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Avalos adds new wrinkle to Sharp Park dispute

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San Francisco Supervisor John Avalos has fanned the flames of controversy over the future of Sharp Park Golf Course, which pits golfers versus environmentalists.

Avalos said Tuesday he will work with the city attorney to draft legislation to close the course and transfer it to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area -- a move long favored by environmental groups that say the Pacifica golf course, which is owned by San Francisco, is hurting endangered species.

Reached by phone Wednesday, Avalos said he is especially worried about the endangered-species issue, which has already prompted a lawsuit against the city.

"The city has a liability there we need to respond to," said Avalos, adding that, from a practical standpoint, the city can't afford to maintain Sharp Park anymore. "The park facilities around the city are overwhelmed by budget cuts, so trying to find savings and a broader recreational use for Sharp Park makes sense."

Supporters of the 18-hole golf course questioned the timing of the mayoral candidate's announcement on the park, a subject that has prompted rallies by golfers on the one hand and 275 letters from people petitioning the city to do away with the golf course on the other.

The city's own Recreation and Parks Department is preparing a plan to fix the course and realign some holes to promote healthy wetlands. A lagoon on the site was drained when the course was built in the 1930s.

"He has a mayoral

campaign on and he's putting it into the political mix," said Richard Harris of the San Francisco Public Golf Alliance. "It seems like the timing to close the golf course at this point is very bad, and we would very surprised if most politicians thought this was the right thing to do."

The San Francisco City Attorney's Office is defending the city against a lawsuit by the Wild Equity Institute claiming the city's efforts to control serious flooding problems at Sharp Park have been killing threatened frogs and snakes. That could make it awkward for the city attorney to help Avalos draft legislation to close the golf course because of threats to endangered species.

Harris pointed out that San Francisco is investing \$4.8 million in a project to pipe recycled water to Sharp Park to irrigate the golf course. The pipeline project is a partnership between the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and Pacifica's North Coast County Water District, and will save 50 million gallons of water each year.

It's also unclear how much support Avalos will be able to drum up among his Board of Supervisors colleagues. Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi supports decommissioning the links, but Supervisor Sean Elsbernd is a passionate advocate of the course, which has some of the lowest green fees in the Bay Area.

Other unanswered questions: How much would it cost to transform the course, which spans 400 acres on both sides of Highway 1, into a giant public park. And who would pay for it?



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The Wild Equity Institute has released a report estimating a cost of \$5 million to restore the golf course to its natural state, not including the cost of connecting native species habitat on both sides of Highway 1. By contrast, a report commissioned by the Recreation and Parks Department says it would cost between \$5.9 and \$15.6 million to keep the golf course while overhauling several holes.

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area, part of the National Park Service, maintains the Mori Point promontory just south of the course. A representative for the National Parks Service did not return calls Wednesday.

Contact Julia Scott at 650-348-4340.



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