

New course to have quite the view



BRUCE KELLMAN | THE NEWS TRIBUNE

University Place residents Mindi Lowenstein and Dave Bergman walk their dog Lilo on the Grandview Trail above the 930-acre Chambers Creek Properties where Pierce County is planning to develop a world-class 27-hole golf course that overlooks Puget Sound with the Olympic Mountains farther in the distance.

From wasteland to golfers' paradise

T.Sports - Golf

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On the Net

For information, go to www.tribnet.com/news/links and follow the link to the county's master plan for Chambers Creek Properties.

How to get involved

To reach Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg, call 253-798-7477. To contact County Council members, call 253-798-7777.

Inside

What the five finalists have to say about their plans, and how the fees could compare with local courses. **Back page**

BY AARON CORVIN
The News Tribune

Imagine Tiger Woods uncorking a mighty swing off the 18th tee as a brisk Puget Sound wind whips his Nike shirt, the sun caresses the Olympic Mountains and the gallery of golf lovers holds its collective breath.

Sound crazy?

Not to Pierce County officials, who are close to selecting a designer they hope will transform a waterfront wasteland into a world-class golf course at the county-owned Chambers Creek Properties in University Place.

"This could be and should be the best golf course in Washington," said County Executive John Ladenburg, who compares the 930-acre property's potential to Pebble Beach Golf Links on California's Monterey Peninsula and Bandon Dunes Golf Resort on the Oregon Coast.

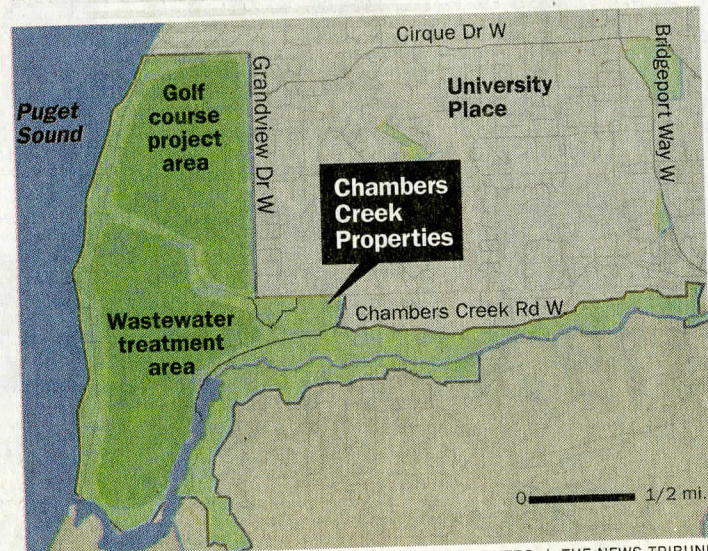
After whittling down 57 applications, county officials have chosen five finalists, including firms affiliated with professional golf star Phil Mickelson and renowned course designer Robert Trent Jones II.

Ladenburg is expected to present his choice, as well as financing options and the overall plan for Chambers Creek Properties, to the County Council at a Feb. 23 meeting.

The location of the meeting has not been announced, but it

Pierce County tees up plan for golf course

County Executive John Ladenburg is proposing a 27-hole golf course, capable of attracting national tournaments, as part of a plan to develop the 930-acre Chambers Creek Properties. Ladenburg is reviewing design plans from five finalists and will pitch the project to the County Council on Feb. 23



SOURCE: ESRI, GDT

REGGIE MYERS | THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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PIERCE COUNTY PHOTO

The 930-acre Chambers Creek Properties, site of Pierce County's proposed golf course, offers panoramic views of Puget Sound, neighboring islands and the Olympic Mountains. The property features cliffs, dunes and an elevation gain change from sea level to 250 feet.

Golf course

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will be open to the public.

The course, which could open in 2007 and charge non-Pierce County residents greens fees of up to \$150, would cater to golfers with lower handicaps and fatter wallets than do other municipal courses.

"Something extraordinary"

Last year, the County Council earmarked \$1.3 million to pay for the design of the golf course and clubhouse, permits, surveying and other technical services. That pool of money comes from customers of the county's sewer utility, including residents of unincorporated Pierce County, University Place, Lakewood and a portion of Tacoma. Those customers pay an average \$20 per month for county sewer services.

Under Ladenburg's plan, the county would cover the construction and start-up costs of the 275-acre, 27-hole golf course by selling bonds and then using revenue from the golf course to pay off the debt.

The idea is to have the golf course pay for itself and avoid billing county ratepayers for its long-term costs. The county also wants to incorporate trails, a wastewater treatment system and other public access improvements as part of the golf course project.

The total price tag ranges from \$12 million to \$15 million, with the golf course alone costing roughly \$6 million to \$7.5 million.

County officials said draft market and feasibility studies show the golf course can turn a profit.

At least one golf industry leader agrees.

"The setting is absolutely breathtaking," said John Bodenhamer, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Golf Association and Washington State Golf Association. "This is a chance to do something extraordinary."

It's up to the seven-member County Council to approve Ladenburg's plan and release the funds to hire a designer.

Some are skeptical and want more information about the short- and long-

Greens fees at area courses

County officials say greens fees at the proposed Chambers Creek course could run \$50 to \$75 for county residents and \$150 for nonresidents. Here are weekend fees for 18 holes at other public courses:

Course	Fees
Allenmore (Tacoma)	\$24
Auburn	\$22
Fort Steilacoom	\$18
High Cedars (Orting)	\$30
Lake Spanaway	\$25
Madrona Links (Gig Harbor)	\$22
Meadowpark (University Place)	\$22
Trophy Lake (Port Orchard)	\$39
Washington National (Auburn)	\$62

term prospects of the golf course project.

"Obviously, we need to be extremely careful with the funds we have," said Councilman Kevin Wimsett (D-Spanaway), "and there are a lot of priorities that people expect county government to take care of. I think the question needs to be asked and answered whether or not this golf course is in that priority range."

Plan envisions golf course and more

The golf course project traces its beginning to the Chambers Creek Properties "master site plan," adopted in 1997 after an exhaustive public process.

The 50-year plan envisions a \$70 million makeover for what used to be a forested 250-foot bluff above Puget Sound and is now two miles of gravel mines.

For more than 100 years, crews busted rock and burrowed earth in one of the largest mines in the United States.

Now, Pierce County is working to reclaim the site for parkland, recreation and other projects, including a golf course, arboretum, botanical garden, trail, sports fields, environmental education center and restaurant.

The overall plan began to take shape between 1958 and 1992, when the county bought 290 acres from Lone Star Northwest Gravel Mine for the county-owned Chambers Creek regional wastewater treatment plant's future expansions.

The county then acquired another 640 acres to buffer nearby residents from the sewage odors that occasionally waft from

the treatment plant.

The planned park and recreation areas – including the golf course project – are intended to help dispose of treated water and biosolids. The county wants to use treated wastewater, called gray water, and treated biosolids to irrigate and fertilize the parkland, including the golf course and sports fields.

"That's the linkage of why the golf course would be located here," said Joe Scorcio, the county project manager for Chambers Creek Properties.

County officials also believe the golf course would attract tourists, generate money for other parkland projects on site and give the public more access to the property.

"The golf course is projected to be a revenue source for other projects on the properties that don't generate money, such as trails," Scorcio said.

In 2002, the county built two sports fields and completed walking trails along Grandview Drive West and 64th Street West – several years ahead of schedule.

The golf course project would enable more such projects, Ladenburg said.

"This can be a really beautiful site when you do all of these things at once," he said. "There will be a lot of public uses to the land outside the golf area."

Moonscapelike expanse

Seen today, it's difficult to imagine a golf course occupying the moonscapelike northern expanse of Chambers Creek Properties.

The site of the next "Mad Max" movie, maybe, but Tiger Woods' next conquest?

On a recent bumpy drive through the scarred landscape, county officials spoke of the green space to come and emphasized its pragmatic role as a partner to the wastewater treatment plant.

They pointed to a 75-foot-high, free-standing remnant of a rock-and-gravel conveyor system and confidently spoke of plans to incorporate the protrusion into the design of the golf course.

Scorcio said the structure, affectionately called the "swingset" by county officials, will be maintained to preserve a piece of history and remind county residents of the gravel mine that once was.

The golf course would be designed to reflect the game as it was played hun-

dreds of years ago on the windswept coast of Scotland.

In their reports to the county, all five design finalists say they would use the rugged terrain, spectacular views and second- and third-growth forests to produce a golfer's paradise and a premiere destination point for the county.

Ladenburg said the world-class stature of the planned course means it would not compete with the two golf courses the county already operates at Lake Spanaway and Fort Steilacoom.

Fees haven't been determined yet. But county officials say a round of golf against the Puget Sound backdrop could cost \$50 to \$75 for county residents, compared with \$25 charged at Lake Spanaway. Nonresidents could pay up to \$150 to play on the new course.

Ladenburg, an avid golfer, said county officials would not get any special perks on the Chambers Creek course.

"When I go out to play Spanaway Lake, I pay the greens fees just like everybody else," he said.

But plenty more details remain to be worked out, including construction of the golf course. Although the county would own the course, it also expects to contract out the operation and maintenance.

"This is an early step in a long process," Scorcio said of selecting a designer.

Council members said they are looking forward to Ladenburg's presentation in two weeks.

"We haven't had a chance to see the economic studies," Wimsett said. "We've heard bits here and there, but we haven't gotten a good overview or briefing of what's going to happen out there. The biggest part for me is, financially will it pay for itself?"

Councilman Shawn Bunney (R-Lake Tapps) said the track record of government-owned golf courses is mixed, noting the City of Sumner's debt-ridden course.

"I think people are wanting to make sure that things are delivered on time and on budget," he said. "This is the kind of thing that if it's not done right, and we're not right, we further erode public trust."

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