

Qualicum Beach, September 11, 2025

Annette Hester

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Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

I am writing with respect to the proposed purchase of the Eaglecrest Golf Course lands. While I recognize the potential benefits this purchase may offer, there remain important questions and concerns that deserve full and transparent answers before any final decision is taken.

Public Consultation and Transparency

- **Open Houses:** Early communications mentioned multiple open houses, yet only one (September 9) has been scheduled. Given the scale of this decision, one event is insufficient to reach the community.
- **Survey Results:** Residents have been encouraged to complete a survey, but there is no commitment to results being published prior to Council's decision. Without transparency, the consultation risks appearing symbolic rather than substantive.
- **Meetings with Groups:** The Town's website notes that several groups were consulted in August. However, no list of those groups or a summary of their positions has been published. Sharing this information would allow residents to understand the breadth of input received and the outcomes of these consultations.

Decision-Making Process

- **Timeline:** With the November 1 deadline for due diligence, there is a risk that public feedback and technical assessments will be rushed. Will all reports and results be completed and made public before Council commits to this purchase?
- **Referendum:** In past cases, such as the pool expansion, the Town held a referendum. Why is such a significant acquisition not being put to the same democratic test as past projects?

Financial Considerations

- **Economic Risk:** The acquisition cost of \$8.5 million, even if partially offset by land sales, comes at a time when the economy is projected to cool. What analysis has been done of the implications of a market downturn on the Town's finances, and when will it be released to the public?
- **Reliance on Land Sales:** The model depends on selling portions of the property or other Town-owned land. What is the contingency plan if the real estate market is weak? Will taxpayers be asked to fill the gap?

- **Parkland Maintenance:** The plan would add a substantial amount of new parkland. This will inevitably increase demands on Town crews, particularly for fire prevention and trail maintenance. What are the projected costs and staffing implications?
- **Golf Course Operations:** Once reconfigured to nine holes, what contingency plans exist if demand for golf declines due to an economic downturn? Will the Town subsidize operations if revenues fall short?
- **Municipal Development Risk:** The Town proposes to act as "initial developer" to subdivide and sell portions of the property. Has Council obtained independent legal and insurance advice regarding the Town's potential liability and obligations in this role? What comparable municipal development projects have staff researched, and what lessons learned from other communities will guide this decision? Acting as developer introduces risks municipalities don't typically assume, potentially exposing taxpayers to market losses and legal liabilities.

Community Need and Benefit

- **Demand for Parkland:** Has the Town established, with data, that there is a shortage of parkland?
- **Beneficiaries:** Who stands to benefit most — current golfers, nearby homeowners, or the broader community? How will this purchase improve the quality of life for Qualicum Beach residents?
- **Risk Assessment and Exit Strategy:** Has the Town completed a comprehensive risk assessment, and if so, when will it be made public? Finally, what exit strategy or adaptive plan is in place should the golf course or parkland not prove viable in the long term?

Major decisions, whether personal or communal, always come with choices.

None of the material provided by the Town discusses what will not be funded should this land purchase be completed. This applies both to capital projects and to the allocation of staff's time and other resources. At a minimum, residents deserve a clear vision and explanation for a purchase of this magnitude.

In the interest of good governance and community trust, I urge Council to provide clear answers to these questions, to publish all consultation results in advance of any decision, and to consider whether a referendum is appropriate given the magnitude and long-term implications of this purchase.

Respectfully,

Annette Hester
Qualicum Beach Resident