Golf Course Preservation
Initial Strategy Analysis Example

This document contains an initial analysis of options to prevent the proposed development of a hypothetical golf course from impairing quality of life for nearby residents. We'll call the course Eagle Rock Golf Course. The folks seeking to preserve the course mostly own homes fronting on the fairways, greens and tees. They have formed Save Eagle Rock Golf Course (SERGC). A development company has proposed converting the golf course into a project known as Eagle Rock Manor. The project needs various permits and other approval from Eagle Rock City.

A suggested strategy is presented first, then followed by recommended measures to preserve and even enhance existing quality of life. These measures and the strategy are based upon the facts presented under the following headings: General, Parks, Schools, Traffic, Smith Creek, and Political Factors.

SUGGESTED STRATEGY

After the SERGC board expands then refines the proposed resolution measures, a decision must be made whether it is necessary to preserve the golf course in its entirety. In other words, would the resolution measures allow for development of the site while preserving quality of life for SERGC members and other area homeowners?

If the Board's answer is **yes**, then we should:

- Get input from the other group seeking to address Eagle Rock Manor impacts, including their attorney;
- Send a letter to the applicant setting forth the measures which would resolve concerns and requesting a meeting to explore their willingness to implement each measure (or some equally effective alternative).
- If the applicant agrees then we ask that they sign an agreement legally binding them and all future property owners to the measures. We also ask that the applicant modify plans to incorporate all points of agreement. Finally, we ask that the points of agreement be made conditions of relevant City permits and other approvals.

If the Board's answer is **no**, and the goal becomes preserving the site then we should:

- Get input from the other group seeking to address Eagle Rock impacts, including their attorney;
- Identify measures that would restrict development of the Eagle Rock golf course and other City golf courses to uses compatible with adjoining homes-neighborhoods.
- Sample a portion of those owning homes next to Eagle Rock and the other golf courses about their willingness to support the measures. If the response is good then we should call upon the City to postpone further consideration of golf course development proposals until a bill is drafted making the measures law.

- Ask the Mayor and Council members to support the bill and subtly let them know that we'll inform the City's frequent voters of their support just before the 2017 primary election.
- If the response to the golf course approach is weak then we should poll voters instead on other issues, like the adoption of an Adequate Public Facilities ordinance to keep school crowding and traffic congestion from getting worse. We must make certain that school-traffic is bad enough in the vicinity of Eagle Rock golf course that the APFO would nix the project.

RESOLUTION MEASURES

A. The Eagle Rock Golf Course should be preserved then converted to low-impact open space with amenities desired by area residents. Purchasing a portion or all of site will help reduce the Eagle Rock City critical park-recreation area deficit. Currently there are 5.0 acres of park-recreation area/1,000 City residents. The general accepted goal is 10 acres/1,000 residents. Preserving the entirety of the site as park-recreation land would raise the ratio to 5.9 acres/1,000 residents.

B. If for some reason Save Eagle Rock Golf Course does not succeed in preserving the golf course as open space then we should call for the following measures to reduce impacts to existing homes adjoining the site:
    1) Add visual buffers achieving 100% opacity at locations where proposed housing units would be visible from existing homes.
    2) Include fences within the buffer that would prevent Eagle Rock Manor residents from cutting through existing yards.
    3) Locate single-family homes along outer common boundary with existing homes.
    4) Reduce the number of apartments and townhouses to that number which can be concentrated farthest from existing single-family homes.

C. To preserve and restore Smith Creek we should call for:
    a. Designing all proposed impervious surfaces to drain to the highly-effective stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) listed in the *Eagle Rock City Low Impact Development Guidance Manual* such as bioretention; and
    b. Request that the applicant and City retrofit a portion of existing impervious surfaces with highly-effective BMPs *(see Chapter 3 in LID Manual)* which may bring a net improvement to the health of Smith Creek.

D. To prevent school crowding and traffic congestion from becoming worse, the Eagle Rock City should adopt an Adequate Public Facilities ordinance as was recommended in the 2012 Eagle Rock City, Virginia *Development Review Process* report.

GENERAL

1. According to an Eagle Rock City News article dated April 13, 2015, the Eagle Rock Manor was proposed to be 100 single-family homes, 125 townhomes, and 200 apartments generating 2,500 vehicle trips per day.

PARKS

2. The 2016 Smith County Comprehensive Plan states:
   a. The goal is at least 10 acres of park/recreation space per 1,000 residents. (p. 47)
   b. The County contains 2,262 acres of park/recreation areas. (p. 47)
   c. The population of Smith County is 101,555. (p. 3)
   d. This equates to (2,262 acres ÷ (101,555/1,000) = 22.3 acres of park/recreation land per 1,000 residents.
3. For the Eagle Rock City:
   a. The goal should also be at least 10 acres of park/recreation space per 1,000 residents.
   b. According to the City Parks & Athletic Facilities table, Eagle Rock City has 555 acres of park/recreation areas.
   c. The population of Eagle Rock City is 100,323.
   d. This equates to (555 acres ÷ (100,323/1,000) 5.5 acres of park/recreation land per 1,000 residents.
   e. The Eagle Rock Golf Course area = 120 acres.
   f. If Eagle Rock Golf Course became public then Eagle Rock City would have 675 acres of park-recreation area.
   g. With 675 acres Eagle Rock City would have 6.7 acres of park/recreation land per 1,000 residents, an improvement of 22%.
4. Other existing golf courses within the Eagle Rock City are:
   a. Cook Hill Country Club;
   b. Country Club at Larkspur;
   c. Langtree Country Club;
   d. Pinon Pine Country Club; and
   e. Eagle Rock City Municipal Golf Course.
5. According to a 2015 Smith County public opinion survey, the five most important (from most desired to least) park-recreation areas are: community parks, pathways/trails, beach parks, performance/festival space, and community gardens. (p. 23)

SCHOOLS

6. According to the Smith County *2015-2025 Facility Needs Survey*:
   a. Enrollment in all elementary schools exceeds capacity by 106%. (p. 9)
   b. By the 2020/21 school year elementary school enrollment will exceeds capacity by 111%. (p. 9)
7. Of the 45 public school in Smith County, the service area of 24 are located within the Eagle Rock City (at least partially).
8. Of these 24 schools, 6 could receive students from the Eagle Rock Manor: Smith Elementary, Manor Elementary, High Point Middle, Mitchell Middle, Eagle Rock High, and Newton High.
9. Of the two elementary schools, the class size exceeds the average for not only all other Eagle Rock City elementary schools but that for Smith County and Virginia.
10. The average English II and Biology class size for the two high schools also exceeds the average for all other Eagle Rock City high schools as well as for Smith County and Virginia.

11. Because of the class size issue and the overcrowding of elementary schools countywide, the Eagle Rock City should adopt an Adequate Public Facilities ordinance as was recommended in the 2012 Eagle Rock City, Virginia *Development Review Process* report.

TRAFFIC

12. The *2015 Urban Mobility Scorecard* states that the average Eagle Rock City area motorist suffers 20 hours of delay and $435 in wasted fuel in 2014 due to traffic congestion.
13. According to the 2007 report *Traffic Congestion in Virginia*:
    a. the Eagle Rock City area "current congestion index, now a modest 1.04, will increase sharply to 1.10; to say it another way, the delay in commuting (the portion of the index past the decimal) **will more than double**." (p. 175)
    b. "The region lacks the financial capacity to add enough streets and highways to maintain existing levels of service" (p. 178)
    c. "As the [area] continues to grow, congestion on the area's roadway network will only worsen. This growth…will require streets and roadways to be constructed or improved that provide for additional capacity and access to the Eagle Rock City area". (p. 178)
14. The 2014 report *Virginia Transportation By The Numbers: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility*, noted that roadway conditions in the Eagle Rock City area result in combined costs of vehicle operation, congestion and safety which are the second highest of Virginia's five largest cities and total $1.4 billion per year.
15. According to an Eagle Rock City News article dated April 13, 2015, the Eagle Rock Manor was proposed to be 100 single-family homes, 125 townhomes, and 200 apartments generating 2,500 vehicle trips per day.
16. CEDS prepared a spreadsheet showing PM peak-hour trips which is posted at: http://ceds.org/eaglerock/Trip_Generation.xlsx
17. The CEDS spreadsheet shows 440 PM peak-hour trips, which equates to about 4,000 daily trips.
18. US1 is the primary road that would carry Eagle Rock Manor traffic.
19. Save Eagle Rock Golf Course cited the intersection of Murphy Highway and US1 as dangerous. As part of proposed resolution measures, the applicant should be asked to improve this intersection (e.g., traffic light).
20. Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, was used to compile a map showing fatal accident locations within the Eagle Rock City for the period of 2011 – 2015. This map is posted online at: http://ceds.org/eaglerock/Fatal_Accident_Locations.pdf
21. A spreadsheet showing the number of fatal accidents which have occurred on streets within Eagle Rock City is posted online at: http://ceds.org/eaglerock/FARS_Accidents.xlsx
22. The spreadsheet shows that of the 48 Eagle Rock City streets where fatal accidents occurred between 2011 and 2015, US1 had the highest number of fatalities.
23. US421 is the main road that would serve Eagle Rock Manor residents and visitors.
24. For every fatal accidents another 191 nonfatal accidents occur.

25. According to the Virginia Department of Transportation report *Virginia 2014 Traffic Crash Facts* (p. 140), of 83 cities Eagle Rock City ranked second most worst with regard to traffic crashes.
26. Given that City residents must suffer undue traffic congestion and US1 is the most dangerous road in the City, Eagle Rock City should adopt an Adequate Public Facilities ordinance to prevent new growth from making congestion worse. The adoption of an APFO was recommended in the 2012 Eagle Rock City *Development Review Process* report.

SMITH CREEK

27. Tidal waterway fisheries do best when no more than 5% of the watershed is covered by buildings, parking lots, streets and other impervious surfaces. Severe stress occurs at 17% impervious area.
28. Eagle Rock golf course is located in the Smith Creek watershed.
29. According to a 2015 UVA report entitled *Environmental Quality of Eagle Rock City and Smith County Watersheds, 2014*, the Smith Creek watershed:
    a. Drains 3200 acres;
    b. Approximately 9,000 people live in the watershed;
    c. 22.3% of the watershed is covered by impervious surfaces; and
    d. If the Eagle Rock Manor is developed it would add another 30 acres of impervious area increasing the percentage to 23.0%.
30. While Smith Creek watershed imperviousness is high, stream restoration and other watershed projects can reverse the effect.
31. The Virginia State University has an active stream restoration program with several on-going projects in the watershed.
32. However, recovery of Smith Creek would be easier to achieve if the golf course were converted to low-impact open space.
33. If for some reason Save Eagle Rock Golf Course does not succeed in preserving the golf course as open space then we should call for:
    a. Designing all proposed impervious surfaces to drain to the highly-effective stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) listed in the *Eagle Rock City Low Impact Development Guidance Manual* such as bioretention; and
    b. Request that the applicant and City retrofit a portion of existing impervious surfaces with highly-effective BMPs *(see Chapter 3 in LID Manual)* to bring a net improvement to the health of Smith Creek.

POLITICAL FACTORS

34. Of the Mayor and City Council members, the following are up for reelection next year: Mayor Bob Smith, Councilman John Brown, Councilman Joe Doe, and Councilman Mike Hunt.
35. During the November 2013 Eagle Rock City elections Councilman Doe won by 470 votes. This would cause any incumbent City elected official to take very seriously an organization that could count at least 500 voters among its active supporters.

36. Of the 100,555 Eagle Rock City residents, 72,289 are registered to vote[1].
37. Those who vote in every election are the most influential. These frequent voters usually decide who wins a primary race. They also tend to be the most likely to support a good cause with hours, letters, calls and dollars.
38. Eagle Rock is located in Ward 5 which has 4,521 registered voters, of which about 800 would be frequent voters.
39. Contact information and voting history for all Eagle Rock City registered voters is available online.[2]
40. Save Eagle Rock Golf Course should poll a sampling of those who voted in the last election to gage their willingness to support measures that would resolve the issues presented in this document.

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[1] See: http://elections.nhcgov.com/public-information/public-data/
[2] See: http://elections.nhcgov.com/public-information/public-data/