Scope and Purpose

Once a hallmark of the City of Rio Rancho, Club Rio Rancho struggled financially in the 2000’s before finally closing in 2016. Degrading conditions and concern from local stakeholders caused the City to take an active role facilitating a conversation and charrette in the Spring of 2017. Consensus Planning was hired to facilitate this dialogue among stakeholders in order to develop potential solutions for the site.

Club Rio Rancho shut down its North 9 in 2013, eventually closing its doors entirely in December of 2016. Since that time the future of the course’s roughly 260 acres has been a topic of heated debate for the property’s owners, local residents, city staff, and potential developers. In the interest of facilitating a constructive dialogue among community stakeholders and exploring potential options for the course’s future, the City of Rio Rancho contracted Consensus Planning in April of 2017. The primary venue for this dialogue was agreed to be a charrette, in which stakeholders would participate in designing future land use alternatives. Following this charrette, Consensus Planning was to explore these potential alternatives, combining them into land use plans, and providing analysis regarding how these alternatives might progress into reality. While these results should by no means be considered complete land use plans, they provide the first steps in identifying the potential outcomes that are most suitable to all those involved.
Background

Introduction

The decline of the golf course industry is by no means a phenomenon unique to Rio Rancho. Indeed, this is a trend prevalent throughout the United States, where golf course closures have outpaced openings each year since 2006, and where roughly 1,400 golf courses closed nationwide between 2001 and 2013.

The challenge facing golf courses is one of both oversupply and declining demand. Over the previous two decades, the number of golf courses has increased by roughly a third, despite the number of rounds of golf played per course per year dropping by 20% over the same period, a decline due to both shrinking leisure time and a shift to other activities. An expert on the topic recently suggested that balancing supply and demand will require the closure of between 1,500 and 2,000 courses.

The emergence of new golf courses even in the face of declining demand is due in large part to the impact these courses have on surrounding property values. New homes constructed adjacent to golf courses sell for 10-25% more than similar homes located in non-golf course communities. This realization among developers led to the massive expansion of golf course communities, particularly in the 1990’s. Construction of these courses did not include adequate consideration of a long-term funding mechanism to support course maintenance and upkeep. As such, golf courses without a long term, generated funding source have become particularly vulnerable to closures.
Appropriate methods for re-purposing failing golf courses has become a fervently debated topic in recent years. Proposed solutions have involved creating large open spaces, housing developments, cemeteries, commercial spaces, and hybrid approaches that combine one or more of these solutions with a reduced golf course, for example shrinking an 18-hole course to a 9-hole course.

The 131-acre Marlborough Golf Club in Marlborough, Maryland closed in 2010 after operating for over 30 years. The property was foreclosed on the following year. A 2013 land use plan, developed with heavy input from local residents, utilized roughly half the grounds to develop town houses and single family dwellings while reserving the remaining acreage as open space to be utilized for recreation, reforestation, and habitat creation.

In Orlando, Florida, The Marriott Corporation took over the 170-acre Grande Pines Golf Course in 1997. In 2014 Marriott sold the land to a development firm, believing the sale of the property would prove more profitable than its continued use for golf. The plan for the site involves a 1,136 home development, including 260 single-family home lots, 176 townhome lots and 700 apartments.

Turkey Creek in Alachua, Florida was built and marketed as a “Golf Course Unit Count Townhomes: 300 Single Family: 51”. The redevelopment plan for Marlborough Golf Club in Upper Marlborough, Maryland is noteworthy in its degree of stakeholder participation in the design process, leading to a plan high in recreational open space and natural habitat (Source: Soltesz).

Case Studies

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Turkey Creek in Alachua, Florida was built and marketed as a “Golf Course
The Ravenwood Heights Apartment Complex in Tempe, Arizona represents a rare golf course redevelopment project that has been carried through to construction.

“Community” in 1977. When the course closed in 2011, the residents and land owners were left with a challenging decision regarding how to best utilize the land. In his 2014 Landscape Architecture thesis, University of Florida student Adam McCollister developed three separate land use plans for the course, each varying in intensity of development and in their continued use or removal of golf from the site. McCollister later assessed each plan based on its potential implications for the environment, economic returns, and the social benefits the land could provide to the community’s residents.

While plans for re-purposing golf courses abound, built examples are scarce, due in large part to public push back by residents, reluctant to see the courses developed. One of the rare built example is the Ravenwood Heights Apartment Complex in Tempe, Arizona. The complex was constructed on the site of a former 9-hole golf course. The site maintains a townhouse community as well as two and three bedroom apartments. A portion of the golf course was left as recreational open space within the site.

In summary, golf course re-purposing plans are a topic across the country, but only a few of these efforts have been implemented. Club Rio Rancho could be one of the first of its kind in the nation.
Site History

Club Rio Rancho was built by AMREP in 1969. The West 9 was designed by famous golf course architect Desmond Muirhead, and the East 9 was designed by professional golfer Gene Sarazen. The North 9, added in 1988, was designed by golf champion Lee Trevino in partnership with William Graves. Over the site’s history the course hosted various celebrity tournaments and fund raisers, while the club house became a social hub of Rio Rancho.

The golf course began changing hands quickly in the late 1990’s, being sold to Golf Co. of Nevada in 1997, Diversified Partners in 2002, Harry Apodaca soon thereafter, and finally Jhett Brown and Bob Gallagher in 2014. While all of these owners made substantial investments in improving the course, each was forced to sell. Some of the issues affecting the course’s financial stability included decreasing membership, increased water costs, and increasing maintenance costs. In December of 2016 the course was closed and turned over to Southwest Capital Bank. In March of 2017 the property was bought by Josh Skarsgard of Skarsgard Firm. Skarsgard quickly began a listening tour, meeting with local residents and agreeing to hear proposals for the land until May 1, 2017.
Methods

Overview

In order to better incorporate stakeholders’ knowledge, concerns, and hopes for the future of the property, a participatory approach was taken to this process. The main vehicle for this approach was a charrette, which occurred with community leaders and stakeholders representing residents of the North, East, and West 9 on May 5, 2017. A follow-up meeting occurred on June 9 in order to present the results of the charrette and subsequent analysis.

Introductory Meeting - April 21

An initial meeting took place between Rio Rancho staff, Consensus Planning staff, and local stakeholders at Rio Rancho City Hall on Friday, April 21. The primary purpose of this meeting was to introduce the scope and purpose of the project to stakeholders. The meeting began with a brief introduction from city staff. Following this, stakeholders introduced themselves and explained who they were representing. When introductions had concluded, Consensus Planning staff explained their role in the project, explained the purpose and structure of the charrette, and laid some ground rules for the charrette. Participants discussed the best date for the charrette, and Friday, May 5 was chosen.
Consensus Planning met with stakeholders and representatives of local residents’ groups on May 5, 2017 to carry out a design charrette. Prior to the meeting Consensus Planning prepared various materials to aid in the process. These included existing land use and zoning maps, aerial images, and opportunity and constraints maps (see page 9). The firm also prepared informational boards displaying golf course redevelopment case studies.

The meeting began with a brief introduction, as well as an update from property owner Josh Skarsgard. Skarsgard informed participants that he had been in discussions with Bellows Golf Management. According to Skarsgard, Bellows was willing to take ownership of the course and continue to maintain the property as an 18-hole course provided they be allowed to develop homes on the remaining 100 acres. The offer also stipulated that Skarsgard deed the property to Bellows at no cost, and that the City agree to provide water to the course at a reduced rate.

Following this group discussion and a brief explanation of the charrette process, participants split into three breakout groups, with group membership being determined based on location of residence along the course (East, West, or North). Each group was tasked with providing two separate land use plans for their relative sections of the course; one option maintaining some golf on the site and one option without golf. Members of the East and West groups actively participated and quickly worked through each of the plans. While residents of the North 9 did identify some locations to serve as potential development areas, participants were generally pessimistic about any development, indicating a strong preference that the area should remain as golf, going so far as to discuss scenarios for acquiring the North 9 directly.

Following the completion of these plans a representative of each group presented their results to the larger group. Participants then discussed dates for the follow-up meeting, and the meeting adjourned.
Following the charrette, participants’ designs and feedback were incorporated into two separate land use plans. These plans represented the combined “With Golf” and “No Golf” options created by participants during the previous meeting. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were utilized in making each of the plans, allowing for acreages to be totaled by land use type and project area.

Following the creation of these two generalized land use plans, yield studies for each of the plans were conducted. This involved a schematic platting of the area designated for residential development to create a potential lot yield count for each of the two plans. Using a standard single family lot size of 50’ x 110’ it was determined that the “With Golf” land use option could accommodate roughly 345 single family homes, and that the “No Golf” land use option could potentially accommodate roughly 694 units, utilizing a combination of 50’ x 110’ single family lots and 120’ x 30’ town house lots. It should be noted that far from being final land use plans, these studies provide an estimate of the number of lots the site could support. Additional analysis is necessary in creating a final plan. Adjustments to these lot dimensions would result in changes to unit counts, allowing the property to accommodate more or less lots.

**Charrette Results**
The plan for the “Golf Land Use Option” attempts to distribute land use types evenly throughout the site. This nevertheless proved challenging in certain instances. The West 9, for example, holds a disproportionately small share of golf uses. This was due to the challenge of routing golfers through residential uses to reach the western extent of the area. The preservation of the area surrounding The Enclave as open space is in part a response to this disparity. The North 9, by contrast, holds a disproportionately small share of new development. Relatively narrow building spaces, the area’s accessibility to the club house, and concerns expressed by the North 9 residents made a high concentration of golf more feasible. This plan preserves the course club house, while converting the tennis courts and upper parking lot and driving range to residential use.

The plan for the “No Golf Land Use Option” attempts to balance the need for new development with the desire to preserve open space throughout the site. Charette participants from the East 9 and West 9 chose to prioritize the conservation of open space around The Enclave and The Islands. As with the “Golf Land Use Option”, the North 9 holds a relatively low proportion of new development due primarily to residents’ concerns. This plan preserves the club house and surrounding area as a potential community or senior center, or as a restaurant or event center.

Note: Although the West 9 surrounds a 5 acre parcel that is not held under the same ownership as the course, the owners have indicated a willingness to develop this land, and so it has been included in this study.
The yield study for the “Golf Option” attempts to incorporate existing residents’ concerns regarding privacy and property value with the need to create residential units on the site in order to support a future golf course. As noted previously, this option maintains golf uses primarily in the areas immediately surrounding and with connectivity to the club house. Residential areas were designed with a minimum 20’ buffer between proposed and existing residences, although this buffer is substantially larger where space allows. This area could remain as an undeveloped buffer separating residences, or could be developed as trails, potentially connecting the surrounding neighborhoods to the course. Space was also allocated in certain areas to allow golf cart paths to move around proposed residences when moving from one course area to another. While the club houses is preserved for the future course, the upper parking lot, tennis courts and driving range are converted to housing.

In the yield study for the “No Golf Option”, the area surrounding The Islands was marked by charrette participants as potentially suitable for town houses due to the existing town house community located there. They requested that the area immediately surrounding their community be left as open space. Large open space buffers were provided in the developed western portion of the North 9 to accommodate steep topography in the area. As with the “Golf Option”, residential areas were designed with a minimum 20’ buffer between proposed and existing residences, but are substantially larger in certain locations. This option leaves the club house building intact for potential community or commercial uses, and preserves the tennis courts and upper parking lot.
On June 9th a follow up to the charrette took place. In preparation for the meeting, Consensus Planning staff printed the two land use plans, which were displayed alongside tables providing acreage figures for each of the two plans, broken down by both land use type and golf course area. In addition, Consensus Planning presented the results of the separate yield studies associated with each of the plans. These studies were displayed as hand graphics on trace paper, which was overlaid on an aerial image of the course. The yield counts for each of the two plans were displayed to the side of each map, and were broken down by golf course area. Both the land use plans and the yield studies were presented to participants at the beginning of the meeting, followed by audience questions and comments.

Following this discussion, property owner Josh Skarsgard updated meeting participants on recent progress with Bellows Golf Management. Skarsgard outlined four necessary conditions for a golf course solution to occur. These were:

- The City of Rio Rancho granting a reduced water rate for the golf course, ideally no higher than the “flow-through rate”;
- Residents of the newly developed homes would become automatic members of the course, thus allowing the new construction to contribute to course maintenance fees;
- Skarsgard would deed the land to Bellows at no cost, a condition to which he had already agreed; and
- Members will take charge of a club membership drive in order to increase the course’s financial support base.
Next Steps

In order to facilitate a transition to the property’s redevelopment, this report includes an outline of some of the key remaining tasks. Since the “Golf Option” is the strong preference of the property owner and the stakeholders, this action agenda focuses on this preferred alternative. These steps have been grouped based on the party primarily responsible for completing each task. This list is not exhaustive, and new steps are likely to arise as the process progresses.

**Property Owner**

As the current property owner for the site, Skarsgard Firm will bear a substantial portion of the responsibility in bringing this project to completion. These tasks will include:

- Negotiating a reduced water rate for golf uses;
- Deeding the land designated for golf to Bellows Golf Management;
- Facilitating a membership drive to attract new funding for course upkeep and maintenance, to include information regarding membership options, cost range, benefits, etc.;
- The creation and submittal of a Master Plan and Zone Map Amendment including preliminary water/wastewater availability; and
- Collaborating with the NMED to address any issues facing the property’s irrigation ponds and update or obtain permits from the Groundwater Protection Bureau.

**Stakeholders**

The primary stakeholders represent the surrounding neighborhoods that are adjacent to the golf course. These stakeholders will be critical to the success of this redevelopment strategy. Their role includes:

- Participants shall take the concept back to their respective organizations to ensure broader support;
- Provide political support to the property owner relative to the water rate agreement, master plan, and zone approval; and
- Participate in the membership drive and garner a wider base of supporters (not just the new residents).

**City of Rio Rancho**

The City’s role in this process is limited to one of reviewing and processing future applications. It is however important that the City’s support continues through this process. Their primary responsibilities will be to:

- Review the water rate agreement proposed by Bellows Golf Management and the property owner and evaluate the proposal for possible approval by the governing body; and
- Review and evaluate the Zone Map and Master Plan Amendment to be submitted by the property owner.
Critical Elements of the Master Plan  
The Master Plan and Zone Map Amendments submitted to the City will be the primary documents specifying the updated standards and layout of the property. The critical elements of these documents include:

- Open space buffers between existing and new development;
- Height restrictions (single story);
- Perimeter trails and amenities where appropriate;
- Final determination of density and lot sizes;
- A schematic golf course layout, to include tee boxes, fairways, and greens;
- Access points and traffic considerations;
- Non-golf open space ownership and maintenance responsibilities; and
- Project phasing plans with infrastructure (proposed and existing) to include but not limited to roads, water (potable and reuse), sewer, dry utilities, and stormwater drainage (including natural features and floodplains).

Final Notes  
As previously noted, this list is by no means exhaustive. It is likely that other requirements will arise as the process progresses. This section nevertheless presents many of the required tasks likely to arise based on discussions with stakeholders, city staff, and the property owner during this planning process with the City of Rio Rancho. Although these steps have been listed as pertaining to a single party deemed to be primarily responsible, a great deal of collaboration will need to be involved in all of these steps. An initial step in this process was a meeting held by Skarsgard Firm on June 29, 2017 at City Hall, with stakeholders, representatives of local residents’ groups, and City staff in attendance.
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**May 5, 2017**
# GOLF COURSE CHARRETTE MEETING
June 09, 2017

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Appendix B
Meeting Notes

City of Rio Rancho
Golf Course Charrette – Introductory Meeting Notes – April 21

Development and Future Options

- The previous Pulte plan was opposed by almost 85% of residents of the North 9
  - Open to almost anything else, but will oppose another Pulte Plan
  - Lower density development could be a possibility
- Any plan must pay off the property owner’s debt – roughly $3.2 million
- Anything other than weeds
- Would like a wall to separate existing and new development
- There are parties interested in maintaining the property as a golf course, but realize some development would have to take place
- People would concede to some development if not “right on top of them”
  - Would like some golf to remain
  - Many avid golfers in the area
  - Many people are OK with some development near their homes if there is also golf close by and there are large buffer zones separating new and existing development
  - Majority of pushback from people in $450,000 home value – concerned will face greater competition in selling their homes
- The West 9 would be the best place for development
  - Widest
  - Easiest access
- The East 9 should remain as golf
  - Beautiful views
- Are there any plans for the Club House?
  - Currently being kept vacant so that it is open to different land use solutions
- There is an issue of trust

Ponds

- Participants from the Enclave are concerned that converting the ponds to open space will lead to litter
- There are safety concerns about the ponds related to drowning
- There are concerns about pollution in the ponds effecting wildlife
- Water provides historic and cultural value
  - With future development, the responsibility for maintaining the ponds should be shared
City Involvement

- The City wants to see an amicable resolution that works for all involved property owners
- The City did a cost analysis to study what it costs to deliver effluent to ponds
  - Rates are currently higher than costs
- City could broaden base of payment to maintain the area with a PID or SAD
- For development plans, the City must analyze the relationship to public infrastructure

Consensus Planning Role and Charrette Preparation

- Consensus Planning is representing the city and not Pulte or Skarsgard – although Consensus Planning previously represented Pulte
- Friday May 5 was chosen as the charrette date
- Around 25 people suggested as the correct number of participants
City of Rio Rancho
Golf Course Charrette – Break Out Group Notes

East 9

- East 9 is willing and committed to contributing its fair share for the golf alternative to succeed
- The northern and southern appendages of the East 9 are most appropriate for residential development
  - The area along the south edge of the southern appendage is adjacent to lots with large rear yards
  - Potential for new residential lots with smaller rear yards and less impact to the existing lots with large rear yards
  - The 10+ acre northern appendage provides an opportunity for development without much impact to the golf alternative
  - Development of the northern appendage should include the tennis courts; maintaining the tennis courts is not a priority
  - Would like confirmation on the size of the northern and southern appendages
- The central east-west portion of the East 9 has the best views and should be maintained for the golf course alternative
- Potential for single family detached and single family attached, depending on existing adjacent development; new development should be designed and be responsive to the adjacent existing development
- No golf alternative:
  - Maintain the east pond as “open space”
  - Remainder of East 9 would be available for residential development
  - Area on the outside of the east pond would be appropriate for townhouse (attached) development
- The clubhouse used to be a great place to socialize, have a drink with friends

West 9

- Storm drainage must be taken care of, this is a priority
- Enclave can't afford to take over lakes
- Preference for single family homes and not apartments
- Like the idea of trails with access to the surrounding neighborhoods
- Option 1 (Golf)
  - East Area – Golf
  - Middle Area – Housing
  - Area around the lakes – Open Space
 Option 2 (No Golf)
  o East and Middle Areas – development (HOA to include pond maintenance)
  o Senior living facility
  o Area around the lakes – open space (Parks & Rec) City involvement only w/development
 Lakes are a great amenity if it is possible to maintain them
 Mixed use
  o Different styles of homes
 Area around the lakes and the lakes are preferred for open space with a conservation easement
 Open space important around perimeter (50’)
  o Trees – Walking Trails
 Open space area between the lakes and Enclave
  o Enclave has the capacity/capability to maintain the existing trees
 Clubhouse (No Golf) +/- 60 acres of development
  o Senior cottages
  o Apartments
  o Kids workshop
  o Senior Center
  o Community Center
  o Restaurant (appropriate w/ added housing)
  o Event Center
  o Maintain tennis courts (good shape/still used)
    ▪ ‘RRPS or City
  o Private use for residents

 Protecting/Adding Home Values
 What makes development worthwhile?
  o Upscale Housing ($125/ft.*) ($200k+)
  o Trails / Trees / Landscaping
  o Amenities
  o Benches
  o Exercise Area (stations)

Would like to see a schematic development design/layout plan for both scenarios to help determine the feasibility
North 9
- Would prefer to maintain entire area for golf
- Financial discussion to “acquire” the north 9 would require 100% participation by residents to become members with monthly dues (would receive complete club membership benefits)
- Some small areas could be developed for housing that do not negatively impact golf, and this would reduce the membership cost to the area residents
- Alternative to all golf would be to give up the northeast acreage for housing, as well as the other small development areas
- If housing is developed it is important to create buffers that aim to maintain views and current quality of life
City of Rio Rancho
Golf Course Charrette Follow Up Meeting – June 9

Questions

➢ What would the range of memberships cost?
➢ Will there be a driving range?
➢ Who will maintain the open space?
   ○ There could be a number of solutions, but the city will not be taking them over.

Suggestions

➢ Golf cart trails could be placed around the perimeter of the site to connect residents to the course who do not live adjacent to the site. This would encourage connections to the golf course.
➢ The West 9 needs a landscape buffer. These could potentially be in the form of trails.

Moving Forward

➢ The project will need political support for a General Plan Amendment
➢ Stakeholders need to be prepared for some pushback
➢ Trails and setbacks should be included in the Zone Map Amendment
➢ Bellows is already working on a golf course layout
➢ Consensus Planning will share the report when finished, and will include a “Next Steps” section
➢ Skarsgard outlined four conditions necessary for a golf solution to occur.

1) City of Rio Rancho granting a reduced water rate for the golf course, ideally no higher than the “flow-through rate”.

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2) Residents of the newly developed homes would become automatic members of the course, thus allowing the new construction to contribute to course maintenance fees.

3) Skarsgard would deed the land to Bellows at no cost, a condition to which he had already agreed.

4) Skarsgard outlined the need for a club membership drive, and asked meeting participants to take charge of this process.

Other

➢ There will be no ponds without golf. If there is no golf use the ponds will have to be drained