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Community in rough on Fontenelle Park's fate

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A division among duffers and those who do not play golf was exposed Thursday night at a community meeting on the future of Fontenelle Park.

Like the three other nine-hole public golf courses in Omaha, the course at Fontenelle is losing money.

The number of rounds played at the north Omaha park has dropped by 60 percent in the past 10 years, City Parks Director Melinda Pearson said.

Fontenelle lost \$80,000 last year, more than the three other nine-hole courses combined, she said.

As city officials develop a plan to redesign the park, about 50 people concerned with its fate attended the first of several meetings at the park's pavilion.

Eliminating the course is among the options under consideration.

Other meetings are planned over the coming months, and Pearson said she hoped to have a final plan in place by the end of winter.

City Councilman Ben Gray has suggested closing the golf course. Canoeing and other recreational activities could be offered after an expansion of the lake in the park, Gray said.

A soccer field, widened walking paths and tree plantings were

among the suggestions offered at the meeting.

Gray said Thursday night that many proposals were on the drawing board and that the golf course could be saved.

Still, he asked the crowd, how will the city pay for the course if it stays open?

Pearson said that if the Fontenelle course closes, golfers could play at two other nearby public courses.

After some people criticized the city's upkeep of the park, Gray said maintenance comes at a price of increased property taxes.

"We've got to decide which way we want it," he said. "We can't have it both ways."

Several times he urged the crowd to "be realistic."

The city is updating the park's master plan in part to comply with a federal mandate to improve sewer drainage.

The mandate calls for the city to find more places to store rainwater so it doesn't overflow and bring sewage into waterways.

Doris Lassiter, an employee of Partners for a Healthy City, a group that advocates healthy living in Douglas County, said she learned to play on the Fontenelle golf course and would like it to remain open.

Still, she said, she would welcome other opportunities for recreation.

"If soccer replaces it, fine," she said.

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