

Cottonwood Hills developer seeks to build model homes

By Mary Clarkin - The Hutchinson News - mclarkin@hutchnews.com

Developer Lane Neville wants to "go vertical" at Cottonwood Hills, East 4th Avenue and Buhler Road.

To secure a mega-loan, Neville has to raise the housing site pre-sale numbers from about 20 to about 50 or 60. To help generate interest, Neville wants to construct two model town homes or duplexes, for a total of four units, near the subdivision's 18-hole golf course.

Because of county restrictions attached to the plat - to ensure that lots aren't sold without a plan for utilities - Neville needs Reno County Commission's consent before building permits can be issued for the model homes.

Neville also hopes to move the temporary golf course clubhouse closer to the future, permanent clubhouse site. A clubhouse, ideally, is close to Hole 9, to accommodate golfers playing only nine holes. Cottonwood Hills' temporary site, however, is neither close to Hole 9 nor to the practice area.

The Hutchinson/Reno County Joint Subdivision Committee could take up Cottonwood Hills' issues in November with its recommendation resulting in a county commission vote in early December.

On Tuesday, Neville and local surveyor Dan Garber, with Garber Surveying Service, gave county commissioners a preview of the plans.

What's hot

A hill rising between Cottonwood Hills' Holes 12 and 15 would prevent a motorist on Buhler Road from seeing the proposed town homes, according to Garber.

But people entering the subdivision on the main drive would not miss the town homes as they head to the temporary clubhouse, pointed out Neville.

That's intentional, he said.

Also intentional, Neville said, is the type of housing chosen for model homes.

"Empty nesters," Neville said, favor low-maintenance town homes.

"It's a downsizing for most couples," he said.

The units will be one-story structures and that will be another selling point, in his opinion.

Town homes will range from 1,400 square feet to 2,500 square feet, with retail prices ranging from \$190,000 to \$300,000.

Neville, who lives in Scottsdale, Ariz., would stay in one of the units while in Hutchinson. Ultimately, the town homes would be sold, once housing development and sales are allowed at Cottonwood Hills.

Getting the loan

Cottonwood Hills was supposed to be the site of more than 600 residences, including luxury homes with ample ground for horses. Five years after planning commenced, however, the subdivision has a golf course but no

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Initially, Neville recalled, he wanted to put the first 10 to 20 homes on private septic and groundwater well systems, with the requirement that the homes hook up to public water and sewer lines once those were installed.

Sanitation codes influenced final plans, though, and the developer faced the challenge of installing the water and sewer systems at the outset.

That proved a higher hurdle than Neville realized at the time.

"I just was never thinking how hard the final loan would be to get," Neville said.

He is trying to arrange a \$17 million to \$18 million loan, he said.

Pulling in people

About 75 percent of those people who have entered into pre-sale agreements for housing sites live outside Reno County, according to Neville.

The golf course, built in phases, recently completed its first quarter as an 18-hole course and it is drawing people from outside the county, Neville also noted.

On average, Neville said, 80 to 90 rounds of golf are played on weekdays and over 120 rounds on weekends.

"The golf is breaking even now," he said.

About 10 percent of the golfers come from Oklahoma and another 10 percent come from the Kansas City area, he said. Over half the golfers, on average, are from the Wichita area, while about 10 percent to 15 percent are from Hutchinson.

Between Marriott Golf, which manages the course, and Cottonwood Hills, employment at the property totals about 23 people, he said.

The News was unable to reach Marriott Golf.

County Commissioner Francis "Shep" Schoepf remains confident in the economic promise of the project, and voiced support for Neville.

Both Commissioners Larry Sharp and Frances Garcia indicated the Joint Subdivision Committee's recommendation on the town home request would be important in their final decision.