

# In Newmarket, a suburban dream goes off course as developers buy golf club's front nine

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*One in an occasional series on the GTA's growing density and its effects on life in the region.*

Dave Sovran has been living the green dream for 20 years, looking out from his yard to see the grassy tract of par-five fairway that borders his Newmarket home.

Like many of his neighbours, living among the links of Glenway Golf and Country Club was a prime reason to move in. The course clubhouse and fitness centre became a hot spot for weddings, workouts, summer sports camps and New Year's parties, while proximity to the golf course greenery lent the community a cosy, quaint feel.

Now Sovran fears the dream is dead. The clubhouse has been demolished, and half of the golf course faces the same fate, with a property development proposal in motion that residents warn will destroy the character of their course-side community.

"We all paid a premium to live on a golf course," said Sovran, who bought his home there in 1993. "It's kind of a nasty piece of business to go into a stable residential neighbourhood and say you're just going to tear it up and take away the green space."

A conglomerate of GTA-based real estate firms, under the name Marianneville Developments Ltd., bought the course for more than \$10 million in January 2009, after its original owners

— who built the community in the early 1980s — put it on sale a year earlier. While preparing its development plan, the group kept the course open until October 2011, as tensions with Glenway residents grew more “polarized and emotional,” said Joanne Barnett, Marianneville’s vice-president.

“This is not an intrusive development. It’s modest,” said Barnett, defending the plan to bring 710 residential units — family homes on 50-foot lots, townhouses, apartment buildings and bungalows — to the front nine of the former course. The back nine will be rebuilt as a smaller pitch-and-putt with a new clubhouse, she said. The original was torn down last year.

“The golf course was losing money hand over fist,” Bartlett said. “We think (our plan) is well thought through, well justified, and we stand on its merits.

“We will keep golf here, but we will do it in a different way.”

Christina Bisanz, chair of the Glenway Preservation Association, the development’s chief neighbourhood opponent, said residential development is welcome in Newmarket, but doesn’t belong in Glenway, where course land is designated for park use in the municipality’s official plan.

“There is a dearth of green space in the town of Newmarket as it is,” said Bisanz, who lives on the former 16th hole. “This really just flies in the face of what that vision of our town and our future will be.”

In April, in an apparent effort to support the grievances of Glenway residents, local MPP Frank Klees introduced a private member’s bill at Queen’s Park, aiming to prevent the Ontario Municipal Board from overriding community concerns about property development on golf courses when a town or city council rejects them.

That prompted Marianneville to appeal to the OMB, even before the municipality voted on the application, to avoid its proposal getting blocked, said Barnett.

The developers were allowed to bypass local council and head straight for the provincial body, because more than 180 days had passed since they first submitted their application.

“In my mind, it’s really a matter of fairness,” said Newmarket Councillor Chris Emanuel, who represents the neighbourhood at town council. Emanuel is concerned that pre-hearings at the OMB will start during the summer, before municipal staff finish their report on the Glenway development. The matter has not yet gone to a council vote.

“We should get to say where that growth takes place,” said Emanuel, who added he’s not opposed to residential development closer to the town centre, along the Yonge St. and Davis St. corridors.

“They’re shoehorning homes into an established neighbourhood,” he said of Marianneville’s plan. “It’s a shame.”

Barnett said her conglomerate hopes OMB hearings will prove helpful in smoothing over tensions with Glenway residents, and welcomes any input to improve the plan.

Still, she said she’s never met with opponents of the development, something she’s never experienced in her years in the industry.

“I’ve never been in a situation where there really was no possibility of having a dialogue,” she said.

Barry Wyner