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CITY OF ANN ARBOR  
CITY CLERK  
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John Hieftje, Mayor  
City Hall, 3rd Floor  
100 N. Fifth Avenue  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Dear Mayor Hieftje:

Several years ago, facing a very serious economic downturn, consultants hired by the city to evaluate our options concluded that both Huron Hills and Leslie Park golf courses should be sold. The cash from the sale was needed, they said, and the continuing tax revenues from the profits generated by the new owners would be welcome – and the only losers would be that minority of citizens who play the game. The community reacted against the proposal, however, and kept – and improved – both courses. The management of both courses greatly improved: Leslie Park prospered (voted Best Municipal Golf Course in Michigan) and the use and income of Huron Hills has grown steadily since that day. Yet now, despite that success, the city is once again considering the sale of Huron Hills.

Just a few years ago this same city, facing much the same economic problems, passed the Greenbelt Proposal to buy vacant land around the periphery of the city in order “to protect parklands within the city and open-space on its periphery” The city had insufficient funds to pay for its plan up front, so we passed a 30-year .5% milage to raise the funds necessary to meet its new obligation. And now we consider reversing that path by selling our very productive, citizen-oriented and highly approved open space in a move totally at odds with the plan and the spirit that motivated the passage of the much more expensive Greenbelt improvement.

And while golf is often denigrated as simply a game of repeated strikes at a little ball with a big

stick, for many it is a highly respected and effective form of social and physical therapy. At one level, of course, it's just a game, but a game that serves many causes, reflecting many motives and satisfying a range of needs that, when taken together, may help define and satisfy some of the more varied and subtle problems and values of the total community. For the older, retired community members, golf provides an otherwise unavailable activity that helps keep them motivated and interested in life. And for the very young it provides an environment that helps their health and their social relationships. Huron Hills, for example, offers free golf for kids on Sunday afternoons and evenings – an offer that is utilized with great joy and active participation.

Yes, the city needs money, but primarily it needs – and has – an environment that is attractive to outside investors and industries and boasts the respect and cooperation of its citizens. A bit over a decade ago Washtenaw County opened a physical fitness facility on Washtenaw Avenue in Ann Arbor, potentially some of the most valuable real estate in the city. The building included a swimming pool, a running track, a huge collection of highly sophisticated (expensive) exercise equipment – and operated at a significant cash loss. Although most of our county population are strangers to organized exercise programs and tend to dismiss the concept of running and lifting and bending as a waste of time and energy, the participants love it and use it – and at very limited individual costs. Originally financed by a taxpayers' mileage, it was conceived and is operated primarily as a public service for the citizens of Washtenaw County – without discrimination on the basis of race, religion or physique. And the financially, the facility is now doing quite well.

Sounds a lot like Huron Hills. And evidently even the promoters of our city agree, having made the photograph of a local golf course the centerpiece of its website. And this is a large part of what makes Ann Arbor the attractive, wonderful town that it is.

It doesn't always work, of course, but neither do all the participants in the gym build their muscles or flatten their abs. There are many ways to serve a community in ways not measured by fiscal responsibility. In the mid-1960s a local developer considered building a research park in Ann Arbor. He surveyed a large number of national corporations to find what they most valued when considering a new site for their operations and the overwhelming response was their preference for a community that provided a pleasant living environment for its workers.

Community services need not be limited to police and fire protection, or trash collection, or sewage drains and highway construction. After all, none of the public libraries has ever made a dime, and a lot of books are available at Borders and Barnes & Noble and Amazon, but few municipal facilities are less questioned, more valuable, or more beloved by the general community than the Free Public Library

Robert Faber

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Faber', written in a cursive style.