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Editorial: Regents must weigh real value of golf site

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If it were just about golfers, greens and saving water, it might be a much easier decision.

But it's not. And because it's not, the University of New Mexico Board of Regents needs to be very careful about what it decides to do with and to the UNM North Golf Course. The board is considering a big chunk of the course as the site for a new retirement community.

For starters, the board needs to expand its reservoir of golf course advisers well beyond the university administration and even beyond UNM as a whole.

On this issue - as with UNM's recent presidential search - the board would be wise to make its decision by making the process transparent and publicly loaded from the get-go.

Students, faculty and staff should be polled for their wishes. So should the neighborhood, the golfers who patronize the course and the many other users from all around town who enjoy it on a daily or even occasional basis.

The reason for all of this is simple: There are parts of UNM's constituency that might never forgive the regents for trashing one of the remaining great green spaces in the city - and certainly the most spectacular spaces in the university. As with historical or architecturally significant buildings, the North Golf Course should be viewed as a landmark.

Indeed, trying to develop the golf course could easily become one of the worst knock-down-drag-out battles in the university's history.

The regents, apparently under pressure to develop another revenue stream for the university, are thinking about building a retirement community on some two-thirds of the 80-acre golf course. The project would favor UNM alumni and faculty, and projections suggest it could generate \$2 million to \$3 million per year for UNM.

That's not coffee change, but it's also true that the golf course property is not the only piece of property that UNM could use to generate such cash. The fact is UNM has many other properties in the same general area that might be ideally suited for a retirement community.

Critics can legitimately ask: Why mess with the beautiful golf course, when there are other options?

The truth is the golf course's value - which one development opponent puts at about \$50 million - might be much greater for the good will and positive public relations it brings the university than as a cash-generator.

Golfing aside, there's the neighborhood to consider. Not that retirement centers are a bad thing, but compared with the relatively natural qualities of the North Golf Course, it's really no contest.

Tracy Venturi
WelcomeHomeABQ.com
Click the Map to find a Home

Neighborhoods on map: Rio Rancho, Westside, North Valley, Southwest, Downtown UNM, Far Northeast, Northeast Heights, Kirtland AFB/Sandia Labs, Placitas/Bernalillo, Corralitos.

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The golf course is home to dedicated golfers, walkers, joggers, competitive runners and wildlife - including several nesting hawks. It's a place for many to go to find relief from the urban landscape and its many headaches.

It has been argued that UNM is not in the golf, nature or exercise business. It is an institution of higher learning and should do what it needs to do to enhance its educational mission.

But it is a public university, and part of that mission is public service.

Before the regents embark on any more golf course development projects, they should carefully consider how the North Golf Course serves the public.

Swapping all of that for a retirement community generating a few million dollars per year sounds intuitively like a very bad deal.

Golf Course

Find a Local Golf Course, Driving Range, Miniature & Resort Golfing.

Golf.YellowPages.com/Albuquerque

The Club at Black Rock

Award-winning 36-hole golf club located on Lake Coeur d'Alene

www.BlackRockIdaho.com

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Posted by **aezekiel** on **October 19, 2007 at 4:18 p.m.** ([Suggest removal](#))

As usual, the Trib has it right! But you know there is more to this story. Actually, \$1-2 million a year IS pocket change in UNM's budget, now on the order of \$1.75 Billion annually. Potential losses in good will to alums, retired faculty, etc. from paving over the golf course should dwarf that figure.

UNM hasn't been luminary in its real estate efforts in the past. I'm not sure if the South Campus Technology Park is break-even yet or not. But it's always worth a look to see who stand to benefit. Follow the money is the old saying.

Take a look at CCRC, the so-called retirement community experts, the UNM regents want to bring in to develop this project. A quick scan of their own website suggests that a large number of their successes are either still in development or very new. UNM is rumored to plan to retain ownership of the site and facilities, leaving the developer free to walk away from a failure. Has anyone (else) done a study to see if there is a market here for this development?

It's a company from Tennessee with strong Louisiana ties. Charles (Buddy) Roemer III, former Governor of Louisiana, is Chairman of the Board and Charles (Chas) Roemer IV is Sr. Vice President. But most significant is board member Joseph C. Canizaro, President and CEO of Columbus Properties in New Orleans. He's a major player in New Orleans reconstruction, a major Bush donor and recently merited pieces in the New York Times ("A Mogul Who Would Rebuild New Orleans" <[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/29/busine...>](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/29/busine...)) and The Nation ("Who is killing New Orleans" <[http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060410/da...>](http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060410/da...)). None of his press gives me warm fuzzies!

Posted by **Virginia** on **October 20, 2007 at 1:43 p.m.** ([Suggest removal](#))

Why not compromise. Change the golf course to a 9 hole course, or a par 3 course. It is a short course anyway. Reduce the size of the retirement buildings so the 2 mile running track would stay and the hawks could stay. We can have the best of both worlds.

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