

LONG ISLANDNASSAU

New designation limits homes that could be built at golf club



The owners of Woodmere Golf Club have proposed building more than 280 homes on the property. Credit: Jeff Bachner

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Hempstead Town Board members seeking to end a years-long development dispute have designated the Woodmere Golf Club as a Coastal Conservation District.

But the move to preserve 83 acres as open space, maintain a 9-hole golf course and limit construction to 59 new homes, is only expected to bring further legal battles from golf club owners who had planned to build more than 280 homes on the 118.4-acre property.

The conservation district was unanimously approved at the July 1 board meeting. The golf club has been embroiled in at least five lawsuits and two building moratoriums. Woodmere Golf Club owners Efrem Gerszberg and Robert Weiss have said they've spent more than \$1 million in legal fees.

The new coastal district was drafted with the neighboring villages of Woodsburgh and Lawrence and the Five Towns Civic Association. The town's vote was held eight days after a livestreamed public hearing and comments on the new zoning district.

Woodmere Golf Club owners declined to comment, but have previously said they may pursue additional litigation after town officials refused to meet with developers and disregarded the developers' environmental impact report.

The town imposed and extended a building moratorium on the property in 2016 after club owners proposed shuttering the golf course and private country club in 2022 and building 284 homes. The moratorium was extended on appeal after a judge initially ruled it was unconstitutional. The town signed an intermunicipal agreement last December with the neighboring villages expressing environmental concerns about overdevelopment.

A condition of the new zoning district requires any future development to conserve the Woodmere Clubhouse and nine holes of the currently shuttered 18-hole golf course. The golf course has been closed since the pandemic shutdown.

The new zone calls for preserving 70% of the property as open space. It also includes rain gardens, irrigation technology and maintains tidal wetlands while accounting for storm surge and sea level rising because of climate change.

Hempstead Councilman Anthony D'Esposito, who represents the district with Councilman Bruce Blakeman, said the town had met with the villages to discuss creating a park district, but could not determine how much it would cost to buy the land and the taxes required to maintain it.

D'Esposito said the town's contracted firm, Cameron Engineering, addressed concerns from residents to control traffic and issues that could arise with adding hundreds of new homes served by police and fire departments.

The villages voted on the plan simultaneously within days of the town board's vote. D'Esposito said the golf course was maintained as part of historical value in the community. D'Esposito said the town followed all protocols and saw "no benefit to meeting with developers."

"I think we've heard from all of our Five Towns neighbors. Anyone here knows traffic is an issue and with concerns of overcrowding, we didn't think what's in place now and the infrastructure could support adding another 300 homes," D'Esposito said. "We tried to protect as much open space as we could."

Woodmere Coastal Conservation District

- 118-acre property will be maintained with 70% open space
- A limit of 59 new luxury homes
- Nine-hole golf course and clubhouse