

May 30, 2024



Mr. Steve Parker, City Manager
City of Seguin, Texas
205 North River Street
Seguin, Texas 78155

Re: Starcke Park Golf Course Tree Removal/Remediation Plans

Dear Mr. Parker,

We send this letter today in response to inquiries from residents and Council members from the City of Seguin regarding our team's proposed tree removal and tree remediation plans for the renovation of the Starcke Park Golf Course set to begin this fall.

Early on in the planning process, as a team, we determined that a tree replanting program on the property was not in the best interests of the golf course. This is a belief that Nathan, Todd, and I still hold. In his posthumously-released book of musings titled Golf Has Never Failed Me, the more famous golf course architect with whom I share a surname, Donald Ross, has a great quote regarding the role of trees in golf that has long resonated with me. He opines:

"As beautiful as trees are, and as fond as you or I are of them, we still must not lose sight of the fact that there is a limited place for them in golf. We must not let our sentiments crowd out the real intent of a golf course: that of providing fair playing conditions. If it in any way interferes with a properly played stroke, I think the tree is an unfair hazard and should not be allowed to stand."

While Mr. Ross was speaking primarily to trees and their role in the playability or strategy of a golf course, in practice, we as architects must also judge trees on several other important factors. First, and foremost, is the tree healthy? Does it pose a risk to golfers or golf course staff during their time on the property? Does it pose a risk to structures or other critical infrastructure?

Secondly, we must consider how a tree impacts a course manager's ability to maintain the best possible stand of turfgrass, for golf is played on grass, and not in the forest, after all. One tree is capable of outcompeting an area of turfgrass three times the size of its canopy for water and nutrients. In addition, poorly located trees can create shade and airflow problems that closely-mown turfgrass needs not only to thrive, but sometimes just to survive. We must also consider the amount of time, and thus money, that must be spent blowing leaves, picking up fallen limbs, weed-eating around trunks, grinding reels after mowing over pecan nuts, acorns, and seed pods, etc.

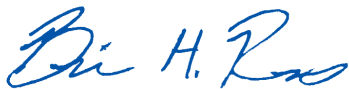
Only after we have considered these factors do we then consider how a tree might actually affect the playing of a golf hole. Does it require a particular shot shape that favors one golfer over another? How often is that repeated during the course of a round? As the elder Mr. Ross noted, does it allow for fair recovery? How does the golf hole change when the tree is inevitably one day gone?

Nathan, Todd, and I have over 60 years of combined experience as architects addressing these and other “hot-button” issues that often arise when a golf course is to set to be renovated. It is safe to say we understand how polarizing of an issue tree removal can be. It is our position that the tree removal recommendations that we have made during the planning process were as light-handed as they could practically be given the issues we were tasked with solving and are based solely on the reality of the present condition of the golf course, on our collective experience, and rooted firmly in the best management practices of our industry. Every tree that we have proposed for removal will benefit the golf course in at least one, but typically more than one, way.

Given the issues that we feel we have resolved and the belief that our plans have in no way altered the park-like setting in which the Starcke Park Golf Course sits, it would have been irresponsible of us to recommend replanting trees back onto the golf course that might one day serve to recreate the issues that the golf course faces today for future managers and users of the property. Thus, it has been our understanding and our intention from very early in the planning process that, in lieu of replanting, the golf course would “pay” into a fund for the remediation of the healthy trees we hope to remove or to replant them elsewhere, whether off the golf course within Max Starcke Park or in some other City-owned park or property.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to clarify our position and also for passing along our thoughts on this matter to those concerned.

Respectfully,



Brian Ross
Owner & President
Ross Golf Design, LLC

cc: Nathan Crace - Watermark Golf/Nathan Crace Design
Todd Quitno - Quitno Golf Designs, Inc.

