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Council opts to mull over golf course land-swap offer

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The Alameda City Council has decided to explore a developer's proposal to swap privately-owned land on North Loop Road for a portion of the Chuck Corica Golf Complex as a future site for up to 112 homes.

As part of the deal to secure the Mif Albright course, Harbor Bay Isle Associates is also pledging \$6 million for upgrades at the golf complex and an additional \$3 million to the city for building soccer and baseball fields on the 12 acres of North Loop Road.

The council's move to consider the idea came during an update Tuesday from Acting City Manager Lisa Goldman on the future of the city-owned golf complex, which is currently under interim management.

While councilmembers said they were intrigued by the land-swap idea, they noted that their decision to hear more details from Goldman within the next 60 days was only to find out if it was actually feasible.

"We are not committed to a thing beyond exploring," Vice-Mayor Rob Bonta said.

The rumors of a possible land-swap -- which have been circulating for years -- became official last week in a letter to the council from the associates' Ron Cowan, who helped spearhead the development of Bay Farm Island in the 1970s.

"We believe this plan offers many benefits to the city of Alameda," Cowan said. "Among them it preserves the facilities for youth and senior golfers. It preserves and improves the 36-hole golf course. It also addresses the city's desperate need for more soccer

and baseball fields."

The deal also could let the city off a legal hook, Cowan said.

The city is still obligated to honor its agreement with Harbor Bay Isle Associates to build 3,200 homes in Alameda, he said, and so far 2,973 have been built.

City planners already have rejected his proposal to build the homes on North Loop Road, and local business owners also have voiced opposition to a residential development on the site.

Jane Sullwold, chair of the city's Golf Commission, said she was "cautiously intrigued" by the land-swap proposal. "But I have very, very deep reservations about this plan," she added.

Among her concerns were whether any new homes would be built near an environmentally-sensitive area of the complex and whether the developer was providing enough cash to compensate for the land value of the Mif Albright site.

Others questioned whether the 14-acre Mif Albright Course -- which is popular with novice golfers -- would fit on the eight acres that is being proposed for the smaller course.

But Councilmember Beverly Johnson said the land-swap at least should be considered, especially since golf consultants have told the city that outside investment into the complex was unlikely amid the current economic slump.

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"You can think about just golf," Johnson told golfers who turned out for Tuesday's meeting. "We need to think about broader issues here."

Mayor Marie Gilmore said she wanted more details about what the developer's plan would actually look like, such as how the golf course would be reconfigured.

Whatever happens, she said, it must remain 36 championship holes.

The city is currently negotiating with interim manager KemperSports over a long-term lease for the golf complex.

Kemper is proposing a 20-year lease with a pledge to make \$5.8 million in improvements during the first decade. It also would maintain the complex's two existing 18-hole courses, company Vice President Ben Blake said Tuesday.

Three other golf firms have contacted the city recently, expressing interest in managing the complex, Goldman said.

Meanwhile, the city is conducting separate negotiations to hammer out final details with the Alameda Junior Golf Association to manage the Mif Albright course as a nonprofit.

The council asked Goldman to provide a term sheet on that deal within 60 days, when it also wants the additional details on the possible land-swap.



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