



# City of East Providence

## Department of Planning and Economic Development

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MAYOR

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### Memorandum

**Date: May 8, 2024**

**To:** East Providence Planning Board

**From:** East Providence Department of Planning and Economic Development

**Re:** Advisory recommendation on the consistency of the proposed operation of a 9-hole public golf course with the 2010-2015 Comprehensive Plan and Subdivision and Land Development Review Regulations for a portion of that parcel designated as Map 107, Block 15, Parcel 1 and designated as Zoning Waterfront Sub-district Metacomet.

**Applicant:** Marshall Properties, Inc.

**Parcels:** Assessor's Map 107, Block 15, Parcel 1

**Zoning:** Metacomet Sub-district

### I. INTRODUCTION

Marshall Properties has submitted an application to the East Providence Waterfront Commission seeking approvals to begin operating its re-designed 9-hole public golf course located at 500 Veteran's Memorial Parkway. The proposed golf course represents the first phase of the development. As shown below, additional development phases will constitute that portion of the development that will include both commercial and residential development on the northern, upland portion of the property. These later development phases (including Phase 1A – the proposed golf course maintenance building) will be addressed in review processes that are currently underway and that are separate and apart from this phase of the development. *This consistency review recommendation therefore, is restricted only to the golf course use as it will initially operate.*

As indicated on the applicant’s submission entitled, “Golf Course Supplemental Submission” dated 4/18/24, proposed project phasing is as follows:

<b>Phase #</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Applicant’s Estimated Construction Schedule</b>	<b>Scheduled Date of Planning Board consideration</b>
<i>1</i>	<i>9 hole public golf course</i>	<i>Summer 2024</i>	<i>5/13/24</i>
1A	Golf course maintenance building and related site improvements along Fort St.	Fall 2024	6/10/24
2	Commercial portion and limited residential portions of development	Years 1-5 following Waterfront Commission approval	6/10/24
3	Remaining residential portions of development	Years 5-10 following Waterfront Commission approval	6/10/24

**The Planning Board’s role in this development review process is that of offering an advisory recommendation to the DRC and the Waterfront Commission as to whether the proposed 9-hole public golf course is consistent with the purposes and intent of the City’s 2010-2015 Comprehensive Plan and Subdivision and Land Development Review Regulations.**

The Metacomet Sub-District, the specific sub-district where the golf course is proposed, defines within Section 19-481 a number of allowed uses within the sub-district, including specifically, the golf course use. This use along with numerous other uses were part of a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and rezoning that was approved by the City Council in 2021. As a result of these actions from the perspective of the decision by the Council, the proposed golf course is in compliance with the City’s current Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinance.

## **II. SPECIFICS OF THE PROPOSAL**

A reduced 11 X 17 inch version of the development plan set showing the golf course use is attached to this memorandum for the Board’s use in this review. It is important to note that the Board’s role in this process is not the approval of the golf course development plan, but to offer an opinion to the DRC and the Commission as to whether the proposal to operate the 9-hole public golf course on the property meets the purposes and intent of the City’s current Comprehensive Plan and the City’s Subdivision and Land Development Review Regulations.

### **Basic Site History**

The site at 500 Veteran’s Memorial Parkway was formerly the Metacomet Golf Club that operated as a private 18-hole golf country club from 1926 to its closing in 2019. The property was eventually acquired by Marshall Properties, Inc., who are proposing the operation of a 9-hole public golf course on the property. Over the past two years, the 9-hole course has been redesigned and reconstructed under the oversight of a golf course architect (Robert McNeil, The Northeast Golf Company). Several of the holes

from the original 18-hole layout have been retained while several of the holes have been modified and/or realigned under the newly modified 9-hole layout to accommodate the layout on the available acreage that has been set aside for the course use. An existing golf course maintenance building is currently in use on the property, and will continue to be used in maintaining the golf course in the near term. A new golf course maintenance building is proposed that will eventually replace the original maintenance barn and is proposed to be built at the southeast corner of the property, with a proposed access driveway to the building from Fort Avenue. This new maintenance building will not be constructed until all approvals of the upland, mixed-use portions of the property receive all appropriate approvals from the Waterfront Commission. The new course will include a small “starters building” where patrons will pay golf fees. The applicant will also construct restroom facilities in the vicinity of the first tee/starters building.



Figure 1 Aerial image of newly configured 5th Hole Green with tee box and fairway of the 6th Hole in the background. Source: The Northeast Golf Company website.

## Open Space Provision

While the Metacomet development proposal includes a substantial commercial and residential component, a significant portion of the property’s acreage will also be dedicated to both private and public open space. The development will retain approximately 65 acres of the property specifically for the golf course use. Also, nearly ten acres (9.6 acres) of the property is proposed to be deeded to the City at the northeast corner of the property for passive recreation use by the City in the future as a condition of the development’s approval.

## Property Access and Parking

In operating the course in the near term future, the existing entrance to the property from the Veteran’s Memorial Parkway will be retained and will continue to serve as the primary access to the golf venue. The developer proposes to use the existing paved area on the property to accommodate off street parking for the golf course. This parking lot, which formerly served the private country club, will provide ample space to accommodate the off-street parking needs of the golf course use. The parking lot will contain approximately 225 parking spaces, which exceeds the minimum required parking for the golf course use.

## Utilities - Water

The private Metacomet Golf Club utilized the City's public water supply to irrigate the 18-hole course. The new 9-hole course is a partially re-designed layout that retained some of the holes from the private layout but also involved the relocation and rebuilding of some of the holes in order to create a playable 9-hole course layout. The irrigation system was also updated on the course but will continue to use the City water supply to irrigate the course.

### III. CONSISTENCY WITH THE 2010-2015 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The "2003 East Providence Waterfront Special Development District Plan" (Waterfront Plan") was adopted by the City Council and incorporated into the City's Comprehensive Plan on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003. Subsequent adoptions of the City's Comprehensive Plans have continued to include the Waterfront Plan as an element within the Comprehensive Plan as well. In support of the use, the following goals and objectives from the East Providence Comprehensive Plan support the golf course use on the property:

#### Land Use Element

***Objective 1.3: Provide natural or man-made buffers between residential neighborhoods and incompatible adjacent non-residentially zoned properties and/or uses.***

The golf course will buffer portions of Fort Street and Fisher Street from the proposed mixed use development located on the northerly upland portion of the property.

#### Natural Resources Element

***Natural Resources Element Goal 1.0: Preserve and protect the water bodies and groundwater and their sources within the City of East Providence for continuation of their natural beauty and as components of the East Providence ecosystem.***

The developer will retain approximately 65 acres on the southern, lower lying acreage of the development parcel for continued use as a public golf course. In supporting this use, Planning strongly recommends that the developer utilize low impact best management practices in maintaining the golf course that strives to reduce the use of fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides. It is also recommended that an irrigation management plan be developed to maintain a sustainable greenscape that retains the scenic beauty of the course and supports wildlife habitat while minimizing the use of water use on the course.

***Objective 1.4: Provide for the protection of all freshwater wetlands including those that are outside of the designated Critical Areas.***

Freshwater wetlands within the development area are generally restricted to the golf course portion of the property. Based on a review of the golf course developments layout, freshwater wetland areas will remain unaltered and will be retained in their current condition. Design modifications to the course appear to have taken protection of wetland areas into account during the redesign and construction phases of the course during its construction.

***Natural Resource Element Goal 2.0: Preserve private open lands in their natural state where possible to ensure their maintenance as wildlife and fish habitats, natural drainage areas, and areas of passive recreation and outdoor education.***

The developer has proposed a mixed use development that will include a significant portion of acreage that will be preserved as private open space, primarily through the preservation of a significant portion of the property for use as a 9-hole public golf course.

***Objective 2.2: Where significant open lands are developed, require preservation of open space and resources to the maximum extent possible.***

The Planning Department is of the opinion that the developer has expended considerable effort to preserve as much acreage of both public and private open space as possible including the preservation of nine-holes of the prior 18-hole golf course use and the dedication of nearly 10 acres of public open space to the City.

***Natural Resources Goal 3.0: Preserve and expand public access to the City's waterfront for passive and active recreational activities.***

As stated previously the portion of this property that is to be retained for golf use will provide direct public access (through paid golf fees) to the Watchemoket Cove, a scenic tidal waterbody. A public walking path along the waterfront is not likely feasible due to the potential physical injury risks associated with pedestrians being struck with golf balls during course play. This golf course was previously developed directly adjacent to the cove, limiting the ability for a waterfront path. It is important to note that the waterfront on this property was previously only accessible to private country club members of the Metacomet Golf Club.

***Objective 3.1: Require pedestrian access to the waterfront as part of any private mixed use development in waterfront areas.***

The development provides direct access to Watchemoket Cove, a coastal and scenic tidally influenced waterbody. The proposed 9-hole public golf course will immediately abut this Cove and as such, will provide pedestrian access to the public (through paid golf fees). Due to the nature of the game of golf, however, Planning believes it is impractical to allow unfettered public access to the waterfront since pedestrians would experience the very high likelihood of being struck by errant golf balls during course play. This golf course was previously developed directly adjacent to the cove, limiting the ability for a waterfront path. Access to the course would, therefore, be available to those members of the public who are willing to pay the associated golf fees.

## **Recreation and Open Space Element**

***Objective 7.1: Continue to utilize the City's Waterfront District Development Plan to guide responsible development in the Waterfront District.***

Under this Element of the Comprehensive Plan, the golf course proposal is consistent with the development goals and objectives identified for the Metacomet Sub-district and the overall Waterfront Plan. From the perspective of adequate open space provision and opportunities for the public, and as

previously stated, the development has proposed that a significant portion of the property be utilized as either privately owned open space (through the retention of a 9-hole public golf course that was previously a private country club with restricted public access) or through public open space through the dedication of municipally owned public open space (through the donation of 9.6 acres of the site to the City of East Providence by the developer).

***Objective 7.2: Systematically diminish barriers that presently reduce public access to the waterfront and its amenities.***

When this property existed as a private golf country club, access to the property was restricted to members and their guests only. Members of the public who accessed this property without authorization from the club were subject to immediate removal from the property. This proposal includes a public 9-hole golf course that will be available to anyone who wishes to pay the course green fees that will allow full access to the waterfront shoreline at Watchemoket Cove.

***Recreation and Open Space Element Goal 8.0: Preserve, expand and enhance open space within the City of East Providence while broadening access to the public where warranted.***

The development proposes to retain significant acreage of the property as open space in the form of public open space and private open space (through the retention of a 9-hole public golf course).

***Objective 8.1: Create a contiguous greenbelt network to function as a passive recreation, non-vehicular circulation, ecological landscape buffer and physical link between natural, recreational and historic points of interest.***

As stated above, this proposal includes a public, fee based 9-hole golf course that will provide access to the waterfront shoreline at Watchemoket Cove. The preservation of a portion of the property as a 9-hole golf course provides some linkage to the history associated with the original Donald Ross designed golf course, where several of the holes associated with the original layout are retained in the new course layout.

***Recreation and Open space Element Goal 9.0: Coordinate the development and preservation of open spaces so that together they contribute to a satisfying urban environment for City residents.***

As previously stated, the development proposes to retain significant acreage of the property as open space in the form of both public open space and private open space.

***Objective 9.6: Require all future subdivisions, commercial developments, and Land Development Projects to provide for open space, active recreation space, buffers, and/or landscaping.***

The development provides significant acreage of public open space and active recreation space.

#### **IV. CONSISTENCY WITH THE PURPOSES OF THE LAND DEVELOPMENT AND SUBDIVISION REVIEW REGULATIONS**

Section 1 -2. General Purposes of the Subdivision Regulations states: The general purposes of these Regulations is to establish procedural and substantive provisions for the subdivision and development of land that will, consistent with the provisions of the East Providence Comprehensive Plan and the East Providence Zoning Ordinance, accomplish the following:

***(a) Protect the public health, safety and welfare of the community.***

Under this application process, the proposed 9-hole golf course use will be reviewed and approved in a manner that will assess its capability to promote positive impacts that ensure the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of East Providence.

***(b) Provide for the orderly, thorough and expeditious review and approval of land developments and subdivisions.***

The proposal is being reviewed by municipal staff, the Planning Board, and committees associated with the Commission in conformance with City regulations and ordinances, and within the time frames allotted for such review.

***(c) Promote high quality and appropriate design and construction of subdivisions and land development projects.***

Under the Commission's design review process, the proposed golf course submitted by the applicant, appears to meet the general standards for a high quality design, as proposed.

***(d) Protect existing natural and built environments and mitigate all significant negative impacts of any proposed development on the existing environment.***

All aspects of this development will be subject to a thorough review analysis and approval process by all appropriate State and local permitting authorities, as it relates to impacts on the existing environment.

***(e) Promote the design of land developments and subdivisions which are well-integrated with the surrounding neighborhoods with regard to natural and built features, and which concentrate development in areas which can best support intensive use by reason of natural characteristics and existing infrastructure.***

The proposed golf course, given the history of the property, appears to be well integrated with the surrounding neighborhoods since the prior use on the property dating back to 1926 was as a private 18-hole golf country club.

***(f) Encourage design and improvement standards to reflect the intent of the East Providence Comprehensive Plan with regard to the physical character of the various neighborhoods, districts, and special and critical areas of the City.***

This standard, in the opinion of Planning, as it relates to the proposed golf course, is being met under the design proposal, as submitted.

***(g) Promote thorough technical review of all proposed land developments and subdivisions by appropriate officials.***

This re-development of this property including the golf course use, has been the subject of multiple meetings between City and Waterfront Commission staff, the developer and the developer's consultants. The development plans have been reviewed by staff from the Departments of Planning, Public Works, Fire, and the DRC and Waterfront Commission.

***(h) Encourage dedications of public land and impact mitigation to be based on clear documentation of needs and to be fairly applied and administered.***

Dedication of public land appears adequate based on the development as proposed.

***(i) Provide for the establishment and consistent application of procedures for local record keeping on all matters of land development and subdivision review, approval and construction.***

The proposed development is being reviewed under the Regulations and Ordinances adopted by the City and pertinent record are being kept.

Staff is of the opinion that site layout and design of the golf course use is consistent with the 2010-2015 East Providence Comprehensive Plan and will not detract from neighboring residential development in the vicinity of the proposed development. This determination is further strengthened by the fact that this property has operated for nearly 100 years as a golf course use and the proposal seeks to continue this use on the property that will commence in the near-term and continue into the foreseeable future.

## **V. RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the above analysis and review of the submitted development proposal, the Planning Department recommends that the Planning Board offer an advisory opinion to the DRC and Waterfront Commission that the proposed 9-hole public golf course use is fully consistent with the purposes and intent of the City's 2010-2015 Comprehensive Plan and with Section 1 -2. General Purposes of the Subdivision and Land Development Review Regulations.

KAB/JFM/jfm

Attachments:

- Reduced copy of applicant's Golf Course Supplemental Submission dated 4/18/24
- Applicant's Waterfront District Permit Application Accompanying Narrative – April 2024 Supplement

Cc. East Providence City Council  
East Providence Waterfront Commission  
Daniel Borges, Public Works Director  
Lt. Michael Carey, Fire Chief  
Raymond Lavey, Waterfront District Executive Director  
Mayor Roberto L. DaSilva