

Council majority opposes housing at Ellis

By Rick Smith

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CEDAR RAPIDS — It seems as if a proposal to build 40 apartments and 25 townhouses on the Ellis Golf Course's former chipping green will not proceed as planned.

Four City Council members Monday objected to the proposal by two Twin Cities

developers for the site during a broad-ranging discussion with Jim Ernst, chairman of the city's Replacement Housing Task Force.

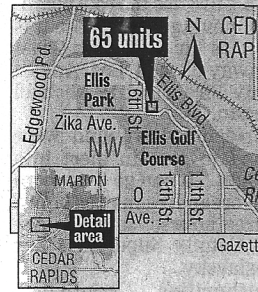
Council members Chuck Wieneke, Monica Vernon, Jerry McGrane and Justin Shields agreed with neighbors, who quickly objected, saying the area around the golf course

was a spot for single-family homes and not apartments and townhouses.

Wieneke and Vernon went further, telling their council colleagues that the developers would not have tried to locate the project on the former chipping green area if the council

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would commit to buying out and demolishing more flood-damaged homes.

The developers, they argued, could build their project on those sites, which are expected to sit behind the proposed flood levee.

In addition, the task force's Ernst reported on Monday that the task force had tabled a plan by Skogman Homes to add three additional homes to its initial plan to build 11 homes on small lots in the Oak Hill Jackson Neighborhood.

Ernst, however, did not see the Skogman matter as slowing anything down. Skogman, he said, was still moving ahead on the 11 new homes, which are being built with significant city incentives in a portion of Oak Hill Jackson that has long

been in decline. With the city incentives, owners of the 11 homes will pay between \$83,000 and \$103,000 for homes that cost Skogman between \$120,000 and \$145,000 to build.



Jim Ernst
C.R. housing task force

Council member Vernon expressed dismay that the task force had tabled Skogman's plans for an additional three homes. Vernon said she wanted to see the neighborhood, which has been focal point of City Hall redevelopment interest for a few years now, get developed.

Ernst said Skogman could not have built the three additional homes for some months anyway. He said the housing task force wants to get a better

handle on how incentives and grants are going to be handed out to flood victims.

In particular, he said the task force is concerned that someone might get a city incentive to buy one of the Skogman Homes and then also qualify for a sizable payment from other funding. In the end, one person might get a lot while others coming later in the process would get nothing, Ernst said.

The thought, he said, is the city's data-collection process under way with flood victims will help provide answers to the council and task force.

As for the proposed development on the former Ellis chipping green area, Marty Hoeger, the city's real estate disposition coordinator who is working with the city's Replacement Housing Task Force, noted the spot is one of the few available city-owned areas that could be converted into housing. He noted, too, that the proposed development is much less dense than the existing 400 or so units at the nearby Windsor on the River apartments.

Council member Tom Podzimek noted the city's "smart-growth" score card scores the proposed development favorably for density at 65 housing units on 6.7 acres. But other council members argued that streets in the area could not handle the additional traffic.

Council member McGrane suggested the city sell the chipping green area and use the money to help rehabilitate some homes. He estimated about 30 single-family homes could be built there.

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