

Golfing may be in port's future

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TAMPA -- A new golf facility may be coming to South Tampa.

The city plans to seek proposals from developers to convert an old landfill in Port Tampa into a golfing facility, Deputy Administrator of Development Bob Harrell said Wednesday.

His comments came a day after Mayor Dick Greco mentioned the idea in passing at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Port Tampa Community Center.

The roughly 40-acre landfill, closed since the 1970s, is south of Interbay Boulevard and west of MacDill Air Force Base. Residents still use it to dispose of yard waste.

It's unclear whether a potential facility would be a golf course, a driving range or both.

One proposal involves a teaching course aimed particularly at girls and young women. Another possibility is a par-3 course, which is smaller than regular courses.

Harrell said the city would lease the land at low cost in exchange for certain guarantees: The facility must be open to the public, open to city-run children's programs and compatible with the neighborhood.

"We don't want one of those driving ranges that have a spinning golf ball with neon lights," Harrell said.

A Port Tampa course would be the only truly public course in South Tampa. The

Palma Ceia Golf and Country Club course is private. Two courses at MacDill are limited to military personnel, retirees or civilians who work on base.

Even though the idea has been floating around for years, Port Tampa residents said Greco's mention of it Tuesday was the first time they heard something concrete.

Their reactions were mixed.

Norm Wilson, who lives just north of the landfill, said golfers would be quieter than dirt bikers, who roar over the pasture-like land on weekends.

But Wilson also feared a golf course would attract more people to Port Tampa, which is experiencing the first tremors of a growth boom.

"It'll just bring more development," he said.

Resident Lianne Monteiro said a golf course, though, would at least preserve green space.

"It's better than a thousand apartments," she said.

Wilson said the landfill caused odor problems after it closed because of methane gas from decomposing trash. But once the city installed pipes to vent the gas, the problem dissipated.

Planning Commissioner Chris Malzone, also a Port Tampa resident, said the landfill would not pose special environmental hurdles for a golf course.

"As long as you don't excavate, I don't think there's any issues," she said.

Finding a new spot for yard waste might be more difficult.

Right now, city residents can bring their waste to the old landfill at no extra charge seven days a week. If the land is converted into a golf course, city officials would either have to find another property or send South Tampa residents to the city facility on MacKay Bay in east Tampa.

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