

Ipswich Chronicle

Turner Hill members to take reins

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IPSWICH - Members of the Turner Hill Golf Club took the reins of the 4-year-old, world-class golf course and mansion on Topsfield Road Thursday, June 7.

A group of 92 members recently formed a company called The Golf Club at Turner Hill LLC and have been in negotiations with local developer Neil St. John "Ted" Raymond.

"The goal has been right from the beginning that the golf club be eventually owned by its members," said Raymond.

The 311-acre property includes a luxury housing community. However, only 20 of an allowed 186 homes, including 10 affordable units required under the town's Great Estates Bylaw, have been built.

TD Banknorth recently announced intentions to sell the properties at a public auction on June 22 due to breach of conditions of the mortgage. Raymond said that while the bank needs its money, construction delays dating back 10 years, and now delays on the sale, have made it difficult to make payments.

"With the closing of the golf course, it will be taken care of," he said.

Raymond is in the process of selling off the remaining properties.

"The market is slow," he said, adding that he expects to sell the properties over the next three to four years. The prices of the homes range from \$750,000 to \$2.5 million.

"The prices will continue to go up," he said.

Member Robert Talbot, who is co-spearheading the sale on the members end, said it's an exciting time for the club. Five new members have joined the club and the LLC, while 22 new members have joined the club. Talbot said he expects membership to keep rising.

"The demographic is very family oriented," Talbot said. "If people are interested and love golf, we welcome them to turn into Turner Hill and go through the membership process."

Talbot said while mistakes were certainly made along the way - plans to sell were announced last October, for instance - there is no doubt Raymond had a vision and built a spectacular course.

"We are doing this out of passion," Talbot said, adding that the course was recently ranked 12th in the state. "We have a beautiful course."

The design of the property is unique, Raymond said, with the houses in the center, surrounded by the sprawling golf course.

"From a planning perspective," Raymond said, "it's really quite beautiful."

Raymond had plans to turn the mansion into an inn or a luxury hotel. Talbot said he and other members envision doing the mansion over as well to be able to accommodate both private and public functions. He went before the Board of Selectmen last week to begin the process of transferring two all-alcoholic liquor licenses from Raymond to the newly formed LLC.

While a public hearing needs to be scheduled before the transfer is completed, the selectmen voted to allow the group to serve liquor until the hearing is set.