. While it is arguable as to whether this constitutes an actual safety hazard, I believe a greater buffer should be established between any of the fairways and private property. Holes 1, 2, and 3 were designed for an area that contains highly sandy and erosive soils. There are already erosion problems in this area from existing uses and these holes should be relocated to other areas of the park if the course is to be constructed. The course would have some impact on the use of some of the walking trails within the park. While the holes generally do not cross these trails, their use would change the atmosphere due to the presence of more users being near the trails. The solitude that many people currently enjoy would be disrupted at times. Some of these issues could be at

least partially mitigated by course redesign, but the presence of more people in the park would negatively affect some existing park uses.

- Impact on the Park's Natural Environment - This issue is the one that clearly is of the biggest concern to most of the course opponents. The park contains approximately 40 acres of woodlands and the disc golf course is proposed to be built entirely within the wooded area of the park. While the woodlands do have great appeal to many people, at least 22 acres of the woods are actually a pine plantation that was planted in 1942 as opposed to being truly a "natural area". This may be more of a technicality but it is important to know that a good portion of the woods has been altered in the past with logging and other activities which have somewhat diminished their natural characteristics. To accommodate the course, most of the trees within a proposed fairway would have to be cleared. While most of the trees to be removed would be three inch diameter or less, this clearing significantly alters the appearance of the site. With an estimate of 1000 players a week, I believe that there would be significant soil compaction in most of the course area and that this would lead to root compaction and plant death and the spread of non-native invasive species. Again, the number of likely users is far greater than I first imagined and would have more impact on the site than I first believed. It is also likely that areas outside the fairway would also be subject to compaction and other trees would be subject to injury due to the impact of discs. I believe that these impacts are significant and would clearly alter the character of the woodlands.
- Economic, Recreation and Health Benefits – These issues were not studied by the Working Group and there is no data available to address them in an objective way. I do think that clearly disc golf is an activity that does have health and recreation benefits as it provides an avenue for exercise for all ages in a pleasant outdoor setting that many people would enjoy. There would also undoubtedly be some economic benefits of having the course in Leddy Park but there is no way to measure this without considerable research. There clearly would be a monetary savings to the disc golf players in Burlington who would choose the Leddy Park course and no longer drive to Waterbury.

Leddy Park is a "City Park" under Burlington's park classification system and thus is designed to serve the various recreational needs of the residents from throughout the City. It clearly has a number of developed recreational facilities, many of which were built after clearing wooded areas of the park property. The remaining wooded areas of the park have an extensive trail system that is obviously heavily used and enjoyed by many people who live nearby and in other parts of the City. Given the absence of a master plan for Leddy Park or any existing statement of philosophy regarding the appropriate use of the remaining woodlands, there is no guidance available to the Commission to answer this fundamental question about the future use of this space.

The BTown Disc Golf Club has indicated a willingness to work with all parties and develop a new course design to fit within an area of the park that is determined to

acceptable for development. The exact size of the course and number of holes would be determined after this process. I would agree this would be a fair and reasonable approach if an area were determined to be appropriate for this type of development. However, after carefully considering this matter, my view is that the development of the disc golf course, regardless of size and exact location, would have a significant adverse impact on the woodlands of Leddy Park. Given the strong public support for preserving the natural qualities of these woodlands, I recommend that a disc golf course not be built in Leddy Park. While I do believe that having a course in Burlington would be an asset to the City, it does not have to be in Leddy Park and in my view should not be constructed here. With that being said, I am not prepared to suggest any alternative locations for a disc golf course at this time. There may in fact not be a suitable location within an existing city park. This would require considerable further study and should include other lands in the city as well as park sites. I hope this information is useful to you as you deliberate this important policy question.