

A Golf Course Retention Pond

I've never understood the attraction to living next to a golf course. This is after all a sport where not extremely athletic people use the leverage of a 44" long club to drive a small hard object as far as they possibly can. Mostly people whose skill with said club is somewhat less than perfect. So living next to a golf course means occasionally being bombarded by errant projectiles, especially on nice weekend afternoons!

So why the uproar about turning the Westhaven golf course into a park/retention pond? I think it's mostly because the golf course is a known entity, and the park/pond is an unknown. But that's not reason enough to not do the retention pond, given its obvious benefits.

And the benefits should be obvious, to anyone who read the paper last week. On my first draft of this column, written 3 weeks ago (that's right kids, I do rewrites, just like your teachers tell you to do!), I wrote about the flooding they had on the near West side about 4 years ago. You might remember the stories about flooded basements, and worse yet, backed up sewer lines. About how people had to throw away pretty much everything they'd had in their basements – family records, furniture, things in storage – because it had all been ruined by the flooding.

Well, that flooding was in the Campbell Creek basin. And it's happened twice again, last week. That flooding is exactly what the retention pond is designed to prevent. You see, the storm drains on Oshkosh's near West side, between the river and Highway 41, were never designed to handle all the added runoff that came with development west of the highway. It's that extra runoff, generated in the Westhaven area and the Southwest Industrial Park, that overloads the system, causing it to back up and flood the neighborhoods near 9th and Ohio.

The retention pond will hold a lot of that extra runoff, letting it fill a big outdoor pond rather than back up back up into a lot of near West side basements. Since much of that water is coming from the roofs, streets, and driveways of the Westhaven area, it seems altogether fair to me that the Westhaven area also provide part of the solution.

Besides, it's not like they're putting a prison in their backyard, or a highway through their neighborhood. It's a park, with grass and wildflowers and a walking and biking path, only with a big pond in the middle. Sort of like the big ponds in the middle of County Park, near the soccer fields. Only designed better, with shallow areas filled with cattails and other native water species along the pond's borders.

So here's our choice. We either turn the Westhaven golf course into a park and retention pond, or we tell the people in the neighborhoods downstream that they use their own basements at their own risk. Or maybe we choose one or two of the other options that the City Engineers explored, that will cost the taxpayers twice as much to get the same water runoff retention. Options that won't reduce the pollution runoff into the Fox River and Lake Winnebago nearly as much as the Westhaven park and retention pond.

Gee– not much of a choice to me! Cheaper, better natural water purification, and a solution to our endemic West side flooding problem. So let's go ahead and build it, and save the arguing until after the retention pond is built.

Because you just know, once its completed, the Otter Street Fishing Club will just be itching to build a pier into it!