

IN FOCUS: WELLINGTON

Golf courses finding new lives



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Palm Beach Polo Golf and Country Club owner Glenn Straub wants to de-emphasize golf. JENNIFER PODIS / THE PALM BEACH POST 2016

One after another, people stood before Wellington's Equestrian Preserve Committee last week to oppose proposed changes to golf courses at Polo West and Palm Beach Polo Golf and Country Club. And several of those residents had the same message for



The Greater Boca Raton Beach and Park District bought Ocean Breeze Golf Course. LULU

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the committee: Golf is dying — so does that mean development is coming?

Developer Glenn Straub's two applications for the courses would change their use to include field and equine sports along with golf, and add several access points. Some people who commented before the committee acknowledged that golf courses are not the revenue drivers they once were.

A consultant who said he worked with Straub to develop the applications was the first to raise the issue of the nation's waning interest in golf.

"Equestrian is important to Palm Beach Polo because golf is dying," Effective Solutions President Mike Nelson told the committee. "If we don't have another sport to be able to use those properties with, Palm Beach Polo is going to shut down."

He added Straub cannot afford to have 300 acres of land dedicated to golf. "Nationwide, golf courses are closing," Nelson said.

Resident Stephen Stack, whose property sits along Polo West's golf course, said he understands that "golf's a dying sport," but said the benefits of a golf course go beyond the game: "It prevents development

from overtaking every space in a community.”

It's true that golf courses throughout the U.S. are closing. Last year, Bloomberg reported more than 800 golf courses had shut down in the past 10 years. And the trend has hit Palm Beach County, with some courses closing while others are forced to make radical changes.

Here's a look at what some golf courses in Palm Beach County have done when faced with a drop in income and interest.

Ocean Breeze Golf Club, Boca Raton

After closing last year, the Ocean Breeze Golf Club is set to see new life with its purchase by a Boca taxing district.

The Greater Boca Raton Beach and Park District, which is independent of the city, is spending \$24 million on the run-down property with plans to rename it Boca National Golf Club, The Post reported last month. The district said it will spend millions more to renovate the course and clubhouse.

Polo Trace Golf and Country Club, suburban Delray Beach

Now in the works: the sale of the Polo Trace Golf and Country Club's golf course to GL Homes, which said in May that it plans to build between 318 and 320 single-family homes on the land.

While the existing residents will lose their course, GL Homes President Misha Ezratti told The Palm Beach Post the developer will create a new recreation facility.

“If you want to remain a builder in South Florida, there's not enough land, and we have to adapt to smaller pieces of land, in-fill and golf courses in particular,” Ezratti said in May.

Fountains Country Club, suburban Lake Worth

In a deal worth \$17 million, members of the Fountains Country Club gave the OK to sell parts of the club's north course and some undeveloped land to GL Homes. The developer plans to build 150 to 200 single-family homes and 250 to 300 apartments there, The Palm Beach Post reported last year.

The club's board of directors said the money from the sale will be used to upgrade the aging club, including the addition of a \$2.5 million pool facility.

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