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The Hampshire Country Club housing project is still stalled. Here's why.

David McKay Wilson, Rockland/Westchester Journal News Published 6:00 a.m. ET Sept. 27, 2019 | Updated 9:55 a.m. ET Sept. 27, 2019

Tax Watch columnist David McKay Wilson explores the extended review process of the Hampshire Country Club development.

The foot-dragging continues in Mamaroneck over Hampshire Country Club's [plan to fill in part of its Sound Shore golf course to build 105 single-family homes \(/story/news/local/westchester/2015/07/01/hampshire-development-golf-course/29575913/\)](#) and bring \$5.5 million in annual tax revenues to the town, village, county and Mamaroneck schools.

On Wednesday, Hampshire Recreation LLC had hoped that the Mamaroneck Village Planning Board would finally accept the project's final environmental impact statement, more than a year after it was submitted.

But after discussing the matter for about 15 minutes, the board kicked the can down the road once more, telling the development team it might come up at meetings in October, said land-use attorney Michael Zarin.



Developer Dan Pfeffer, and public relations consultant Peter Giles at Hampshire Country Club in Mamaroneck. (Photo: David McKay Wilson)

"There's no urgency, to attempt to bring it to finality," said Zarin. "I've been doing this work for almost 30 years, with projects way more complicated. We've never seen 11 work sessions to get to completeness on the FEIS — and that's before the board writes its findings and writes its resolution for the site plan."

Planning Board Chairman Richard Litman, interviewed before a work session earlier this month, told Tax Watch the panel was moving forward, but at its own pace. Litman said he was not slow-walking the process in response to criticism of Hampshire's wealthy investors from Mayor Tom Murphy or citizens opposing the plan.

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“You can’t just rush it for the sake of rushing it,” Litman said. “And we don’t get instructions from anybody.”

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Hampshire Recreation LLC bought the course in 2010 after the club, which was founded in 1943, didn’t survive the Great Recession in the late 2000s.

Hampshire’s attempt at redeveloping the country club comes as the country club life —and the sport of golf — has seen their allure decline in recent years after decades of suburban expansion. The fairways that once hosted weekend duffers and midweek businessmen are now seen as dream fields for housing development.

The plan also comes at a time when golf clubs have found great success challenging their property assessments in state Supreme Court. In 2018, Hampshire won its case, cutting its taxable value roughly half to about \$6 million, and reducing its property tax bill from about \$300,000 to about \$150,000, village and town records show.

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Celia Felsher has been fighting against the proposal to build homes at the Hampshire Country Club in Mamaroneck June 28, 2019. (Photo: Peter Carr/The Journal News)

The developers also received a \$1.2 million tax refund for overcharges going back several years.

Hampshire is located in the village of Mamaroneck’s upscale Orienta neighborhood, by the Hommocks Middle School and the Fairway Greens condominiums. Hampshire’s swimming pool by the clubhouse overlooks Long Island Sound.

Hampshire in 2013 presented plans for a condominium development on two acres right by the clubhouse, which would have preserved the 18-hole course. But the village board never entertained the rezoning proposal required for the condo project.

Instead the board recommended the developers return with a plan allowed under current zoning, which allows about 200 homes, if all 18 holes were sacrificed for the houses. The plan, which surfaced in 2015, would include 44 single-family and 61 attached homes on 50 acres, and require the club to downsize the course to just 9 holes.

The homes would be located on the course's higher elevation, but would still require 82,000 cubic yards of fill to bring the homes 16 feet above sea level, which the developers say will keep the owners dry, even after the rise in ocean level caused by climate change.



A five-some plays at Hampshire Country Club one September morning. (Photo: David McKay Wilson)

Leading the opposition is Celia Felsher, president of the Mamaroneck Coastal Environmental Coalition, who owns a mansion looking out on the 12th fairway, and four more houses nearby.

She wants fewer units or nothing built at all. The club lies in a flood plain, and the course often floods during severe storms.

“In all honesty, when you look at the property itself, the highest and best use is for a golf course, given the topography and the inability to build in the flood plain and the desire of the community to keep the club property in marine recreation or marine commercial use,” she said.

But others in Mamaroneck, like Guisela Marroquin, the former director of Mamaroneck’s Community Action Program, say the added tax revenue from the homes could provide funding for village social service programs. She was among about 1,000 Mamaroneck residents who signed a petition in support of the project, the developer said in a news release.

“There continues to be a shortage of funding for community services,” said Marroquin, a 2001 graduate of Mamaroneck High. “And I believe it would be a good way to bring in new neighbors.”



Developer Dan Pfeffer, of Hampshire Recreation, has grown frustrated with the environmental review process in the village of Mamaroneck. (Photo: David McKay Wilson)

Heading the development team is Dan Pfeffer, who has grown frustrated with the snail's pace at the village planning board. In late June, he recalls bringing his full team of four paid consultants to attend a meeting, only to sit there for more than an hour while the board met in private.

When the private meeting was completed, the development team was instructed to return weeks later, with no questions asked that evening.

"Every time we get close, they add something more," he said. "They keep moving the finish line."

But former Mamaroneck Mayor Kathleen Savolt, a Planning Board member, brushed aside the criticism from the developer and his consultants.

"They are getting paid to be upset with us," she said. "They are doing their job."

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