

Camarillo golf course housing development faces repeal

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A proposed housing development that would shorten the 18-hole Camarillo Springs Golf Course may not be up to par.

Councilman Tony Trembley said at last week's City Council he will direct staff to schedule a discussion on the possibility of rescinding a general plan amendment to redesignate 31 acres of the golf course to low-medium density residential.

Called the Greens at Camarillo Springs, the project would convert the property into 248 senior, single-family residential homes. The remaining 151 acres will be reduced to 12-hole golf course with additional amenities and improvements.

Over 20 members of the public addressed the council last week and another 25 written comments were submitted ahead of the meeting. Comments were overwhelmingly against the development.

"I would lose my view," wrote Joyce Maggio, a 21-year Camarillo Springs resident in her opposition. "All the animals would disappear. My home would (definitely) lose value, and from what I can tell, I will not have the lake for a backyard as promised."

At future meeting, the City Council will discuss whether to hold a public hearing to act in favor or opposition of the amendment moving forward. The date has not yet been set.

New Urban West, Inc., the project developer, applied to amend the general plan in late 2017 and submitted accompanying documents in the following years. A draft Environmental Impact Report was released for a 45-day public comment period in 2020, which drew 84 public comments, according to a staff report.

City staff shared public concerns over the developer's proposed drainage and flood protection plan. As a result, Kasraie Consulting was hired to perform an independent review.

The Ventura-based firm found the plan to be "inadequate."

"When we reviewed that master plan drainage plan report, we found the study to be somewhat incomplete and not up to the right level of hydrology standards," said Hassan Kasraie, of Kasraie Consulting, last week.

After working with Kasraie Consulting, the developer submitted an updated drainage plan, which addressed the firm's concerns.

However, Kasraie said the area is still at risk of flooding.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency uses a 100-year flood map to determine water levels during a significant flooding event. According to the agency, such an event has a 1% chance of happening each year.

In the Camarillo Springs area, the flood zone includes areas near the Conejo Creek and a large portion of the nearby agricultural fields, according to city documents. The flood zone also extends into the golf course and could reach over 150 homes, according to city documents.

The proposed housing development would raise 34 acres of the golf course, which would act as a flood barrier.

Trembley, who had previously supported the project, had a list of questions and concerns on the updated drainage report.

He drew attention to a small lake located at the north end of Margarita Avenue that would increase in size under the drainage plan.

Kasraie said he was concerned about the lack of an emergency spillway for the lake and its use of a flap gate system to regulate the lake's water levels.

If the flaps were to get jammed opened, the water levels in the creek and lake would equalize, raising the lake levels during a major flooding event. Flood waters could spill into the surrounding neighborhood, Kasraie said. In his report, Kasraie notes that a separation flood wall between the lake and creek could breach in a 500-year flooding event, resulting in the flooding of current and proposed homes.

A 500-year flood event has a 0.2% chance of occurring each year, according to FEMA.

Jonathan Frankel, a New Urban West project manager, said last week Kasraie's review of the flood and drainage plan stated it would work as intended. He said the company couldn't design a system that was devoid of risk, but there was a "tremendous risk of doing nothing."

"Everyone will be made safer as a result of the plan," Frankel.

The Santa Monica based developer has built over 4,000 homes in Ventura County, according to Frankel.

John Gardner, a Camarillo Springs resident, spoke in favor of the project. Like Frankel, he questioned what would happen to the area during a major flooding event if nothing was done. He suggested the city work with the developer, who will use private funding to make the area flood resistant.

"If you've got a willing developer who is willing to, and they have already shown their willingness to work with the experts, to design and redesign and add millions of more dollars of costs to the project to be able to make this project safer," Gardner said.

Those opposed to the project spoke on a variety of topics, such as the drainage plan, reduction of the golf course and the environmental impact to the area. They also noted the additional traffic that would make it more difficult to evacuate.

"When our area was forced to mandatory evacuate in the last fire, it was complete panic," said 22-year Camarillo Springs resident Bryan McCall in a written statement.

"People driving on the wrong side of Adohr Lane and the dirt roadway next to the fields. Craziness is the only word to describe our experience."

Because so many changes were made to the draft Environmental Impact Report, it will have to go before the public for another 45-day comment period. City staff said they are unsure when the draft will be released and when the final report will be presented to the council.

Brian J. Varela covers Oxnard, Port Hueneme and Camarillo