

Park Hill Golf Club: Get ready for another Denver development debate

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The city of Denver is ready to end the legal conflicts that have ensnared a valuable piece of property in the city's northeast. But a proposed settlement may be just the beginning of a long and contentious political fight over the future of the Park Hill Golf Club.

The property — a rare 155-acre chunk of open space in an urbanizing city — has been through a head-spinning series of legal maneuvers over the last few years. It has been the prize for intense wrangling between its former nonprofit owner, the city government and a for-profit golf company, and the subject of a couple lawsuits.

The developer Westside Investment Partners [bought the land this summer for \\$24 million](#), but it still was shadowed by legal disputes. On Tuesday, Mayor Michael Hancock's office announced that a proposed agreement "would end litigation involving the property."

The settlement will not allow any development on the land. Only a vote of City Council can do that. "We wanted a guarantee that Denver would have a right to provide input about the property's future," Hancock said in a news release.

The biggest legal questions include a lawsuit over an ongoing city flood-control project on the land. Early this year, the city took possession of about 35 acres of the course to complete the project. The parent of the former golf course operator, Arcis Golf, sued the city for damaging its business.

The new owner, Westside, took over that lawsuit. City officials wouldn't say whether the settlement included a payment from the city to Westside, saying that the agreement wasn't final yet.

Regardless, the legal settlement is just the beginning of the next big debate: Should the city allow any degree of development on the golf course site?

Westside hasn't detailed plans for the site, but construction is likely to be part of the picture. The developer doesn't "have a huge interest in running it as a golf course," said managing principal Andy Klein in an earlier interview.

However, city laws don't allow any development on the property. Only the Denver City Council can vote to lift those restrictions, a process that will likely result in a heated debate and take months or years to complete.

"We look forward to having a robust neighborhood conversation about what the future of this property should be," said Kenneth Ho, a principal for Westside.

Woody Garnsey, a neighborhood organizer, said that his group, Save Open Space Denver, doesn't want to see any development.

“Our goal is to preserve the whole 155 acres as open space and to eventually have the city acquire it for a regional park. We’re adamant about protecting the whole easement, and we’re guardedly optimistic that we have support on City Council to do that,” he said.

“We need to worry about more concrete-ization of Denver. We just feel like there’s no compelling need to put anything in that property that’s going to take away from the open space.”

Meanwhile, supporters of housing development also have their eyes on the land.

“We’re definitely not arguing against the park. It would be foolish to not create another regional park with that land,” said Adam Estroff, president of YIMBY Denver, a pro-housing group. “That being said, if we can make the developer pay for a lot of the park by putting some neighborhood (development) by the transit station up north, that could be an effective way to force-multiply our city dollars.”

The golf course is surrounded on its southern side by tightly packed residential blocks of the Clayton and Northeast Park Hill neighborhoods. Its northern stretch is flanked by apartments, the rail corridor, businesses and warehouses. It’s blocks from the 40th and Colorado stop on the A-Line.

The land has a long legal history with the city, which previously ran the golf course for 50 years. In the 1990s, the city paid Clayton \$2 million to put development restrictions on the land. The city itself [attempted to buy the land in 2017](#), but the deal fell apart after Arcis, the golf operator, asserted that it had a legal “right of first refusal” to buy the land.

Arcis settled its legal beefs when the developer Westside bought the land, according to Scott Siddons, the golf company’s general counsel. He declined to say whether Westside paid Arcis, citing confidentiality requirements.