

Sell golf course, buy park

Steadman's plan for land panned by main opponents

By **CHERYL JAHN**

Free Press staff writer

Ruby Park, nearly 20 acres of land located at the intersection of Highways 16 and 97, is becoming the defining factor in the race for mayor.

Very early in the campaigning frenzy, the future of the property came to the fore. Mayoral candidate Tom Steadman announced he had "a plan" to have the city buy the property — a plan which he would expand on at a later date.

Competitor Don Bassermann, at the other end of the spectrum, says he wants nothing to do with any purchase of Ruby Park. Candidate Colin Kinsley has taken the middle ground, saying he would like to see the property left as park land, but as more tourism-oriented park land than it currently is.

Mr. Steadman has announced his plan which hinges on the sale of the Pine Valley golf course, a piece of property he feels is not meeting its full potential.

"First, [the city] would have to find an alternative location for a par-three golf course, possibly along the Fraser River in the Cowart Road area, and then sell the Pine Valley golf course," explains Mr. Steadman.

That property has the



Bassermann



Steadman



Kinsley

potential of generating \$16 million. Once sold, the proceeds would be used to buy Ruby Park, at an estimated purchase price of up to \$7 million. The city would have to join in on the auction alongside the two companies which have expressed an interest in bidding on the B.C. Lands property.

But in addition, he adds, some of that money could be spent on the construction of a second municipal golf course in another area of town, either in the Hart or the Blackburn areas.

"In a nutshell, the plan involves more than doubling the city's green space, getting the inherent value of the Pine Valley property, the city would continue to own golf courses, maintaining reasonable rates for golfers, and it would put some \$3 to \$5 million in the city's till."

The purchase of Ruby park would buy the city time, says Mr. Steadman; time to assess what the people of Prince George really want done with that 17 acres.

"Ruby Park is a ticking clock. We need the time to decide what Prince Georgians want done with that property, whether they want it preserved for recreational uses or developed," concludes Mr. Steadman.

What would be the point, ask both Mr. Bassermann and Mr. Kinsley.

"Why would you sell off one golf course to buy another golf course when you don't have to?" asks Mr. Bassermann. That's not to say he disagrees with the proposal to build an alternate Pine Valley golf course, however, but that it should be left to the private sector to do it.

"And if we built an alternative to Pine Valley, it would have to be in a comparable location within the Bowl area, and at a comparable cost."

He adds the city doesn't need to buy the property to "buy time," as the developer would have to come to city council for re-zoning.

"It would come down to a re-zoning application. The chips would fall where they may, but I feel I could exert some influence in that regard."

That's Colin Kinsley's sentiment as well.

"It really is unnecessary to buy Ruby Park to stop its development. We already have the control over its re-zoning."

Mr. Kinsley doesn't see this as a very strong business plan.

"What I'm wondering is this: where are we going to get the money to, first, build the alternate golf course to replace Pine Valley and then, second, buy Ruby Park?"

If he plans to get a loan to buy it, says Mr. Kinsley, he would need consent from the electorate, then manage a council-approved bylaw before the city to borrow any money.

"It sounds to me like he's painted himself into a corner on this issue, and it does show his inexperience in the ways of municipal government."

But, for Mr. Steadman, he sees the city's control as tenuous at best on this issue.

"Despite what Lois Boone says, it just wouldn't be wise for the city to go loggerheads with the province on this issue."

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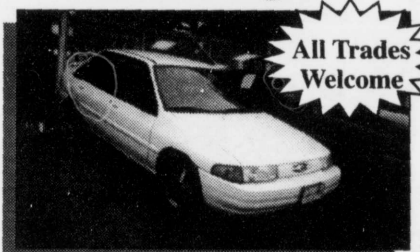
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