

Findings on Golf Course Conversions and Recommended LDC Amendments

Introduction

On April 12, 2016 the Board of County Commissioners (Board) instituted a temporary six month moratorium on the acceptance, processing, and consideration of applications for development orders involving the conversion of lands zoned for golf course use in Collier County. Since that time, staff has conducted research into the status of golf as well as reviewed numerous case studies of golf course conversions. Based on the case studies, staff has developed concepts to provide a public participation process, best management practices, as well as development standards for golf course conversion in Collier County. The developer would be responsible for the proposed requirements.

It is important to note two caveats regarding the establishment of Land Development Code (LDC) Amendments for the conversion of golf courses. First, the development and codification of LDC provisions for golf course redevelopment or conversion shall not imply that a golf course will receive approval from the Board to convert to a different use. Second, the proposed framework is a method to support community involvement and consensus building. However, the public participation and hearing processes will only provide steps to build consensus; the individual parties will dictate whether consensus may be achieved.

Status of Golf in the Nation and Florida

The National Golf Foundation's annual report released on March 8, 2016, identifies that although more people are trying golf, they are not becoming golfers. According to the report, there were 30 million golfers in 2005, the peak of people playing the sport.¹ Since 2006, there has been a decline in the sport every year.² This lack of participation in the sport has led to a trend of more courses closing than opening for several consecutive years.³ In 2015, fourteen 18-hole courses opened and 157 courses closed across the nation, many of which were public courses.⁴

The National Golf Foundation identifies the culture of complicated etiquette and a steep learning curve as reasons for the decline in the sport.⁵ Other resources affirm that the time required to play is too long for new players and younger players are not interested in learning the game.^{6,7}

However, golf has maintained some footing in Florida. A report commissioned by GOLF 20/20 identified there was "a decline in golf residential and new course construction, as well as a decline in the number of professional tournaments played in Florida."⁸ There was growth in golf facility operations, golf-related tourism, and golf-related manufacturing. After adjusting for inflation, there was a marginal decrease, 0.4 percent, in Florida's golf economy as a whole between 2007 and 2013.⁹ The report states "Florida's golf industry is poised to regain more ground as economic conditions continue to improve."¹⁰ Given the differences between the status of golf in the nation and Florida, the number, type, and timing of golf course conversions in Collier County may be difficult to anticipate.

Conversion of Golf Courses in Collier County

Staff presented the *Collier County Existing Golf Courses & Potential for Conversion* study to the Board on March 22, 2016. The study described that the courses zoned Golf Course (GC) are as the most likely to request a rezone to a different use because 1) they do not require Transfer of Development Rights credits, and 2) they are not a part of a master planned golf course community. In total, there are 11 courses zoned GC in Collier County. These courses have existing density rights and are located within the Urban Residential Subdistrict of the Future Land Use Element. Therefore, conversion to a residential use would be supported by the Future Land Use Element. As of today, two courses (Evergreen Golf and Country Club and Quality Inn and Suites Golf Resort) are zoned GC and are closed.

Findings from Golf Course Conversion Case Studies

Following the review of golf course conversions across the nation and the state of Florida, staff has compiled six concepts to ensure community awareness and involvement in golf course conversions, as well as to establish development standards. The developer would be responsible for procedural and development requirements.

1. The importance of community participation

Case studies of golf course conversions demonstrate that obtaining support and input from the residents surrounding the golf course is important to achieve a consensus on a development proposal. In comparison, when surrounding residents are not included in the development process, the development may become contentious, litigious, and lengthy, none of which are in the best interest of the residential communities or the developer. The goal is to create a process that is balanced and inclusive of surrounding community members. This is particularly important because many golf courses, including all golf courses zoned GC in Collier County, are bordered by residential communities that may have purchased their home with the expectation of a golf course view.

Several planning mechanisms can be utilized to provide an inclusive process. For example, planning staff in Lansing, Michigan utilized a series of charrettes to engage the public on the redevelopment proposal.¹¹ A charrette is an intensive planning session, in which the public, stakeholders, and designers collaborate on ideas and concepts for the proposed project. It is an inclusive method for discussion among stakeholders and provides direct input to designers. At each meeting the design team produced a revised conversion plan based on the input received from the stakeholders at the last meeting. The process produced a multi-use plan that reflected various stakeholder interests.¹² Although the Red Cedar Golf Course in Lansing was not a part of a master planned community and was publically owned, the process the City used to create dialogue provides valuable insight into building consensus.

The public hearing process is also integral to the golf course conversion process. In 2015, the City of West Palm Beach approved the conversion of a course within the Presidential County Club Resort Community, a golf course master planned community.¹³ The approval followed several public meetings. According to City staff, the neighboring residents and the developer were able to reach consensus through the public meeting process (J. Roach, Principal Planner, personal communication, August 18, 2016). The developer agreed to provide views of open space, create a large lake system that would enhance the views, and provide separation from the proposed resort development.¹⁴ To ensure participation at the public hearing, proposed provisions will require the public notices (signs and mailings) provided to the surrounding residential community are clear, concise, informative, and timely.

Lessons can also be learned from golf course conversions that became contentions. For example, the proposed redevelopment of the Mizner Trail golf course in Boca Raton has resulted in over a decade of disputes at the county level and in the court system.¹⁵ The approval of residential uses was stalled for several years at the County level due to neighborhood opposition. However, following approval by the County Commission in 2014, the developers faced legal opposition by the Boca Del Mar Improvement Association, which represented the local neighborhood residents. As of 2015, the legal challenge was overturned in favor of the developer and the land has been listed for sale – extending the time the land is in limbo.^{16,17} Throughout the public hearing process and legal challenges, the golf course remained vacant and overgrown. The lack of compromise resulted in a costly and lengthy debate with neither parties obtaining a satisfactory result.

2. Providing useable open space

An important function of golf courses is to provide a source of green space, recreational amenities, social activities, natural and unique views, or wildlife habitat to the surrounding community.^{18,19,20} Many communities with golf courses undergoing redevelopment or conversion to new uses have evaluated the potential to preserve or expand a variety of forms of usable open space. Case studies of golf course conversion illustrate that when open space is maintained or made usable to the surrounding neighbors, compromise and consensus is achieved. Table 1 includes examples of usable open space that have been considered or implemented throughout Florida and the nation as a part of specific redevelopment plans or local land use regulations.

Table 1. Types of usable open space and open space contemplated during golf course redevelopment.

Community	Types of Open Space Contemplated or Developed
Florida	
Royal Oak Golf Course Redevelopment (City of Titusville) ^{21,22}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buffers of various sizes to neighboring residents (50, 75, 100, and 250 feet) • Clustered development with minimum 50% open space
City of Titusville Draft Guidelines for Golf Course Redevelopment ²³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconfiguration of fairways and existing facilities • Alternative recreational amenities • Buffers with vegetated screens and usable tree-lined trails • Minimum open space for new subdivisions
Tam O'Shanter Golf Course Redevelopment (City of Deerfield Beach) ²⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60-acre park (approximately 50% of site) • Linear park • Buffers to neighboring residents • Cemetery/Memorial park
Hillcrest Country Club Golf Course Redevelopment (Broward County) ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 acres of passive open space (20% of site) • Reconfigured golf course fairways • Recreation and fitness facilities
Broward County Land Development Regulations ²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain natural resources (wetlands, lakes, aquifer recharge, tree canopy) • Integrate design with existing roads, sidewalks, parks, and greenways
Mizner Trail Golf Club Redevelopment (Palm Beach County) ²⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required open space (minimum 40% of site) • Landscape buffers • Outdoor recreation • Reconfigured golf course fairways
Commons Park Golf Course Redevelopment (Royal Palm Beach Village) ^{28,29}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional park • Considered conversion of 100% of site, but resulted in 42% of site (R. Liggins, personal communication, August 22, 2016) • Community event space • Reconfigured golf course fairways • Vacant open space
Wildflower Golf Course Redevelopment (City of Englewood) ^{30,31}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public nature preserve • Environmental restoration
Nationally	
Colwood Golf Course Redevelopment (Portland, Oregon) ³²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public park • Open space (natural lands) • Wetland mitigation and forest restoration • Reconfigured golf course fairways
Roselle Golf Club Redevelopment (Roselle, New Jersey) ³³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum open space requirements (40%) • Parks, playgrounds, and other passive recreational uses • Recreational facilities • Community gardens • Landscaped perimeter buffers to neighboring residents
Red Cedar Golf Course Redevelopment (Lansing, Michigan) ^{34,35}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public parks • Boardwalks and trails • Wetland preservation and restoration • Multi-use greenspace
Lexington County Land Development Regulations (Lexington County, South Carolina) ³⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perimeter buffer strips to adjoining residential lots • Conservation easements • Requirement that layout and open space of new golf courses should anticipate reuse after abandonment

Best Management Practices

3. Environmental remediation

Due to the high volume of pesticides, herbicides, petroleum, and other chemicals regularly used at golf courses, groundwater and soil sampling is necessary to determine if remediation is required. Collier County Pollution Control provided a white paper to the Board on March 22, 2016 which identified that while sampling and remediation for pesticides and eight Resource Conservation and Recovery Act metals is required by the state, there is no requirement for sampling at golf course maintenance areas where petroleum is often stored. As a result, staff recommends adding a provision to the LDC that requires sampling for petroleum products, especially near golf course maintenance areas, as well as additional pesticide parameters in the managed turf areas.

Previously, only organochlorine pesticides were recommended for testing because these pesticides are very persistent in the environment and could still be present even years after the pesticides are no longer in use. While this still holds true for these older pesticides, newer pesticides and herbicides can be more toxic, even though they are less persistent in the environment. Therefore, staff recommends adding organophosphate, carbamate, triazine pesticides, and chlorinated herbicides to the suite of groundwater and soil testing requirements in managed turf areas. The potential remediation requirements would be based on state standards in the Florida Administrative Code for residential and commercial land uses.

Land Use and Development Standards

4. Amend the golf course zoning district to include recreational uses

Currently the Golf Course (GC) zoning district establishes golf courses as the only permitted use. To provide flexibility and alternatives, it is recommended that the GC district is expanded to include other types of recreational uses, such as but not limited to: tennis facilities, swimming facilities, club sports, etc. This will provide owners of property zoned GC additional methods to use and market their property. Design standards will be developed to maintain compatibility with the surrounding residential community, such as walls, landscape buffers, as well as lighting standards, for uses other than a golf course.

5. LDC requirements

In addition to preparing an application process and generating additional design standards based on the research discussed above, golf courses will be subject to a number of development requirements outlined in the LDC, such as, but not limited to: landscaping and irrigation, preserves, open space, infrastructure improvements, addressing traffic impacts, as well as other state and federal regulations. Based on the analysis of golf course conversion processes in other communities, staff will propose adding a community participation process to the existing PUD review and approval framework. The community participation process would be required prior to submittal of the land use application to the County.

Golf courses designed in conjunction with residential areas often provide stormwater management for the entire project. Appropriate permitting with South Florida Water Management District or the County will be required. Further, golf courses may also provide stormwater management for residential developments even though they were not originally permitted to provide this service. Therefore, during the redevelopment process the developer will be required to maintain an equivalent (or improved) level of stormwater management service demonstrated by a pre versus post development analysis.

6. Developer's Alternatives Statement

As discussed in the Community Participation section above, it is important to engage the surrounding residential community in the early stages of a golf course conversion in order to build consensus around a redevelopment plan. The Alternatives Statement is a tool prepared by the developer to generate dialogue, build consensus, and address a minimum of three alternatives: a) No change; b) Prospect of County purchase; c) Redevelopment/Conversion

conceptual plans. The Alternatives Statement would enumerate the positive and negative impacts associated with each. Alternatives required to be evaluated include:

1. No change. This alternative will identify the anticipated scenario should no action be taken by the developer. This alternative may also include the current and future financial state of golf course and whether any other uses allowed in the GC district are viable.
2. County purchase. This alternative will identify whether the County is interested in purchasing land for a public use, whether a park or other facility. Coordination with the County will be required.
3. Development alternative(s) that are compatible with the surrounding community. This alternative will identify development proposals for the subject property, taking into consideration the input provided through the community participation meetings.

Conceptual LDC Amendments

The following are conceptual LDC Amendments staff will prepare and publicly vet. The developer will be responsible for meeting the requirements.

1. Develop a public participation program designed to engage the surrounding residential community in the golf course redevelopment process. The program will require the Development Alternatives Statement is shared with the residential community and that feedback is included. Further, to ensure public participation at the public hearing the public notices (signs and mailings) will need to be clear, concise, informative, and timely.
2. Require the redevelopment project to maintain a percentage of open space and/or usable open space that is made available to the surrounding residential community.
3. Require groundwater and soil sampling for petroleum products, especially near golf course maintenance areas, as well as additional pesticide parameters in the managed turf areas. Any necessary environmental remediation shall be consistent with the Florida Administrative Code requirements.
4. Expand the Golf Course zoning district to include additional recreational uses, such as tennis facilities, swimming facilities, and other club sports.
5. Require an equal or improved level of stormwater management for the golf course property. Further, to determine whether the proposed development will need to provide stormwater management for the surrounding residential areas based on a pre versus post development analysis.
6. Require a Development Alternatives Statement, prepared by the applicant, outlining development options and an analysis of the options including: a) No change to existing use, b) Prospect of County purchase, and c) Conceptual compatible development proposals.

¹ Bense, K. (2016, March 8). The Real Reason More Americans Don't Get Hooked on Golf. *Golf.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.golf.com/tour-and-news/report-more-people-are-trying-golf-its-not-sticking>

² Clampett, B. (2016, January 25). Can golf be saved? *Impact Zone Golf*. Retrieved from <https://impactzonegolf.com/can-golf-be-saved/>

³ Rupp, L., & Coleman-Lochner, L. (2014, June 20). How golf got stuck in the rough. *Bloomberg.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-19/golf-loses-players-as-millennials-find-it-expensive-time-consuming>

⁴ Bense, K. (2016, March 8). The Real Reason More Americans Don't Get Hooked on Golf. *Golf.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.golf.com/tour-and-news/report-more-people-are-trying-golf-its-not-sticking>

⁵ Impact Zone Golf. (2016, January 25). Can golf be saved? *Impact Zone Golf*. Retrieved from <https://impactzonegolf.com/can-golf-be-saved/>

⁶ Ibid.

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- ⁸ Golf 20/20. (2015). *The Florida Golf Economy*. SRI International.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Levett, T.J. (2015). Adaptive Golf Course Redevelopment: Identity and Balance. (Master's Thesis). University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Retrieved from http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/3390/
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ City of West Palm Beach City Commission. (March 2, 2015). *2300 Presidential Way and 3100-3200 North Congress Avenue, Sea Palm Resort (formerly PCC) Resort, Major Planned Development Amendment and Major Sub division (3)*. Staff report. Retrieved from <https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AliGmwiq6slkoAQ&id=2A630568D6D3EB34%216841&cid=2A630568D6D3EB34>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Reid, A. (2015, Aug. 7). Building on hold, land for sale at old Mizner Trail golf course. *SunSentinel*. Retrieved from <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/palm-beach/fl-golf-land-problems-20150806-story.html>
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- ²² City of Titusville Planning Department. (2016). Buffer Analysis – Royal Oaks Golf Course. City of Titusville. Retrieved from <http://www.titusville.com/SIB/files/Buffers.pdf>
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