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## Sabal Trace golf course to be sold at auction

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Staff Writer

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*Editor's Note: An earlier version of this story indicated that Charlotte Gold Partners had defaulted on its loan with Wells Fargo, which is incorrect. Charlotte Golf Partners' loan with Wells Fargo for the Sabal Trace Golf & Country Club matured and the bank refused to extend it and foreclosed on the property. The story has been corrected.*

NORTH PORT — Sabal Trace Golf & Country Club, a 207-acre parcel that is the site of the city's first golf course, will be sold in a court-ordered foreclosure auction on Aug. 2 in Sarasota.

The course has been closed, its grounds overgrown, since May 2015, when Charlotte Golf Partners' loan with Wells Fargo for the Sabal Trace Golf & Country Club matured and the bank refused to extend it and foreclosed on the property.

As recently as last summer, Tampa-based GNP Development Partners hoped to buy the property out of foreclosure, build a nine-hole executive golf course and develop between 200 and 300 homes. But that never panned out.

In a prepared statement Walt Driggers III, vice president of Tranzon Driggers, the company marketing the property and managing the auction, called it “hard to find a tract this size, with this much potential — a high-profile location, in a fast-growing community midway between Fort Myers and Sarasota, with off-the-charts demographics.”

For most of its existence, the site functioned as a golf course. The Charles Ankrom-designed Par 72 course was built in 1970 by General Development Corp. and the club followed in 1972, when it was originally known as the North Port Country Club.

Signature Golf, the parent company of Charlotte Golf Partners, bought the property in January 2002 from Club Corp. for \$2.7 million.

Controversial plans to develop as many as 800 homes on the 207 acres led to the forming of the Sabal Trace Homeowners Alliance and contentious rezoning hearings. In 2004, Charlotte Golf Partners filed a \$15 million suit against the city of North Port, in response to the city's 2003 decision to rezone the land from multi-family residential to commercial recreational.

The suit was dropped in June 2005, when the city approved plans for "Valente at Sabal Trace," which called for 500 homes clustered in four-story buildings near the course entrance on Greenwood Avenue, and 130 condos scattered in two-story buildings throughout the course.

Charlotte Golf Partners' last plan prior to foreclosure was to build 280 homes and revamp the 18-hole golf course to include nine holes that would be replicas of signature holes from iconic golf courses.

Former city commissioner and Sabal Trace resident Fred Tower said the biggest concern residents face now would be buffering between existing homeowners and potential new neighbors.

"The biggest concern is the barrier, so we don't have houses sitting on houses," Tower said. "Right now, we understand nobody wants to build a golf course to replace that."

"More golf courses close today than open today," he added.

Because the property is zoned commercial recreational, the new developer would have to put up some type of recreational component, such as tennis courts or pickleball courts. Residents have an interest in how that amenity would be operated, as well as who would pay for it.

North Port Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bill Gunnin said that for the community as a whole, "it's best to get rid of the eyesore as it is now."

However, Gunnin said there is some concern that the company that purchases the 207 acres at auction may do so as an investor and sit on the property.

“Then, they’re not going to take care of it and maintain it the way we’re expecting it to be,” Gunnin said.

“We’re hoping that something comes out that would make the community look a lot better and make the residents of that community happier,” he added.

*Information from Herald-Tribune archives was used in this report.*

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## City of North Port

### NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Michele Norton, AICP, Planning Manager

THRU: Scott Williams, Neighborhood Development Services Director

SUBJECT: Sabal Trace Golf Course Auction

DATE: July 18, 2017

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In response to the many inquiries pertaining to the pending auction of the Sabal Trace Golf Course, the City is providing the following position and information on the subject property that has been provided to each inquiry thus far. This will ensure that all interested parties will receive the same information pertaining to the site.

The property currently has a Comprehensive Plan Land Use designation of Recreation/Open Space (Exhibit A) and is zoned Commercial/Recreation (Exhibit B). Within the Recreation/Open Space land use description, privately owned tracts shall have the same density/intensity as defined in the Low Density Residential designation (4.0 residential units per gross acres for unplatted areas).

Sections 53-187 and 53-188 of the City of North Port Land Development Code provide both the relationship of the Commercial/Recreation (COMMREC) zone district to the comprehensive plan and the established intent of the zone district. Further, Section 53-188 further describes that a residential use is not listed as a permitted principle use in COMMREC zone district. It is provided however as an accessory use at the discretion of the City Commission through a Special Exception process, showing the master planning of the site and to illustrate that the homes are clearly incidental and subordinate to the principal commercial recreational use.





A Special Exception (Article 24, North Port Unified Land Development Code) request requires a quasi-judicial hearing before the City Commission. Consequently, staff will not represent to anyone what recreational use, size of use, or number of units would be supported, as that would reflect subjective matter without any record, application, data, analysis to support decisions. Those items plus transportation, stormwater, subdividing of land, platting and so forth will be reviewed during the appropriate development process.

**Exhibit 'A'**

**Sabal Trace Golf Course  
Recreation  
Open Space Land Use**

Recreation / Open Space - These lands are designated for either active or passive recreational uses. For the Myakkahatchee Creek project identified in Objective 5 of the Conservation and Coastal Zone Management Element, and other similar future projects, the City may wish to classify privately owned platted lots or tracts designated as Recreation / Open Space on the Future Land Use Map. Certain lands along the Myakkahatchee Creek may also qualify as Working Waterfronts in accordance with Florida law (Chapter 342, Florida Statutes) and other applicable laws. The density/intensity shall be the same as defined in the Low Density Residential designation. Prior to permitting, the property owner shall be encouraged to seek other opportunities including transfer of development rights, land trade, acquisition to preserve such lands in an undeveloped condition, as well as other strategies and mechanisms that may be used to bring private lands into public control (Applies only to the City limits as of 1999). No active recreational facilities shall be permitted within wetlands or wetland systems, unless approved by the appropriate state and federal regulatory agencies.

**Legend**

-  Sabal Trace Golf Course Property
-  LU-F-ACTIVITYCENTER
-  LU-F-COMMERCIAL
-  LU-F-CONSERVATION
-  LU-F-ESTATES
-  LU-F-HIGH
-  LU-F-INDUSTRIAL
-  LU-F-LOW
-  LU-F-MEDIUM
-  LU-F-NONE
-  LU-F-PROFESSIONAL OFFICE/INSTITUTIONAL
-  LU-F-PUBLIC
-  LU-F-REC\_OPEN
-  LU-F-UTILITYINDUSTRIALCORRIDOR
-  LU-F-VILLAGE

Prepared by Planning & Zoning  
July 18, 2017



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# Sabal Trace Golf Course Zoning Overview

## ARTICLE XV. COMREC COMMERCIAL/RECREATION [Added 11-24-2003 by Ord. No. 2002-49]

### Sec. 53-187. Relationship to Comprehensive Plan.

The Commercial/Recreation [District] implements the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use, Planning Framework number 2, Future Land Element Goal 1, Objectives 1, and policy 1.2 to provide for standards for neighborhood protection; locations for the classification are shown on the Future Land Use Map contained in the Future Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

### Sec. 53-188. Intent.

The Commercial/Recreation District is established for the purpose of protection, preservation and the beneficial use of the property and surrounding neighborhoods. It is intended that this district shall not be a holding category for land, but rather, a terminal category to insure that the present and future residents of the City of North Port shall be able to enjoy open space, whether or not the property is open to the public, and to encourage recreation facilities while protecting, and preserving surrounding land uses and neighborhoods.

The provisions of this district are intended primarily to provide open space and to preserve lands for recreational facilities such as, but not limited to, golf courses and associated accessory uses and structures. Although these uses are commercial enterprises, the commercial characteristics of the land uses apply to the permitted and special exception and structures. Residential use is an accessory use to be reviewed as a Planned Community Development through the special exception process in order to make sure that any such development maintains a character consistent with this District and with the intent of the Commercial Recreation Future Land Use Designation.

### Sec. 53-189. Permitted principal uses and structures.

Permitted uses and structures shall be permitted as follows:

- A. Golf and frisbee courses.
- B. City of North Port governmental uses (fifty percent (50%) recreational or open space).
- C. Activity/passive recreation uses.
- D. Fishing lakes/ponds.
- E. Boating facilities
- F. Tennis and swim facilities.
- G. House of worship (fifty percent (50%) recreational or open space).
- H. Caretaker's housing unit in conjunction with the principal use.
- I. Drainage facilities shall be permitted in this zoning district and shall be designed as an amenities including, but not limited to, fountains, habitat and wood areas.

### Sec. 53-190. Prohibited uses and structures.

The following uses and structures shall be prohibited:

- A. Institutional uses and structures.
- B. Commercial, industrial, or manufacturing uses and structures.
- C. Communication towers.
- D. Adult entertainment uses and structures.
- E. Billboards.
- F. Adult living, group homes, foster care facilities, or adult day-care.
- G. Warehouse and storage.
- H. Junkyard or automobile wrecking yard.
- I. Incinerators.
- J. Pain management clinics.

### Sec. 53-191. Special exceptions.

All special exceptions shall be required to submit a site plan and an environmental impact assessment in addition to the other special exception application requirements. Any use not specifically permitted and not specifically prohibited in this zoning district may file for a special exception permit in accordance with Article XXII of this chapter, provided that the use applied for contributes to the intent of the zoning district as stated in the City's Comprehensive Plan and this Unified Land Development Code.

### Sec. 53-192. Drainage facilities.

- A. These facilities shall be designed as an amenity including, but not limited to, fountains, habitat and wood areas.



Exhibit 'B'



Prepared by NDS/Planning Division  
October 2015

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