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Horse owners irked by RHE development

By Melissa Pamer Staff Writer

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A long-discussed plan to build a residential development and new golf course in Rolling Hills Estates is beginning to gather steam, and not everyone is happy about it.

The complicated project, involving a land swap between Torrance and Rolling Hills Estates, would replace a huge quarry with a new championship-quality golf course for the adjacent Rolling Hills Country Club, which would become the site of 114 luxury homes.

Brought by the club and the owners of Chandler's Palos Verdes Sand and Gravel Co. facility - now an active landfill for inert construction waste - the Chandler Ranch project would fill in the last remaining large piece of developable land in Rolling Hills Estates.

"It will be a really nice improvement to the city and that entrance to the city," said Mayor Judy Mitchell. "It will cut down on the truck traffic and all the dust. It will be a beautiful project when it's done. It should improve everybody's property values."



For years, plans have been in the mix to convert the Chandler Sand and Gravel pit into a new Rolling Hills Country Club with 114 homes. (Scott Varley Staff Photographer)

The city recently released a state-required environmental report on the 228-acre project, which has been in the planning stages for about six years. The report showed construction would create noise and air pollution, and that noise from future golf course maintenance could not be avoided.

But there is another impact that the local equestrian community wants seriously considered: The new development would not allow horses, though it would be built in the South Bay's most equine-

friendly city.

"People are really ticked off about this. This is a horse community. It's a horse city, it's one of the things that makes this city unique," said A.J. Poulin, president of the Dapplegray Lane Property Owners Association.

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agreed to swap 32 acres with Rolling Hills Estates so that the residential portion of the project can remain in the latter city. A portion of the golf course would be in Torrance, as will nearly 4 acres of open space.

A massive undertaking, the project is set to cost upward of \$300million.

Though the housing market is still in flux, the developers expect more stability once homes would go up for sale, Cope said. They would range in cost from well above \$1million to the "high \$3millions," he said.

In size, the homes would provide 2,700 to 6,500 square feet of space, and would feature a red-tile-roofed Mediterranean style. Billed as "Tuscan Farmhouse," "Rural Italian" and "Rustic Italian," the style contrasts with the ranch homes in some nearby neighborhoods - another complaint of project critics.

The country club, which opened more than four decades ago, would get a longer, Arnold Palmer-style golf course to replace its unusual current configuration. Its clubhouse would be demolished and a new 61,000 square-foot facility would be built.

But first there are many hoops to jump through - and opposition to overcome.

The Rolling Hills Estates Planning Commission will weigh the project in a public hearing in late August or early September, Principal Planner Niki

Cutler said. The commission will make a recommendation to the City Council, which must then vote on the project.

After that, the city of Torrance will weigh in with a council vote.

Then the county's Local Agency Formation Commission must approve the boundary change between the two cities.

"It's a big piece of land. It's a very challenging project," Cope said. "It's got a real set of opportunities and constraints, engineering-wise."

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Poulin, who said he was speaking as an individual homeowner in a neighborhood near the proposed development, is frustrated by the developers' request that the project land be removed from Rolling Hills Estates' horse overlay zone, which allows horses on lots greater than 10,000 square feet.

"To remove hundreds of acres from the horse overlay zone...because somebody wants to make a buck, it's just not going to happen," Poulin said.

He's also upset that the project does not include a public horse and hiking trail that the city had long planned to construct around the Chandler property.

Echoing Poulin's frustration, Dale Allen, president of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Horsemens Association, said he intends to battle the project "all the way."

"As equestrians, we're always fighting to keep our riding areas open and our trails open," Allen said. "Once something's taken out of the horse overlay, we lose the rights to use that for any type of horse activity."

"As (the Palos Verdes Peninsula) develops like that without any trails, people tend to move in who are more and more negative on equestrian things."

In this particular case, local riders may have more of an argument on principle - about the

much-vaunted but declining "rural character" of The Hill - than in actuality. Neither the Chandler property nor the country club are currently open to equestrians.

From the perspective of Michael Cope, the project manager for Chandler's who has coordinated the development proposal, the plan gives nearby residential areas a much more attractive neighbor than a barren gravel pit that attracts thousands of dump trucks per year on Palos Verdes Drive East.

"These nice homes built around this heavy industrial use - I think a new country club is more compatible with the setting," Cope said.

As for the equestrians' concerns, Cope said he would not comment.

"Our proposal is what it is," he said, noting that the project had undergone initial public review by the city's Chandler Reuse Committee.

The project will definitely challenge its engineers, not to mention planners. Homes would be built on existing country club property, and the golf course would be built on the Chandler's quarry and landfill.

The quarry land - which produced about 55million tons of gravel and sand until it began to be filled in the 1970s, Cope said - is steeply contoured in some areas.

Part of the property is in Torrance, which has

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