

Sunset Golf Development Proposal

By Kerry Ashline

Grass Roots Movement Stymies Developer

Back in September of 2013, the rumors were already spreading. Sunset Golf course was being leased by a developer bent on building homes and rental units. Not a word from City Hall. Hollywood politicians tight-lipped. A meeting was called on March 13 by a concerned group of citizens determined to educate the public. The Hollywood Rotary Club's parking lot was jammed packed. Cars parked on every inch of available space for blocks. All made their way into the meeting hall. Hollywood mayor Peter Bober even showed up. When it came his turn he had three minutes to speak his mind, like everyone else. It would have been the perfect time to put the crowd at ease, stand up and tell

everyone how he planned to vote on the proposed development. We all waited. The mayor rose purposefully from his chair. The room got uncharacteristically quiet.



Things got testy in exchange between Mayor Bober and Max Soren at community meeting discussing future of Sunset Golf Course

“This is the first meeting I’ve been to where I’ve heard mean, offensive, horrible things about City Hall,” said Hollywood’s mayor. The crowd jeered. “Sit down!” yelled one woman in the crowd. Bober continued undaunted. “So many people have gotten you all nuts! I have never said I will vote for this!”

“Then how will you vote Mayor?” someone shouted. “I can’t take a position,” said Bober. Doing so, he explained would disqualify him from formally voting on the project if it came before the City Commission. “It’s offensive to attack members of City Hall on their vote before anything is even submitted.” Group spokesman Max Soren had heard about enough. Slowly, deliberately with microphone in hand he made his way across the stage towards the mayor. “What about the \$500,000 they paid?” asked Soren. “They” referring to **CD Development Group**, of which business partner Mauricio Cayon’s limited liability company “Sunset Club Lease LLC” currently leases the now defunct golf course.

“I don’t care if they paid \$5 million dollars!” shouted the Mayor. More jeering. “We wouldn’t be here if we didn’t have a lack of faith in our leadership,” countered Soren. “If you lived in this area you would be upset. We don’t have faith that you will do the right thing. You are in office because we voted for you. Now represent us, and we need you to vote no!”

Soren mapped out the dire consequences of developing Sunset Golf Course on Johnson Street into a 179 home/232 rental unit property. He described Sunset Golf course as “the last remaining green space in Hollywood.” Nancy Fowler, who is also on the committee told me Sunset Golf “is like a little piece of the Everglades in the middle of Hollywood.”

Ownership Is A Mystery

Sunset Golf course, located at 2727 Johnson Street, lies on a 47-acre tract bordered to the south by Johnson, and to the north by Arthur St. Dead end streets empty into the golf course to the east and Interstate 95 borders the tract to the west. Although the identity of the property owner is not clear, public records show the golf course was operated corporately from 1997 up until 2013 by “Sunset Golf Club Inc.” Records further show Carol Goodman of Plantation and William Sutton of Hollywood as corporate officers. In September 2013 Mauricio Cayon formed “Sunset Club Lease LLC” and is leasing the golf course property. The land itself is held in a trust. Dissolution papers have not yet been filed for Sunset Golf Club Inc. so apparently that entity

is still solvent. The golf course, which opened in the 1950’s, has not been sold. CD Development Group’s Mauricio Cayon, under the newly formed LLC is leasing the land. And that is what troubles Max Soren and his fellow grass roots activists.

Problems With Development

At the “**Keep Sunset Golf Course Green**” meeting held not far from the golf course, about 150 packed the meeting facility to hear the fate of the golf course. Attendees feel if Mauricio Cayon and his company succeed, everything from increased traffic congestion, local street flooding, increased crime, lower home values, lack of green space, and adverse wildlife effects would impact residents of Johnson St. and surrounding area. According to Soren, Florida Dept. of Transportation rates roads on a scale of A-F. “Johnson Street east of I-95 is already an ‘F,’” he said, “and heading east towards Dixie Highway is already 1/3 above capacity.” Factor in an additional 800 cars from the proposed new development and FDOT would have to re-vamp their road rating system.

The proposal includes a plan to improve but not widen Johnson Street. Ambulance traffic could be hampered by congestion as Memorial Regional Hospital is only a quarter mile down the road from the proposed development. Eliminating 47 acres of green space, which serves as a retention pond during heavy rains and hurricanes, could prove devastating for adjacent property owners. With no place to go storm waters could also easily flood Johnson St. One needs to look no further than the Lincoln Street park project and the adverse effects of storm water now plaguing that community.

An estimated \$650,000 would be paid in new residential property tax revenues for the Sunset project, which is about half of one percent of the city’s 2014 budget of \$462 million. According to Soren, new development uses about \$1.12 - \$1.36 in public money for each dollar spent. With many homes still in foreclosure he asks “Do we really need another development to flood (no pun intended) the market?”

Currently Designated As Open Space

There are many administrative hurdles since the development group only leases the land, which is currently designated in the city charter as “open space”. The only way to change that designation would be through a lengthy process of meetings,



Sunset Golf Course is currently closed and the 47-acre land is being eyed for housing development

public hearings and voting by the city commissioners. If they approve the plan, Broward county commissioners would also have to give their approval then it would come back to the city for a final vote. Mayor Bober, apparently feeling the pressure of the **Save Sunset Golf Committee**, issued a formal statement a week after the meeting stating that “Under no circumstances will I support a redevelopment of Sunset Golf Course unless for uses consistent with open space.” Curious, I polled the six city commissioners with three simple questions: Are you in favor of ANY development on the golf course property? Do you think Hollywood currently has enough green space? And do you think the Mayor’s idea of the City of Hollywood buying the golf course property and designating it as green space a good idea? The responses were less than exciting.



Yes, No, Or Undecided

Sounding off first was Commissioner Kevin Biederman (District 5). He stated “The City Attorney has advised us that there is a substantial likelihood of litigation surrounding the issue of the development. As a result, he has advised us not to express any opinions on the topic outside of a publicly advertised hearing.” Commissioner Linda Sherwood, District 6, obviously never received that memo and gladly replied: “I would only agree with what is approved under the open space use designa-



Hollywood residents hope to keep golf course designated as open space and possibly a bird watching property.

tion. One third of Hollywood has park space which the city must financially maintain. I would not agree to Hollywood purchasing the land. We are just coming out of a very severe financial crisis. It will be 2017 before the City has excess funds available for any other purposes other than our actual yearly expenses. To approach our citizens with an added burden of a General Obligation Bond for the Sunset Golf Course would not be practical. Both of the working golf courses the city owns are in dire need of repair

with estimates for just one of them at \$33 million. There is not enough money at this time in our Open Space Developer Fee which has not already been designated for other parks. It would not be prudent at this time to purchase Sunset Golf Course nor take on the burden of maintaining it.”

The Mayor’s office was kind enough to respond with a copy of the previously referenced letter from the mayor. Commissioners Patty Asseff, Peter Hernandez, Traci Callari (whose district Sunset Golf Course falls under) and Richard Blattner all did not respond to my emailed questions nor a request for comments.

Developer's Previous Projects

CD Development Group’s projects are numerous, ranging from Palm Square Shopping Center in Pembroke Pines, Centro Canarias in Hialeah and a church, Calvary Chapel Kendall. They’ve built condos in Tampa, Hialeah, Deerfield Beach, Sunrise and Victoria Heights, a condo development in Atlanta. Industrial projects include a warehouse in Hialeah and the Palmetto Industrial Center. But until they can somehow purchase the golf course property and get the city commissioners to change the designation of Sunset Golf as open space, nothing will change which is fine with the Save Sunset committee. CD Development Group did not respond to emails nor phone requests for an interview. Their website cddevelopmentgroup.com bounced repeated emails to their site.

Under Pressure

The backlash from the grass roots effort has seemed to pay off, for now. As reported by **Local 10 News** on March 31st CD Development Group has withdrawn its plan for Sunset Golf Course. However it seems this story may not be over just yet. There still is the issue of the \$500,000 that was paid to lease the golf course which is currently closed. If Commissioner Biederman is right, the city will have to deal with a lawsuit from the developer.

Keep Up The Good Fight

Save Sunset Golf committee is not backing down.. Soren encouraged citizens to get involved. “Attend and speak out at the commission meetings. We are assuming government is looking out for our best interest. The golf course is a break in the urban sprawl. It provides a sense of peace. Once this land is gone, that’s it. The key to our success is to stop any land use change amendment. It is the responsibility of our elected officials to follow the open development plan”

Keeping Sunset Green

The committee’s Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/savesunsetgolf> currently has over 800 “likes.”

There you can see great photos of the wildlife that calls Sunset Golf home. To counter that they have come up with a concept poster of one possible use of the golf course-The Joseph W. Young Wading Bird Sanctuary. Check it out on their page. And stay tuned.