GOVERNMENT UPDATE

Parks, rec board nixes idea to take over land for course

BY BILL ROLKE

The Columbus (Ind.) Parks and Recreation Board has decided not to use eminent domain to acquire the property needed for a proposed municipal golf course.

Negotiations between the board and owners of the property along the Highway 46 city entryway have lasted for nearly 18 months. While some owners of the land needed for the 18-hole golf course are willing to sell, at least two apparently are not.

Initially the board considered using eminent domain to acquire the property. A question was immediately raised, however, as to whether or not this procedure could be used for this purpose.

While it has been employed to obtain land needed for highways, bridge construction, airport expansions and similar projects, there was doubt that eminent domain could be used to get land for a golf course.

Eminent domain procedures are also used to determine the fair value of land when a buyer and seller are unable to negotiate a price.

These jury-decided procedures are often lengthy and costly. It was reported the purchase of land needed for an Indianapolis airport was delayed by six years of litigation, and the original estimate of $800,000 was increased 50 percent by the final $1,200,000 verdict.

The president of the Columbus Parks and Recreation Department announced recently the board will not use eminent domain to obtain land needed for the golf course from unwilling sellers. He said the eminent domain procedure would be used only when the owner was willing to sell but a negotiated price could not be reached.

The board had originally planned to sell up to $5.3 million in tax-supported bonds to pay for the course, designed by architect Michael Hurzdan. Officials felt the course would be self-supporting if players were charged a $16 to $20 greens fee.

The park board was to meet later in June to vote on a resolution regarding the golf course and bond issue.

Meanwhile, a local state representative has submitted a bill to the Indiana General Assembly that would prevent appointed bodies from exercising eminent domain procedures and make only elected officials responsible for this action.

William A. Rolke is a freelance writer based in Columbus, Ind.