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Golf course developers selling Tamarac sites

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By Lisa J. Huriash, Sun Sentinel

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TAMARAC--

The controversial Sabal Palm and Monterey golf course developments appear to be history, at least as far as Prestige Homes is concerned.

Developer Bruce Chait was arrested Dec. 11 with his son Shawn on charges of bribery, unlawful compensation and perjury in connection with the project. Shawn Chait told city officials two weeks later that the Sabal Palm and Monterey sites will be sold at auction in February.

The final blow to the development came Wednesday night, when the Tamarac City Commission voted to deny a site plan extension for Monterey. The Chait family wanted the extension to make the property more attractive to a potential buyer.

Anticipating the vote, Bruce Chait, who like his son is out on bail, hinted at litigation in an e-mail to the *Sun Sentinel*.

"We are very sorry to bring the good citizens of Tamarac into a very costly lawsuit to obtain our site plan renewal that both the [Legislature] and the governor of the State of Florida has granted us," Chait wrote on Tuesday.

Now, instead of 728 single-family houses and townhomes at the project site--east of Florida's Turnpike, west of Northwest 48th Avenue, off Commercial Boulevard--neighbors see a field of grass.

Anthony "Kevin" Goodman, whose home overlooks Sabal Palm, said the plan is "a mess, a failure" that has diminished his own property value.

"What we have here is a hideous site," he said. "There's an ugly chain-link fence and a site left behind. How do you describe living next door to a half-finished project?"

With no site extension for Monterey, any new developer would have to come up with a fresh plan and start the site plan approval process all over again.

In November the commission agreed to a year-long extension for Sabal Palm. Although home construction never started, Chait had spent millions of dollars in street and sewer improvements.

City spokesman Andy Berns said any new owner would have to comply with the existing site plan, and start construction within a year.

The Chait family's arrest had nothing to do with the city's decision on Monterey, Jennifer Bramley, the city's community development director, said Tuesday.

"They have to show us they are doing something to construct the property," Bramley said. "People can't just get a site plan approval and let the property sit."

Prestige Homes has been drawing negative attention for some time.

Late last year former Tamarac Mayor Joe Schreiber alleged that Bruce Chait tried to get Schreiber's wife Mae to drop out of the 2006 mayoral race by offering the couple \$200,000. Mae Schreiber opposed the project, and the couple turned down the money. She lost the race.

Then, state prosecutors accused County Commissioner Josephus Eggleston of receiving a \$3,200 golf membership at the Parkland Golf and Country Club from Chait's son, Shawn. The membership was "in exchange for nearly three years of favorable treatment" in dealings dating back to 2006, prosecutors said.

As part of a wide-ranging corruption FBI investigation, Eggleston pleaded guilty in December to money-laundering charges and resigned as a county commissioner.

The Florida Commission on Ethics also is investigating a complaint that School Board Member Stephanie Kraft misused her position to help Chait. She announced on Tuesday she won't seek re-election in August.

Bruce and Shawn Chait pleaded not guilty on Jan. 8. If convicted as charged, each could face up to 35 years in prison. On Thursday, Bruce Chait expressed optimism he will prevail in his battle with Tamarac.

"Every other city in Broward County is bending over backward to promote tax revenue to the city, county and state by building," he wrote in an e-mail to the *Sun Sentinel*. "However, Tamarac does not see things the way that other cities see things.

"I have been building in this county for 25 years and I have never seen anything like this ever happen before."

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