

New Butte plan raises eyebrows

TRACY WILSON / *The Frontiersman* / February 16, 1999

BUTTE Butte residents are reacting with a mixture of skepticism and hope to the news that a new developer will be deciding the fate of 320 leased acres of Mat-Su Borough land.

I think everybodys wary, said Laurie Courtney, who first met the new developer, Judd Walker, at a Butte Community Council meeting last week. Theres a certain amount of feeling him out. We know what he said that night is it the same thing were going to hear next time we talk to him? People are willing to keep an open mind, but they do want to see some substance from him.

Walker is managing member of Pioneer Mountain Properties, which recently took over a lease that had been held by Homestead Resort Properties.

HRP holds a 40-percent interest in PMP, but HRP president Victor Trygstad no longer will be making decisions about the borough property.

Trygstad obtained a lease for the borough property in March after promising to develop a golf course and subdivision on that land and other acres he owns.

The terms of the lease said he could exercise an option to buy the property in four years, if that happened. Financing for a golf course did not materialize.

However, the requirement for the course is still in place in the boroughs lease a covenant would keep lots in the proposed subdivision from being sold unless a golf course is up and running.

On Friday, Walker said he still plans to pursue financing for the \$12 million golf course development which involves an additional 570 acres of private land as well but added that the first bank he approached told him he would have to put 30 to 40 percent of the money down before it would cut a check.

I have deep pockets, but my pockets dont drag the ground, the 37-year-old developer said. I dont have that kind of capability.

Walker says the development he has in mind would include an airstrip, 9 to 12 miles of equestrian trails and 1 1/2-acre lots.

Soil and other studies will likely be done in the spring, Walker said, before a master plan is put together.

If the golf course idea doesnt pan out, Walker said he has an alternative in mind turning 120 to 160 acres of the land into some kind of park and giving it back to the borough.

The rest of the land would be used for development of some sort, the nature of which he says he has not yet decided.

Butte residents in the past have criticized the lease of the borough land, saying their concerns and

opposition were not considered when it was negotiated between Trygstad and the Assembly.

They had wanted the land and its trails kept for recreational purposes, such as hunting, cross-country skiing and snowmachining. Courtney, Ted Cox and other local residents say the lease should be sent back to the borough Assembly if Walker eventually finds a golf course is not feasible.

What he does on his own land is his own business, Courtney said. This idea of a golf resort community was pushed onto the community by the borough. It was sold as a higher and better use than recreational purposes, so anything less than what the borough contracted for, to me, is not acceptable.

Courtney said she would like to see the process return to square one with open, competitive bidding if a golf course isnt built.

Worries have been expressed by Butte residents about wildlife, the demands a golf course and/or a 200- to 300-lot subdivision would make on the low water table and about the potential for pollution at McRoberts Creek from pesticides and fertilizers.

Residents also say traffic and horses could be a problem and that there is a need to plan for the site of a new school to relieve crowding at Butte Elementary. Keeping the areas popular trails open for public access is yet another question Walker and Butte residents will need to clarify in coming months.

I dont want to say were opposed to what he has planned at this point, but we do have concerns, Cox said.

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