



Aerial view of the area in which the new Palo Alto Municipal Golf Course will be located. The site of the course will be on the marshland near the water of the Lower San Francisco Bay.

Citizens' Organized Campaign Gets Palo Alto New Course

By WALT GAMAGE

Does YOUR community need a municipal golf course?

Here is how the citizens of Palo Alto, Calif. (pop. 34,000) set about making the dream of a municipal course a reality in the short space of 17 months! It's the story of well-planned, energetic community action that welded the political, business and social elements of Palo Alto into a single team behind the project.

The Palo Alto Plan first took form at an informal luncheon meeting of five recreation-minded citizens who contacted their city manager for advice on how to bring the need for a municipal golf course before the city council. He arranged a meeting with Mayor J. Pierce Mitchell who appointed a committee of one hundred citizens to study the feasibility of a municipal golf course for Palo Alto. The committee, which included representatives of business, social, labor and political segments of the community, was approved by the City Council

on June 2, 1952, and a zealous young insurance executive who was a good organizer and public speaker was named chairman of the group.

The committee had to overcome discouraging odds from the start. All they had to work with was the fact that there was some city-owned marshland on the lower end of San Francisco Bay that might be available for a golf course.

Committee Chairman Bill Miller's first official act was to write the National Golf Foundation in Chicago for all available information on planning and building a golf course and operational data on other municipal operations. He outlined the Committee's general aim and asked for advice on how to determine the potential support and needs of a community regarding golf. The Foundation forwarded material and data compiled from a study of more than 100 communities around the country and supplied names of several Californians who

are recognized specialists in the design, construction, operation and maintenance of golf courses. Armed with this information—and with a better idea of what to look for in their investigation—the members of the Committee decided to set up a twenty man Steering Committee, to coordinate the overall operation, and four additional sub-committees on public relations, statistics, architecture and finance . . .

The Public Relations Sub-Committee set itself the task of generating public interest and cooperation in the project. It enlisted the aid of the local press through its editorial and sports pages, it provided speakers to appear before any group of any size in the community to answer questions and to spread the word about the advantages of a municipal golf course to every citizen. Booths and displays were prepared for use at all public functions to further stimulate interest in the proposed golf course. In ad-



The whole-hearted support of the local press was responsible in large measure for the success of the Palo Alto citizens' campaign for a municipal golf course.

In addition, the sub-committee prepared periodic bulletins informing members of the other sub-committees on the progress of the survey in all its phases.

The Statistics Sub-Committee was given the job of checking all municipal golf courses within a 200 mile radius of Palo Alto for specific information on the number of rounds played, annual operating ex-

penses, gross receipts and net profits. The committee found that the San Mateo Municipal Golf Course, some 18 miles away, made a net profit of over \$22,000 for 1952, while the Alameda Municipal Golf Course realized a net profit of nearly \$38,000 for the same year. Alameda also reported being in the final stages of planning an additional 18-hole course. In cases where no profit or a loss was indicated, the committee learned that a restaurant or some other non-golfing facility was responsible for a drain on course revenue.

Marginal Land Suitable

The Architectural Sub-Committee investigated the possibility of using city-owned "bay lands" for a course site. They studied three alternate layouts, finally selecting the one offering the greatest advantages in terrain, low maintenance cost and ample room for the addition of other recreational facilities that could be used in conjunction with the new course. Extensive soil tests and water analyses by independent experts and representatives from the State Agri. Experiment station showed that the new course could be inexpensively irrigated with the "effluent" from the adjacent sewage disposal plant thus eliminating the need to purchase water for this purpose. An actual test planting confirmed the findings of the soil and water tests, proving that several types of turf could be successfully maintained on the marshy land.

The Finance Sub-Committee was the last to submit its findings to the Steering Committee for inclusion in the general report. It stated that financing methods of many communities for various municipal projects were thoroughly studied and were dismissed as impractical for the Palo Alto project. However, the Finance Sub-Committee came up with a unique idea for financing the new course. It recommended that one-third of the estimated cost of the proposed course, or \$75,000, be raised through public subscription; the balance, or \$150,000, to be budgeted by the city over a two year period from the "general funds." Under this plan Palo Alto golfers would subscribe \$100 each in "advance greens fees" which they would get back in playing privileges on the new course over a four-year period. It was estimated that the four year spread would allow the course to pay its operating expenses and redeem the subscriptions simultaneously out of current revenue. The Finance Sub-Committee pointed out, however, that the only hitch in their recommendation was the question whether Palo Alto golfers would support such a subscription.

The Steering Committee decided to test the proposed subscription plan by canvassing the golf-playing citizenry for an expression of support. In three weeks time the Committee of One Hundred collected 550 signatures of golfers willing to subscribe to the advance greens fee plan if it were adopted. The Finance Committee, with this final proof of support, unanimously endorsed the subscription plan for their report.

Citizens Help Finance

With the completion of the Finance Subcommittee report, the Steering Committee assembled all the data gathered into a unified report which contained the estimated cost of the proposed course, the estimated annual cost of operation, the financing plan, the proposed site of the course and means for irrigating the layout. It recommended the construction of a municipal golf course for Palo Alto because: "... we can safely conclude that a municipal golf course not only provides healthful recreation for a great number of people but also has the unique ability of returning a net profit to the taxpayers, whether or not they actively use the course. No other municipal recreation program in Palo Alto or elsewhere combines these two big advantages."

When the completed report was ready for presentation to the Council, Mayor Mitchell intimated that the highly technical nature of the material would require the lay members of the Council some time to study. To eliminate the possibility of such delay, the Steering Committee enlisted the aid of William (Bud) Bell, prominent California Golf Architect who, with his father, the late Billy Bell, had built many of the golf courses now in operation in the West. Mr. Bell carefully studied the Committee's report and then interpreted the report in lay terms to the full city council. After finishing his talk he invited the council to ask questions on any point which they proceeded to do for one full hour. Each question was answered to the complete satisfaction of the Council and it voted unanimously to approve the proposal for constructing the course — provided the citizen's committee could raise \$75,000 through public subscription.

The Steering Committee wasted no time considering the challenge. It spent six weeks preparing for an all-out fund drive to meet the \$75,000 goal. It investigated fund raising methods, laid its plans for publicity and door-to-door canvassing as well as for contacting civic, social and industrial organizations for financial contributions.



—Palo Alto Times Photo

J. Pearce Mitchell, then mayor of Palo Alto, shows Chief Justice Earl Warren of the Supreme Court (center) an artist's rendering of the proposed Palo Alto Municipal Course. Warren was governor of California when this picture was made.

The "Tee-off" for the fund drive was a mass meeting of the entire committee of 100 plus everyone interested in the golf course project. The first advance greens fee subscriptions were sold on the spot and the drive was on its way. After three months of intensive campaigning, with heartening all-out support from the local press and every organized group within the city, the goal was met. In addition to the individual subscriptions, there were many substantial contributions of lump sums from local groups, including a gift of \$25,000 from the estate of a former local philanthropist.

Course Approved

With the final major hurdle behind them, the Steering Committee met to prepare the final report for action by the City Council. However, here again, as throughout the entire project, an acute consciousness of sound public relations came to the fore and the Chairman requested interviews between individual members of the City Council and key leaders of the Committee. He carefully pointed out that the desired interviews were not aimed at pressuring Council members nor for the purpose of lobbying, but only to answer any questions that the city officials might have regarding the new golf course. As a result, when the final report was presented to the council on November 9, 1953 — after 17 months of concerted effort — it was unanimously approved and the city manager was authorized to employ a golf course architect to proceed with the plans for the new course.

Palo Altoans are looking forward eagerly to the breaking of ground for their new municipal golf course this spring!