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my Friday, November 21, 2014

# Austin American Statesman

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## Austin City Council postpones vote on Decker Lake golf course

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Posted: 8:55 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014



By [Lilly Rockwell](#) - American-Statesman Staff

The Austin City Council postponed a vote until December on whether to build two golf courses at a park in East Austin following several hours of tense testimony Thursday and discussion over how much water the golf course would use.

The council was considering a deal that would [allow a developer to build two 18-hole "PGA Tour quality" golf courses](#) on 735 acres at Walter E. Long Metropolitan Park. Through a concession agreement, which works like a lease, Decker Lake Golf LLC would build the \$30 million golf project on city-owned land and give the city a cut of its revenue. The city's take is projected at \$4 million over 10 years.

But the developer's plans stalled after the council heard testimony from Greg Meszaros, the head of the Austin Water Utility, who told the council he had "anxiety" over installing a golf course during a major drought.

"This is by far the worst drought we've ever faced," Meszaros said. He

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said the utility would like to use nearby Lake Long as a backup water source for the city, and it's risky to build a golf course at a time when the city's water use is being scrutinized by entities such as the Lower Colorado River Authority, which manages the water supply in the Central Texas area.

The golf course developers had earlier told the council that they would use reclaimed water and aim for "water neutrality," essentially promising that even with this new course, the city wouldn't use more water for all its golf courses combined.

But Meszaros said this was news to him. "That's the first I heard today that they were proposing this to be a water-neutral development," Meszaros said, adding that it's not in the contract.

Meszaros' testimony provoked one of the night's biggest moments of friction when Mayor Lee Leffingwell, who supports the golf course development, sharply criticized his testimony.

Leffingwell said his "attitude" was "counter to the interest of the city of Austin."

Several hisses would be heard from the audience in reaction to the mayor's comment, and later Council Member Mike Martinez apologized to Meszaros for his colleague's comments.

"I am going to apologize to you for the lack of the respect and decorum that was shown to you," Martinez said.

Martinez added that he was struggling over whether to approve the golf course because many neighbors testified about the need to have more amenities in East Austin, believing that a golf course would carry with it more development.

Council Member Kathie Tovo said she believes "this area deserves a really fine park and ought to have had it a long time ago."

But she said the meeting had failed to convince her that the golf course was the best way to achieve it.

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Another blow to East Austin. Why is it okay to water golf courses in the rest of Austin, but not East Austin? East Austin is a minority community that just got kicked in the teeth again by Austin proper. There is only one rational solution, stop watering all recreational properties in the PARD system. If you cannot water East, you should not be able to water south, central or west.

10:11 p.m. Nov. 20, 2014

**StacySuits**[Report](#)

This needs to be postponed into 2015. The new 10-1 council needs to deal with this issue, 6 out of 7 of the current city council will not be in office come January 1st.

11:01 p.m. Nov. 20, 2014

**andrew\_bucknall**[Report](#)

East Austin does not have a golf course crisis. We have several courses in east Austin all of which are watered. We do share in a water crisis with the entire city of Austin. Colony loop has some specific needs which do need to be addressed. There has been disparate funding for park infrastructure for decades. A golf course diverting water from our emergency water supply is not a responsible way to address the unique needs of the area which include crime abatement, economic development, basic services, affordability and transportation.

7:19 a.m. Nov. 21, 2014



**SameStory**

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It was good to see the Council stand up a bit last night. There is so much good that can be done with this parkland to sincerely uplift the community AND connect it with the rest of the city. Thank you, Brian Rodgers of ChangeAustin.org, for alerting all of Austin and connecting us.

7:32 a.m. Nov. 21, 2014



**LunarMan**

[Report](#)

Of all the problems faced by the COA, a lack of golf courses is not on the list.

10:20 a.m. Nov. 21, 2014

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