

Developers take swing at golf courses

By **DAWN WOTAPKA HARDESTY**

Attention Long Island golfers: Developers are watching your game.

And your course.

On an island where raw land is a scarce, pricey commodity, at least four golf courses are being eyed for residential development.

"The land is so valuable that to have it sit as just a golf course is not productive to the people who own it," Richard Machtay, Huntington's director of planning and environment. "As long as the price of land is high, people that own [it] are going to try to exploit it any way they can."

With land scarce and prices high, builders see opportunity for both sides

R Squared, founded by industrial powerhouse cousins Gregg and Mitchell Rechler, are in contract to buy a quarter of the 116-acre Island Hills Golf Club and Country Club in Sayville. Sources say the Rechlers want to buy the entire course and build housing there.

In Dix Hills, the Hollow Hills Country Club shuttered to make way for 30 homes. In Shoreham, the 150-acre Tall Grass Golf Club might be combined with a sod farm for 283 houses. And the tony Cold Spring Country Club on the Nassau-Suffolk border is marketing its 169 acres as "a unique residential development opportunity."

Lawrence Feldman, a real estate and land-use lawyer with Farrell Fritz, agreed with Machtay, though he pointed out not all of the redevelopment eschews golf entirely.

"Golf courses represent larger tracts of land which are harder and harder to come by on Long Island," said Feldman, a firm partner representing the Tall Grass project: "The developers are always looking for larger parcels. There's more creativity that can be implemented."

Clubs may no longer have the cache they once did – membership rosters are dropping – but development is a major reason.

Most golf courses fill between 100 and 125 acres, and many are the epicenter of an upscale neighborhood that

built up around the course.

Plus, many courses weren't rezoned and residential rules still apply.

That's helping ease preliminary approvals of the Hollow Hills Country Club's homes, which are expected in the next few weeks.

The bulk of the Cold Spring Country Club is zoned for half-acre lots and up to 225 homes could be built.

The surrounding community vowed to fight the development. Earlier this week, neighboring residents petitioned the town for a moratorium on developing golf courses until a master plan could be developed, said Gary Melius, a Cold Spring member who is interested in buying the site near his Oheka Castle luxury hotel.

Machtay, the Huntington planner, said zoning changes to make it harder for golf courses to be redeveloped were previously recommended.



Developer R Squared wants a stake in Island Hills.

The changes weren't adopted, so Cold Spring's neighbors "could fight it, but I don't know what good it would do at this point" since it is zoned for residential development.

Such zoning issues should be addressed Islandwide, said Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island, a smart-growth planning organization.

"The reality check is that the public supported this use because there's less density and there's some open space to keep kind of a more bucolic environment," he said.

"There needs to be some planning involved. This can't happen on a case-by-case basis."