

\$20.77 MILLION IN PUBLIC FINANCING

SEP 14 2005

# Pierce County to fund golf course

**Members of the Pierce County Council vote 6-1 to use public money to build a golf course in University Place. Critics say it should be a private project.**

**BY AARON CORVIN**  
The News Tribune

The Pierce County Council on Tuesday finally blessed the construction of a planned elite golf course in University Place after hearing dueling descriptions of the project as either a boon or a boondoggle.

The council voted 6-1 to borrow \$20.77 million to help build a 250-acre, 18-hole Scottish links-style course at the county-owned Chambers Creek Properties.

Of the \$20.77 million the county will borrow, the actual cost to construct the golf course is \$19,245,000. That leaves the rest of the money to repay a loan and to pay for the cost of issuing the bonds.

The council's vote clears the way for the county to begin building the project. It also caps more than a year's worth of budget wrangling that began when Coun-

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# GOLF COURSE

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ty Executive John Ladenburg proposed the project in February 2004.

Addressing the council Tuesday, Ladenburg said the golf course marks the beginning of the transformation of the former gravel pit that is Chambers Creek Properties into a public gem.

"We're starting down the road of finally doing something with the master plan," he said.

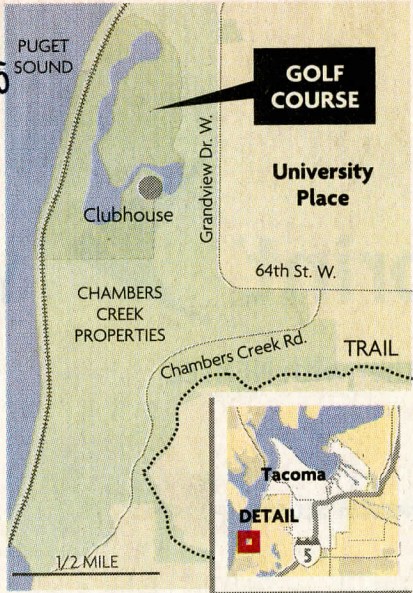
Critics disagreed, saying the project would have been in better hands had the county sought to privately fund it.

County resident Ken Paulson said voters will hold council members accountable for how they voted on the golf course.

"I really think there's going to be bumps in the road," he said of the project.

The county plans to announce the company that will get the contract to build the golf course as soon as today.

Beginning in October, the contractor will have a year to build the golf course. By the end of April 2007, the county hopes to have the grass grown in. It plans



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to open the course for play in May 2007.

"Water the grass, fertilize the grass, mow the grass, kill the weeds," Tony Tip-ton, county project manager, said of the final process leading to opening day. "It's almost like if you planted your yard, ex-

cept it's a 250-acre yard."

Voting "yes" to build the golf course were: Council members Shawn Bunney (R-Lake Tapps), Roger Bush (R-Graham), Barbara Gelman (D-Tacoma), Terry Lee (R-Gig Harbor), Calvin Goings (D-Puyallup) and Tim Farrell (D-Tacoma).

Casting the lone "no" vote was Councilman Dick Muri (R-Steilacoom), who has opposed publicly financing the project from its inception.

"I hope it works," Muri said.

Farrell said the financing package to build the golf course is a solid one.

"It's not a monorail bonding package," he said, referring to the embattled transit project in Seattle.

Gelman said revenue from the project will be invested in other park projects at the site that will benefit the public for years.

"It's going to provide something for future generations that they'll enjoy for years," she said.

In approving the ordinance that borrows the construction funds, the council issued 30-year bonds and pledged golf course and sewer revenues, and the county's general fund, which is filled with property and sales tax revenues, to

pay off the debt.

It also approved another ordinance that includes a back-up plan to lease or sell golf course property or land around it for housing developments if the course fails to make enough money to cover expenses.

Over 30 years, the county expects to pay a total of \$38.01 million in principal and interest to pay off the debt.

All told, the golf course could cost as much as \$21,945,000 - \$19,245,000 to build the golf course, plus \$2.7 million for startup costs and trail improvements.

In the early 1990s, the county used its sewer utility fund to buy the former gravel mine that is Chambers Creek Properties. The golf course, which is being designed by architect Robert Trent Jones II, is intended to rejuvenate the scarred landscape, enable expansion of the county's wastewater treatment facilities, generate revenues to build other park projects envisioned in the master plan for the area and pump up the local economy.

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