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### County kills development plans for Diplomat golf course

By Scott Wyman, Sun Sentinel

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Neighborhood concerns killed the Westin Diplomat's plans to redevelop its underused golf course in Hallandale Beach by adding more hotel rooms and hundreds of new residences.

[Broward County](#) commissioners rejected the \$500 million project Tuesday, and representatives of the hotel now say the future of the golf course is in doubt. Residents complained that the development would overburden already crowded streets and a housing market already weakened by the wave of foreclosures.

A last-ditch effort was made at compromise as the hotel offered to cut the number of new residences from 950 to 826 and to sign deed restrictions promising to keep the golf course in place in perpetuity. But opponents said they could only support the proposed hotel expansion, not the new homes.

"Things have gotten to the point in Hallandale that you can't even get out of your driveway," said 10-year resident Allen Zack. Robert Selz, a resident for 42 years, added: "Can we really believe that we are going to need another 950 units with all the foreclosures and empty housing we have?"

The commission vote was 6-3.

Mayor Ken Keechl joined commissioners Suzanne Gunzburger, Lois Wexler, Kristin Jacobs, John Rodstrom and Diana Wasserman-Rubin in opposing the project. Commissioners Ilene Lieberman, Stacy Ritter and Al Jones favored it.

Gunzburger, who represents the area, said the project was simply too large and the impact too great on residents.

"I've seen people who have a long-term investment in an apartment with a beautiful view of the golf course," she said. "This is what they bought to live on and live out the rest of their lives. This is part of what was their dream, and I'm not going to spoil their dream."

The vote came at a time local officials are looking ahead toward a fall vote on amending the state constitution to require new development to be placed on ballots for public approval. Backers of the amendment warned that the Diplomat would be used as poster child in their campaign if approved.

In addition to the new homes, the plans for the golf resort included a 500-room resort hotel and 3,000 square feet of commercial space around the 18-hole golf course. The Diplomat also proposed keeping the existing

48-slip marina and developing a public park and public walkways by the waterway and golf course.

The development was slated to take five to seven years to complete.

Along with the Westin Diplomat hotel on the beach in Hollywood, the golf resort is owned by the Plumbers & Pipefitters National Pension Fund. The resort serves mainly as an overflow for the beachside Westin Diplomat and has only 60 hotel rooms.

Diplomat executives have said that slowing demand for golf and the limited number of hotel and residential units directly linked to the resort have made it increasingly less profitable and in need of redevelopment.

Attorney Debbie Orshefsky, who represented the Diplomat, warned commissioners that the golf resort cannot continue with the status quo and that the proposal was only viable if new homes and extra hotel rooms were built to support the golf course.

"It is really incredibly impossible for there to be a hotel development there without some counterbalance of a residential component," Orshefsky said. "We have said from the beginning that this needs to be a mixed-use development. That is the only way we preserve the golf course."

The project has had a rocky history – narrowly winning Hallandale Beach City Commission approval and facing opposition from county planning administrators. The developers made repeated concessions in an effort to address concerns, including scaling down a 27-story condo tower to five stories.

Supporters of the project included business groups in Hallandale Beach and Hollywood, who saw it as a chance for new jobs. Local labor union leaders also united behind the Diplomat.

The hotel expected the expansion would employ about 1,000 people during construction and several hundred people when complete.

Area resident George Tenue urged commissioners not to cave to "whiners and complainers." "If people don't like the congestion, let them go live in a cornfield in Iowa," he said.

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