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Golf-course residents get wish to boost taxes

Extra money to pay for Rolling Hills cleanup



Seminole County agreed to special tax to clean up contaminants. (Jacob Langston/staff file photo)



BY MARTIN E. COMAS STAFF WRITER

Politicians are accustomed to people complaining about taxes, but residents of Seminole County's Rolling Hills neighborhood left a county meeting pleased that elected leaders agreed to assess their homes more than \$1,000 to clean up a contaminated old golf course.

"This is the first time in my life that I have asked someone to raise my property taxes, and I'm asking you now to please raise my property taxes," resident Susan Albershard told county commissioners at a meeting last week.

In all, 1,160 residential properties in the high-end Rolling Hills subdivision — tucked just south of State Road 434 and east of Interstate 4 — each will shell out \$93 to \$185 annually over 15 years. Homes adjacent to the golf course property will pay the higher amount.

The county will use the money to eliminate contaminants, including arsenic and dieldrin, on various spots throughout the 95-acre site before turning the land into a nature park where Seminole residents can hike on trails, enjoy picnics on the grass or simply toss balls.

The cleanup is estimated to cost about \$1.5 million. If the cleanup exceed that cost, the county would have to find "an alternative funding source," said Kathy Moore, a Seminole County program manager.

The creation of the special taxing district is one of the final steps before Seminole purchases the property for \$3.95 million this summer.

"The park will be a benefit, not only to the Rolling Hills community, but to all the residents of Seminole County," resident Philip Taylor said. "Today is a great day for Seminole County."

Built in 1926, the Rolling Hills golf course was considered one of Central Florida's premier courses in its prime. But the course closed in 2014 after falling victim to a declining interest in golf. The property was sold for \$1.5 million to a group of investors.

Soon after the sale, alarmed Rolling Hills residents, whose homes surround the fairways and greens, implored commissioners to buy the land and save it from development by turning it into a park.

"You kept pushing and pushing and pushing for us to get involved," Commissioner Lee Constantine told residents. "And this commission, all five of us, recognized the value of that property in the heart of southwest Seminole County, and how important it was to preserve it and keep it as a public park."

Constantine said his childhood home was in the Rolling Hills subdivision.



“I have a great deal of love for this area,” Constantine said.

Known as a municipal service benefit unit, the special taxing district is often used by counties to pay for services in specific areas such as collecting garbage, powering streetlights or cleaning lakes. The idea is that residents within that area pay for the project, rather than all of the county’s taxpayers.

At least 65 percent of residents within an area must agree to form the special taxing district. In a vote conducted this year among Rolling Hills residents, 76 percent voted to form the district, according to county records.

“In just a few months, we hope to stand with you as you cut the ribbon on a new county park,” resident Kit Bradshaw told commissioners.

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