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Company wants to develop DeLand Country Club site

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DELAND — The site of the former DeLand Country Club would play host to 240 homes, a 120-bed assisted living facility and more than 100,000 feet of commercial space — if a development company's plans are approved.

Tailwinds Development LLC of Lake Mary is under contract to buy the 105-acre site from its current owner. The golf course closed in September 2012 due to economic conditions.

Attorney Mark Watts of Cobb Cole presented a preliminary plan of what the company hopes to do with the site to an audience of more than 100 residents at DeLand City Hall on Wednesday night. Also attending were Stephen Infantino, director of leasing and acquisitions for Tailwinds, as well as the company's residential development and engineering consultants.

While nothing is set in stone, Watts emphasized, the current concept calls for up to 240 new single-family homes and some tens of thousands of square feet of new commercial space.

The homes closest to the edge of the property will be built on 70-foot-wide lots, similar to homes in neighboring subdivisions such as Country Club Estates. Closer to the center of the property will be smaller homes on 40- to 50-foot-wide lots.

The neighborhoods will be surrounded by green space buffers and connect with the street network in neighboring communities, which residents have already said is overloaded with traffic cutting across from Taylor Road to Orange Camp Road. The project will have its own entrances on Orange Camp Road and U.S. 17-92 (South Woodland Boulevard).

As presented, the plan calls for 185,000 square feet of commercial space, including what is intended to be space for a grocery store as well as "junior anchors" like a department store or fitness center.

Watts said he presented the plan to city staff recently, and they told him the commercial proposal was "probably 60,000 square feet too big."

Some residents expressed concerns about the traffic impact. Others pointed to issues with school capacity, while others worried about the possible loss of trees on the old golf course or the grading of its rolling hills.

The elephant in the room seemed to be the issue of dieldrin contamination in the area. The club was the target of a lawsuit in 2011 alleging the toxic insecticide was used there.

Although any new homes would use city water, Tradewinds is conducting its own tests for contamination. The project may not go forward if unsafe levels of dieldrin are found.

Infantino emphasized that his group wants to get all the public comment it can about the project.

"We also want to incorporate input and make sure this is something everybody is happy with," he said. "We don't want to shove it through and force it on anybody."

"I think it was a good meeting," said Dick Kelton, president of DeLand Golf Course Inc., the company that owns the property. "I think the buyers are serious about addressing the concerns."

Mike Miller, a Country Club Estates resident, said he and fellow residents have many concerns.

"From my point of view, I wished that the county and the city of DeLand had been able to step up and keep the golf course as green space," he said.

Watts said if all goes as planned, Tradewinds would like to begin construction sometime in 2014.