

Honorable Mayor Sam Liccardo, and Members of the San José City Council
200 E. Santa Clara Street, San José, CA 95113
via email, sent Nov. 24, 2015

re: Riparian setbacks and the Los Lagos Golf Course

Dear Mayor Liccardo and Councilmembers,

In response to questions from the Council last Tuesday on agenda item 5.1 (city-owned golf courses), Tom Isaak of Courseco said that he could make the golf operations at Los Lagos more profitable if he could “invade the riparian area” so as to add two more strokes of par to the course. A couple moments later, Mr. Isaak said that he was just joking about invading, and Councilmember Oliverio and Staff then discussed the city’s riparian setback policy.

I’m writing to provide some background. In 1990, the City empaneled a group of citizens, planners, consultants and staff to serve on “the Coyote Creek Long Range Land Utilization Task Force”. The issue of the then-future golf course relative to the riparian habitat was very thoroughly discussed over numerous sessions. The issue ended up becoming so contentious that then-director Bob Overstreet had to personally staff the meetings: environmentalists advocated for preserving and enhancing a broad riparian corridor in the area while golf enthusiasts wanted to cut down trees so that golf could be played back and forth across the creek channel. Staff insisted on planning for the golf course to be directly in the riparian areas, whereas the citizens on the taskforce collected information from a range of resources and ended up creating what became the prototype for the city’s Riparian Corridor Setback Policy while still accommodating for golf alongside the creek. (I could dig through my old notes: I believe the citizen’s version even allowed sufficient acreage for a full-par golf course up one side of the creek and back down the other, although it may have required an undercrossing to a parking lot and driving-range on the south side of Capitol Expwy.) The taskforce ended up reporting out with two distinct reports and visions – citizens’ and staff’s – and the Planning Commission and City Council chose the citizens’ version with the riparian setbacks.

I give you this background so that you can alert the golf operator that it would again be contentious if “invading” the riparian corridor were ever seriously considered. The City has reaffirmed (and strengthened) its riparian setback policy in the adopted Envision 2040 General Plan Update, and has prioritized formalizing the policy as city ordinance. It would not be appropriate for the City to then give a waiver for its own golf course and have to tell developers to “do as we say, not as we do.”

I would be pleased to provide more background about the Coyote Creek taskforce and the history of the riparian policy.

Lawrence Ames
member, San José Coyote Creek Long Range Land Utilization Task Force (1990)

cc: Norberto Dueñas, San José City Manager
Harry Freitas, Director of Planning, Building and Code Enforcement
Angel Rios, Director of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services
San José Riparian Advocates
Committee for Green Foothills
Dave Poeschel, Sierra Club