

# Developer to perform mercury testing on former golf course, City of Ottawa says

*Work using heavy equipment at the former golf course started in January.*

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Barbara Ramsay stands at the end of her garden, which used to overlook the sixth and seventh fairway of the Kanata Golf and Country Club. Now it's a construction zone for redevelopment. PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /POSTMEDIA

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The responsibility for testing the soil in a former golf course in Kanata for mercury contamination falls to the companies that want to develop the 175-acre property, the City of Ottawa says.

Heavy equipment moved onto the property in January to conduct soil testing to make way for development. Residents fear that mercury, present in fungicides formerly used to eliminate snow mould on golf courses across Canada, is being disturbed along with a massive volume of soil.

“It looks like Armageddon. That’s a bit of an overstatement, but to people who live here it’s insane. Then you layer that with the health risks that are real,” said Barbara Ramsay, chair of the Kanata Greenspace Protection Coalition.

“People see this as a NIMBY issue. There’s nothing NIMBY about this. This is public health, public safety.”

Article content

## *This is public health, public safety.*

BARBARA RAMSAY KANATA GREENSPACE PROTECTION COALITION

Under the Environmental Protection Act, environmental testing and risk assessment is performed by a professional engineer who is retained by the property owner and is legally obligated to ensure that their work is completed safely and in compliance with provincial standards, Marcia Wallace, the city’s general manager of planning, development and building services, said in response to an inquiry from Kanata North Coun. Cathy Curry.

The city has retained a lawyer with environmental expertise and an engineering firm. But, aside from that, its hands are tied because the former golf course is private property.

The city is limited in many respects, Wallace noted. For example, it can’t control when the developer and their consultants do their work. Ottawa Public Health does not have a formal advisory or oversight role on the process. The activity on the property don’t require any city permit or permission unless it contravenes the municipal easements that cross the property or it damages other properties.

“The investigatory work that is currently being undertaken does not require city review or approval,” Wallace said. The developer is not required provide notice to the city, Ottawa Public Health, the public or the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, she said.

Testing on the site is the latest development in a saga that began 1981, when Campeau Corp. negotiated with the former City of Kanata to build the golf course. One condition was that at least 40 per cent of the property would remain open space.

ClubLink, which bought the property in 1997 and still owns its, announced plans to redevelop the golf course lands in 2018, including about 1,500 housing units, with development partners Richcraft Homes and Minto Communities.

That sparked a legal battle culminating in September 2025, when the Supreme Court of Canada denied the City of Ottawa leave to appeal an Ontario Court of Appeal ruling that declared certain provisions in the contract to be invalid.

City councillors voted in January in favour of using every available tool to protect the greenspace, including using the city's Official Plan, secondary plans and supporting planning evidence to "ensure that the public interest is protected."

Curry learned that soil testing would be done on the site on Jan. 22. A bulldozer arrived to move snow the next day. More heavy equipment followed.

Test piles were built in mid-February. There are paths for construction equipment and there will be testing for stormwater modelling, ClubLink, Minto and Richcraft said in a statement.

"Any work being completed at this stage is to continue to address the draft plan conditions that were included in the final Draft Plan Approval," the statement said.

In the inquiry sent to the city on Feb. 11, Curry asked what the city was doing to ensure "independent, precautionary and credible oversight" across the entire 175-acre site. Since the environmental consultants were retained and paid for by the developer, that might create a "reasonable perception of bias," regardless of the engineer's professional obligations, Curry argued.

The owner is allowing the city's consultant to access the site and to take some samples to confirm the level of mercury and to allow for periodic on-site inspections while the contractors undertake their work, replied Wallace, who noted that the city's role was limited to managing how the site was designed and ensuring that the 185 conditions approved by the Ontario Land Tribunal, many of which are standard to housing developments of this size, were met.

The city does not have a role in reviewing or approving detailed testing methodologies, although the city is "taking a more involved role" than would be typical under such circumstances, and the city hired a third-party engineering firm on Feb. 17 to provide the city with an opinion.

Wallace said the property owner had provided the city with mitigation measures to control dust and sediment. The plan included separating proposed works from "areas with known mercury exceedances."

The developers, as with all property owners, are required to comply with the Environmental Protection Act and other laws and regulations, she said. The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks would generally get involved from an environmental perspective when there was a legitimate concern or evidence that a violation under the Environmental Protection Act had occurred.

Curry said the most helpful part of Wallace's response was confirmation that the city had not received or conducted a site-wide risk assessment for mercury mobilization on the entire 175 acres. Spot testing was previously done, but that doesn't cover the entire golf course, she said.

“I really appreciated seeing it in black and white. That’s the concern of the community. We don’t know what we don’t know,” Curry said. “It’s the unknown that people are worried about”

In their statement, ClubLink, Minto and Richcraft acknowledged that mercury was commonly found in golf courses and was present in some areas of the site.

“For the work currently being completed, we are following city guidelines to ensure that any excavated areas are tested and handled in accordance with both city and provincial policies and regulations. We have a local engineering firm conducting the sampling and testing,” the statement said.

“Additionally, the city has both a full-time inspector on site, as well as a third-party engineering firm monitoring all work to ensure compliance with applicable regulations. Soil sampling is being completed in areas where excavation is planned.”

The ultimate remediation on the property is not planned for this year, “as additional sampling will be required and a final remediation plan will have to be presented by a professional engineer to the City for final review and approval,” the statement added.

Curry argues there has been a lack of transparency.

“Other developers let you know months in advance. This is unheard of,” she said.



Barbara Ramsay stands at the end of her neighbour's garden, which used to overlook the ninth fairway of the Kanata Golf and Country Club. Now it is a view of a wall of gravel supporting a construction road. PHOTO BY JULIE OLIVER /POSTMEDIA

ClubLink, Minto and Richcraft said Curry and the city had been presented the work plan for the site in advance and were still being provided with weekly updates.

Meetings with the Kanata Greenspace Protection Coalition, the Beaverbrook Community Association, and the Kanata Lakes Community Association were scheduled for Feb. 23 and again on March 9, but were cancelled by the coalition and community groups on both occasions, according to the developers' statement.

“The proponents of the development remain open to meeting.”

Curry said the meeting was cancelled because requested materials were not available in advance and the developers' team wouldn't allow the conversation to be recorded.

Among other matters, residents are concerned about vibrations caused by the heavy machinery, whether mercury will be released into the air and water and how moving soil around will affect drainage for the entire neighbourhood, Ramsay said.

“This is not a brownfield site on the edge of town. It's immediately surrounded by 630 properties, and around that is a ring of another 1,000 homes. They're talking about this as if it's a garage site.”



A January 2026 file photo of snow clearing at the former Kanata Golf and Country Club. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL /POSTMEDIA

What happens in Kanata will affect other municipalities who are keeping an eye on greenspace contracts, Curry said.

In a Feb. 9 letter to Attorney General Doug Downey, Association of Ontario Municipalities president Robin Jones said municipalities used contractual agreements with property owners to support local growth, to deliver infrastructure amenities and to maintain open space for recreation and permeable ground to soak up water.

“Municipal decision-makers need to have the right tools to protect and manage public land and open spaces,” Jones said.