



Rolling Hills Reserve LLC is a Maury L. Carter & Associates, Inc. investor property.

# LOCAL & STATE

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RED HUBER/STAFF FILE PHOTO

Commissioners consider purchasing the closed Rolling Hills Golf Club to turn the land into a park.

## Seminole moves to buy old golf course to turn into new park

BY MARTIN E. COMAS  
Staff Writer

Seminole County commissioners today will consider purchasing the closed Rolling Hills Golf Club to turn the land into a park, giving nearby residents relief that the land will remain free from development.

If the sale moves forward, Seminole would be the third Central Florida government in the past two years to purchase a golf course property to protect the land from new homes.

Oviedo agreed last month to buy the struggling Twin Rivers Golf Course for \$5 million and Casselberry bought the Casselberry Golf Club in 2015 for \$2.2 million.

According to a proposed contract, Seminole will purchase the nearly 100-acre Rolling Hills land — just north of the Altamonte Mall — for just shy of \$4 million. The sale, however, would be contingent on an independent appraisal and the state lifting development restrictions on another county parcel in Winter Springs.

"I'm happy that this land will remain as green space," said resident Michelle Omana, whose

home sits near the old ninth fairway. "If you look at Longwood and Altamonte Springs, those areas are built out. This land is a gem, and it will be open space not only for us to use, but for everyone else."

But Seminole Commissioner Lee Constantine — who supports protecting the property from development — blasted the proposed deal, saying the county is being taken for a ride.

He pointed out that investors purchased the old Rolling Hills Golf Club in July 2014 for \$1.5 million with the intent of building homes. Nearby residents, angered at the prospect of losing their neighborhood's cherished green space, rallied to urge county leaders to buy the land.

"I have been supportive from day one of protecting the Rolling Hills property," Constantine said. "Do I want to build a park there? Absolutely. But I think right now [the proposed price] is unfair and excessive. It's horrendous the amount of money they're asking for when you consider that they bought it for \$1.5 million. I feel that it would be in the best interest of all the citizens of Seminole

County for our staff to go back and renegotiate a better deal."

The property has an assessed value of \$11 million, according to the county property appraiser. An appraisal report commissioned by the county last year pegged the market value of the property much higher — at \$6 million.

However, that appraisal report looked at the land's best possible use if zoned for residential homes, Constantine said. The land is currently zoned for use as a park.

Deputy County Manager Bruce McMenemy said it's not a done deal yet because the proposed contract is contingent on a new independent appraisal report. He added that a previous sale price is not relevant.

"I don't know what they paid for it," McMenemy said. "To me, it's irrelevant. I'm looking at it from the standpoint of what it's worth to Seminole County residents and what the appraisal is ... That's what makes the most sense."

To help fund the Rolling Hills purchase, Seminole is looking to sell 46 vacant acres called Jetta

Point Park in Winter Springs that the county bought a decade ago to build a sports complex.

Before Seminole can sell Jetta Point, however, the state Department of Environmental Protection would have to lift development restrictions on the land because it was purchased with a \$17 million Florida parks grant.

Also, the sale of the Rolling Hills land is contingent on those development restrictions being lifted. The state agency is scheduled to consider Seminole's request in mid-November.

Rolling Hills, built in 1926 and known as a premier course in its prime, fell victim to declining interest in the sport. Numerous other Central Florida golf courses also have closed to make way for residential development.

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