September 15, 2019

Mr Nick Wimbush
Chair
North East Link Project Inquiry and Advisory Committee

Dear Mr Wimbush,

RE: TABLE DOCUMENTS 378a and 378b

Although I appreciate the opportunity to provide this feedback I would like to state how disappointing it is to be given such a short timeframe in which to respond to the Otium Planning Group Report and Golf Australia’s response to the report, noting the respective dates of their submissions. In fact, the question should be addressed as to why the Otium Report commissioned by North East Link Authority was not provided as a document at the beginning of the Panel Hearing to be considered alongside the seven options contained in North East Link Project Bulleen Park Area Sports and Recreation Options Assessment.

It is particularly disappointing that Golf Australia has supported Option 4 of the New Golf Facility Concept Design without any consultation with the users of Freeway Golf Course. It appears that their reference point for their decision is based on their need to deliver on their recently developed National Facilities Plan throughout Australia regardless of the golfing needs of the locality.

Golf Australia acknowledges that Freeway Golf Course is “one of the North East Melbourne’s public golf facility market leaders” which services “a golf region experiencing a 1.4% growth in membership”. This statement supports the contention that an 18-hole golf facility at Freeway Golf Course is well regarded, highly utilised and needed in this region contrary to Golf Australia’s recommendation in their letter.

Golf Australia has not provided any evidence that supports/suggests there is a lack of opportunity or demand from social golfers to reduce Freeway Golf Course to a 9 or 12-hole course to facilitate social golfers playing golf at this course. It defies logic to contemplate reducing an existing 18-hole golf course to a 9 or 12-hole golf course to facilitate 9-hole social players when this is already available and accommodated at both the 1st and 10th tees.

Furthermore, there has not been a push from golfers or the broader community to locate a mini golf course or driving range at Freeway. It should be noted that these facilities are located in this region at nearby Yarra Bend Park and Bulleen Driving Range.
The Otium Report focusses on an entertainment experience for families participating in a ‘theme park’ environment rather than the real experience of playing golf as a sport in a peaceful environment.

The comparison with Burnley 9-hole Golf Course does not stack up financially, environmentally, facility-wise and actual golfing experience. Visitation to this course is supported by its inner city residential location whereas Freeway Golf Course is a destination golf course for all golfers from across Melbourne.

The concepts put forward in the Otium Report under their Option 2 scenarios may be appropriate in newly developed locations or holiday destinations such as Curlewis Golf Courses that support such leisure seeking activities. To impose these concepts on a fully functioning, economically viable, well regarded public 18-hole golf course in this region begs the question whose best interests are being served by this recommendation given the huge and quantifiable support of golfers for Freeway Golf Course in its present configuration.

In fact, these scenarios put forward can only be viewed as disadvantaging and undermining the integrity of a publicly available competition standard 18-hole golf course at Freeway to accommodate other uses on the land as an easy appeasement to other interests.

Neither the Otium Report nor Golf Australia have demonstrated that the demand or need for traditional public golf courses will diminish into the future. Private golf clubs do not provide the opportunity for public golfers to play at their courses. By reducing the number of traditional public golf courses in the future, particularly 18-hole courses, in favour of ‘family friendly golf facility concepts’ has the potential to downgrade golf as a sport in Australia. It should be noted that land lost to other uses is land never able to be reclaimed again.

Finally, the financial operation model comparison between an 18-hole golf course and the new family friendly golf facility concept outlined in the Otium Report on page 19 acknowledges both options generate an average operational profit with the new family friendly golf facility concept generating more revenue but is more expensive to run. Hardly a glowing financial endorsement!

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to comment on these documents with proposals we totally do not support.

Yours sincerely,

JUDITH VOCE
PRESIDENT