



Tampa Bay

LARGO GOLF COURSE

Envisioning the Future of a Municipal Course



Technical Assistance Panel Report | MARCH 4–9, 2021

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ON THE COVER: The Largo Municipal Golf Course. (*TAP Panel*)



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About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in responsible land use and creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific region, with members in 81 countries. ULI's extraordinary impact on land use decision-making is based on its members' sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns. Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. Drawing on its members' work, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

About ULI Tampa Bay

ULI Tampa Bay was founded in 1997 by a committed group of business professionals who saw its value in Florida and in our community as real estate and land use needs were continuing to grow and change. Today, the local District Council is comprised of over 600 active, engaged members and a host of regular participants who believe in the positive future of Tampa Bay. ULI brings together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs. ULI shares knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, electronic media, events, and programs.

ULI District Council Leadership

Lucia Garsys

Deputy County Administrator, Hillsborough County Government

District Council Chair, ULI Tampa Bay

Siobhan O'Kane

Director, ULI Tampa Bay

Jenna Wylie

Manager, ULI Tampa Bay

ULI Advisory Services: National and Global Programs

Since 1947, the ULI Advisory Services program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for complex land use challenges. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services. National and international panelists are specifically recruited to form a panel of independent and objective volunteer ULI member experts with the skills needed to address the identified land use challenge. The program is designed to help break through obstacles, jump-start conversations, and solve tough challenges that need an outside, independent perspective. Three- and five-day engagements are offered to ensure thorough consideration of relevant topics.

An additional national offering is the project analysis session (PAS) offered at ULI's Fall and Spring Meetings, through which specific land use challenges are evaluated by a panel of volunteer experts selected from ULI's membership. This is a conversational format that lends itself to an open exchange of ideas among diverse industry practitioners with distinct points of view. From the streamlined two-hour session to the "deeper dive" eight-hour session, this intimate conversational format encourages creative thinking and problem solving.

Learn more at americas.uli.org/programs/advisory-services/.

Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed its members' technical expertise to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Tampa Bay area. Drawing from our seasoned professional membership base, ULI Tampa Bay offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and presenting it to the panel. TAP members typically spend two days developing an understanding of the problem, coming up with recommendations, and contributing those findings and recommendations to the sponsoring organization.

ULI Advisory Services identify creative, practical solutions for complex land use and development challenges.

Technical Assistance Panel and Project Staff

Panel Members

Jim Cloar

President, Downtown Development Strategies

William Zeh Herbig

Senior Director, ULI Building Healthy Places Initiative

Hannah McAleer

Senior Landscape Architect, Clearview Land Design

Michael Nunziata

Division President, 13th Floor Homes

Anne Pollack

Partner, Fletcher Fischer Pollack

Paula Randolph

Associate Director, Babbitt Center for Land and Water
Policy, The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

John Rymer

Principal, Rymer Strategies

ULI Project Staff

Siobhan O’Kane

Director, ULI Tampa Bay

Jenna Wylie

Manager, ULI Tampa Bay

TECHNICAL WRITER:

Kelly Annis

Acknowledgments

ULI Tampa Bay is grateful to the City of Largo, Florida, for inviting ULI to study and make recommendations to help shape the future of the site of the current Largo Municipal Golf Course.



Mature trees along the well-maintained Largo Golf Course cart path.

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The clubhouse at the Largo Municipal Golf Course.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Largo, Florida, is striving to be the community of choice for the Tampa Bay area. A key factor in this pursuit is its ability to meet the needs of its residents, providing the services, amenities, policies, and leadership needed while continuing to act in a fiscally responsible manner. This approach led the City of Largo (the City) to re-evaluate the current use and future plans for the Largo Municipal Golf Course, a compact 18-hole course on roughly 46 acres near the intersection of Walsingham and Vonn Roads. Built in 1969, the course has, for the past several years, struggled to meet its financial obligations as an Enterprise Fund and is facing significant capital improvements. At the same time, the course is enjoyed regularly by Largo residents and visitors alike.

The Largo Municipal Golf Course provides Largo residents and visitors with a cost-effective and highly accessible 18-hole golf option within the City limits and just a mile inland from the beach. Situated between neighborhoods and tucked back away from major thoroughfares, the Largo Golf Course (the course) provides an efficient three-hour round of golf at an affordable price – greens fees are generally around \$35. The course is operated as an enterprise fund and, as such, is expected to meet and manage its own financial obligations. At present, meeting that requirement is a challenge, with course management running the operation as efficiently as possible and continuing to defer certain maintenance items. This fiscal position is not sustainable and the City, recognizing the course's looming financial cliff, turned to the Tampa Bay district council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI Tampa Bay) for objective, expert advice on how to proceed. In response, ULI Tampa Bay convened a Technical Assistance Panel (the TAP Panel or the Panel), comprised of a small group of real estate and land use experts, to evaluate the challenge at hand and deliver a set of recommendations the City can use to begin to address the current and future challenges with the Largo Golf Course.

Following a review of comprehensive briefing documents, a tour of the grounds and buildings, and interviews with stakeholders, the TAP Panel delivered three scenarios the City could consider as it looks to the future of the course.

Scenario 1: Retain and Enhance the Existing 18-hole Golf Course

As a baseline development scenario, the City could consider maintaining the status quo and keep the course in its current form. With a renewed and enhanced focus on marketing the course, integrating Parks and Recreation's offerings, and creating partnerships to drive more activity to the site, a fresh take on the clubhouse and programming, the course may be able to improve its ability to generate necessary revenue to maintain its operations. Moving the course to the general fund, and out of the enterprise funding system, is also recommended as a way to further stabilize the course and its funding stream.

Scenario 2: Repurpose for a Mix of Recreational Uses

Should the City determine that the entire site would be more appealing to residents and visitors as something other than an 18-hole golf course, creating a mix of recreational uses at the site might be of particular interest. From a passive park with walking and biking trails to a destination park with active recreational uses, fields, and courts, the site could have a broader appeal to a larger segment of Largo population and provide an important link in the chain of parks and trails across the City. Converting the Largo Golf Course to a City park will require an assessment of funding options and alternatives, including costs for repurposing, potential for revenue generation, and mechanisms for providing for ongoing maintenance and operations.

Future of the Site: 3 Scenarios, 10-Year Horizon



Scenario 3: Redevelop Partially and Reconfigure the Site

Should the City wish to directly and aggressively address the financial challenges of the course and, at the same time meet the growing needs for housing in the City, the Panel proposed a scenario that is community-minded and a “highest and best use” property approach. This scenario considers the neighbors and immediate surrounding area, the physical property characteristics, the community that could be served by development at the site, and the economic viability of development options. By parceling off the northernmost 20 acres and selling or leasing the land to a multi-family homebuilder, the City might achieve financial returns of a magnitude that would allow it to redevelop the rest of the land into a great 9-hole course with a multi-use amenity/clubhouse along Walsingham Road that serves the broader Largo community.

Regardless of the scenario the City should choose to pursue, it is strongly encouraged to build on the excellent engagement to-date and continue to scenario plan in collaboration with the larger Largo community. These actions might include:

- **Soft Changes.** There are some immediate ‘soft’ changes that the City could make today to the course and grounds to encourage broader use of the facilities by Largo residents. These include broader

programming options, enhanced marketing activities, and opening the clubhouse to more community-focused programs and organizations.

- **Due Diligence.** Due diligence investigations of the property will be required for all scenario planning, which will help the City better understand the full scope of the costs that may be related with Scenarios 2 and 3. By investigating the potential title, environmental, transportation, and drainage impacts of physical improvements and modifications to the site, the City can pursue any planning and/or referendum processes with a clear understanding of the additional financial impacts.
- **Estimates for Capital Improvements.** The City is also encouraged to pursue estimates for the impending capital costs with a ten-year horizon. Again, a more complete understanding of the upcoming fiscal obligations will provide all with a clearer view of the path ahead.

With regard to the financial management of the course, today, as an enterprise fund, the course struggles to meet its fiscal obligations. Should the City convert this enterprise asset to a general fund recreational use, there may be an opportunity to keep the course running with the same level of service. This shift might, at the same time, encourage an expansion of potential uses for the course,

providing opportunities for different programming that may attract more diverse residents and visitors.

Ultimately, the fiscal situation of the golf course may have sparked this conversation and evaluation of its future, but the decision is really one of policy for the City. With careful planning, creative programming, and an eye toward the

near (ten-year) future, the City may begin to chart a path for the course that could ultimately provide recreation opportunities for the golf course community *and* Largo residents seeking additional recreational opportunities throughout the community.

Largo Municipal Golf Course Site Map



THE CHALLENGE

The Largo Municipal Golf Course opened to the public in 1969 and has enjoyed a very loyal following within the golfing community. Located within City limits and one mile east of the beach, the compact 18-hole course features mature trees, nicely-maintained grounds, and a clubhouse that serves as a cafe, pro shop, and event space. At approximately \$35 for a round of golf, the Largo course offers an accessible entry point for golfers and a cost-effective option for older adults seeking mid-week and occasional weekend play.

Operated as an enterprise fund, the course is expected to collect revenues adequate enough to fund the course's operating expenses. Declining revenues due to a consistently smaller number of golfers and rounds

played point to a near-term scenario where the course is no longer funding its operations. In addition to the declining revenue, the course is not able to set aside any additional funds necessary to meet the capital demands of anticipated near-term (within ten years) course and building improvements.

Course management has done an admirable job of trimming expenses across the operation while still delivering a good round of golf on a nicely-maintained course. Additional efforts to expand programming at the course are resulting in some additional revenue, but the overall downward trajectory of the course's finances continues.

Questions for the Panel

The City of Largo posed the following questions to the TAP panel, asking for expert advice and guidance relating to the prospects for the golf course.

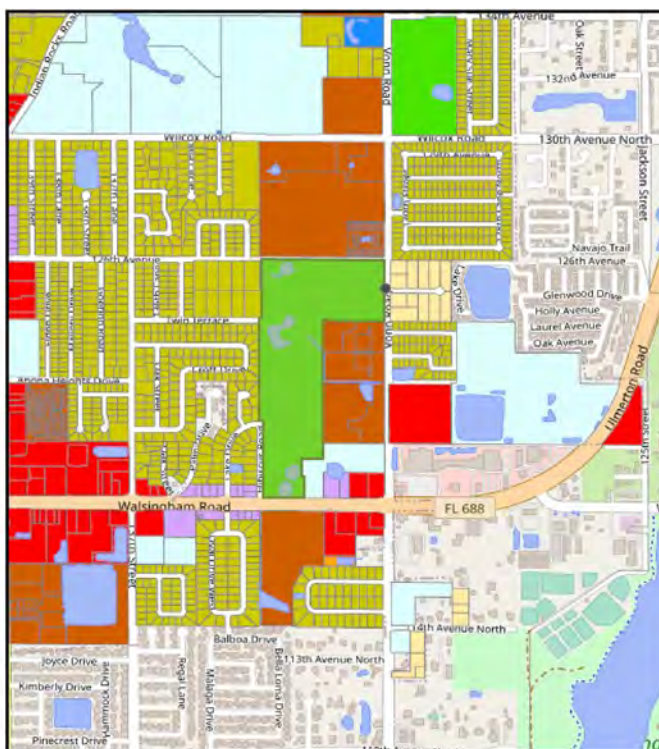
1. What viable re-development and/or reconfiguration options, potentially based on a reduced size golf course, considering fiscal impacts and City objectives, provide amenities to serve a range of users? The ULI team should particularly consider:
 - a. Redevelopment options, including potential commercial and multi-family uses, that avoid concerns of over-development, traffic, and negative impacts on local real estate.
 - b. Alternative strategies for maintaining a mix of accessible recreation and open space use on the site.
 - c. Site planning, landscape, and infrastructure opportunities and challenge that need to be addressed and considered.
2. What strategies and processes should the City employ to navigate this decision-making process?

This fiscal challenge, when combined with the recognition that the sport of golf is in a slow decline, led the City to turn to ULI for advisory services, in the form of a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP), to provide an objective evaluation, expert insights, and a potential path – or paths – forward.

The TAP process began with a thorough briefing process with the City, including a review of previous and current plans for the area, demographic information and trends, and results from recent golfer and resident surveys. While COVID-19 prohibited some panelists from visiting the site in person, several Panel members were able to tour the course to better understand the conditions of the grounds, related buildings and surrounding neighborhoods. The full TAP Panel then spent time interviewing a wide variety of stakeholders, including City staff, course management, neighboring residents, and community organizations to gain further insights into the challenge at hand.

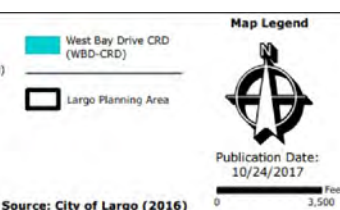
Half-mile Radius – Future Land Use

TAP BRIEFING MATERIALS



Largo Future Land Use Categories

Commercial General (CG)	Preservation (P)	Residential Low (RL)
Clearwater-Largo Road CRD (CLR-CRD)	Residential/Office/Retail (R/O/R)	Residential Low Medium (RLM)
Commercial Neighborhood (CN)	Residential/Office General (R/OG)	Residential Medium (RM)
Commercial Recreation (CR)	Residential/Office/Limited (R/DL)	Residential Rural (RR)
Institutional (I)	Recreation/Open Space (R/OS)	Residential Suburban (RS)
Industrial General (IG)	Residential Estate (RE)	Residential Urban (RU)
Industrial Limited (IL)	Residential High (RH)	Transportation/Utility (T/U)



TAP PANEL



The TAP Panel tour of the study site included the course, the maintenance buildings, and the various amenities on the site.

MARKET INSIGHTS & THEMES

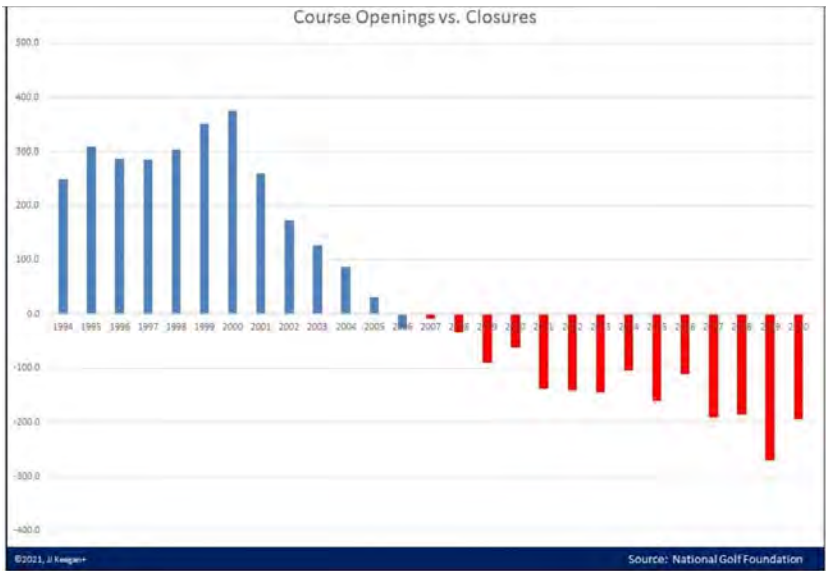
According to the National Golf Foundation, the golfing industry has seen an 11 percent cumulative contraction in golf course supply since 2006, “which has been disproportionately concentrated in value-priced courses (less than \$40 greens fee).” In the last decade alone, there have been an estimated 800 golf course closures in the United States (R&A/Trust for Public Land). The courses that remain are seeing a decline in usage, down from 30 million in 2009 to 25 million users in 2016 (National Golf Federation).

It should be noted that data from 2020 will likely represent an anomaly. Many people turned to golf as a safer sporting alternative and opportunity to get outside with friends in a socially-distant manner. It remains to be seen however, whether this pandemic-induced resurgence will continue through 2021 and into the future when vaccines are widely in use and social distancing measures are no longer of concern.

As the sport struggles to maintain and rebuild momentum, both the public and private sectors are reevaluating these large land assets and contemplating uses that may have a broader appeal to a wider population.

At the Largo Golf Course, the management team has been working hard to expand programming at the course, including innovative games like foot, disc, and bike golf that can be played on the greens, with the goal of attracting new users to the course and increasing revenue. Small gains have been achieved, yet the revenue decline continues.

With this information in hand, the Panel interviewed stakeholders to better understand the current course usage and explore any desired or missing assets in the community. The stakeholders represented a range of Largo constituents, including City staff, neighboring residents, and community organizations. The findings



Courses have been closing consistently since 2007. National Golf Foundation.



Foot golf games are played on conventional golf courses but with a soccer ball and enlarged targets.

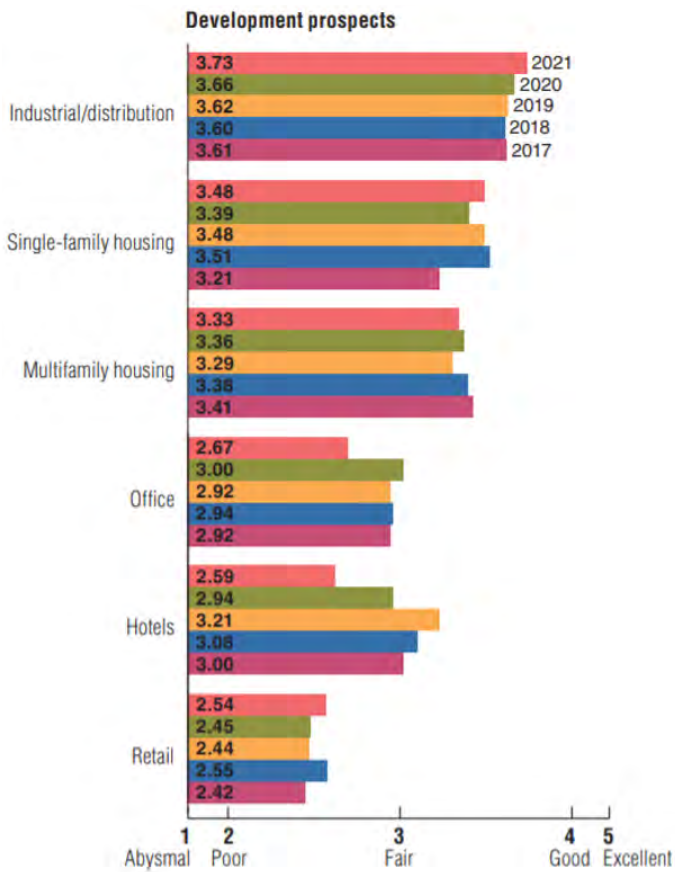
from these interviews, summarized below, helped inform the panel as they began to consider the future of the course and potential alternative land use and recreation needs within the City.

Stakeholder Feedback

- Public lands should serve more people
- It is an affordable golf course
- Other courses are closing, possibly increasing demand
- There are looming capital costs; course isn't generating enough funds
- Don't want residential or commercial development
- Keep green space

- Maintaining property values is a concern
- The course is disconnected and there is missing access for Ridgecrest residents
- Largo has outstanding parks
- The City has a great quality of life
- There is a desire for indoor and outdoor community gathering spaces and places to house community organizations
- Need to improve marketing and amplify programs across parks network
- There is not sufficient affordable housing in Largo
- Space is needed for urban farming
- The use should be economically and environmentally resilient

Demand by Real Estate Sector
2017–2021



Behind the industrial sector, the 2021 *Emerging Trends in Real Estate* publication notes the strength of the housing sector.

Cities Converting Golf Courses
into Public Parks

Atlanta, GA	Ranch Canada, CA
Windsor, CT	Golden, CO
Stockton, CA	La Vista Falls, NE
Marin County, CA	Saginaw, MI
Plano, TX	Santa Barbara, CA
Chicago, IL	Wilmington, NC
Detroit, MI	Belgium, WI
Wake County, NC	Hillsboro, OR
Highland Park, IL	Englewood, FL
Trotwood, OH	Royal Palm Beach, FL
Huntsville, AL	New Orleans, LA
Cedar Rapids, IA	Bothell, WA
Portland, OR	Montgomery County, MD

National Golf Federation

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

With input from the stakeholder interviews, the TAP Panel developed a set of guiding principles that embrace a planning approach that puts people first. These principles lift up ideas such as community connectivity, respect for the environment, recognition of the value of expansive programming and partnerships, and more. Added to the guiding principles was the recognition that the future of the course should also respect and align with the City's *Recreation, Parks & Arts Strategic Plan*. When evaluating potential land use changes to a site as large as the Largo Golf Course, these principles and alignments helped the Panel maintain a community focus, a sustainability mindset, and a connectivity approach.

Guiding Principles of the ULI TAP

1. **Celebrate and reflect the community's diversity.**
Any use at the site should value and respect the diverse residents of Largo and take into account how they would like to use the site.
2. **Mitigate impacts on adjacent neighbors.**
Development considerations should employ an approach that results in minimum impact on the neighbors, both today and into the future.
3. **Respect the site's flora, fauna and landscape features.** The course is home to a number of mature trees and landscape features that have been added to the course over time. While the latter may not be 'natural to the site,' both the mature trees and the landscaping should be respected when possible.
4. **Provide flexible spaces to accommodate greater number of uses within the park.** In addition to the typical golf uses, the course could be home to a wider range of recreational activities that complement the golf usage and/or make use of the course in golf's off-hours.
5. **Reimagine the clubhouse as a community-serving gathering spot.** The clubhouse offers an incredible opportunity to bring community together regardless of any tie to the game of golf.
6. **Link to nearby parks, recreational facilities, trails and other key activity generators.** Largo is rich in recreational assets and the site could serve as a key link in the chain of parks and trails.
7. **Improve visibility and expand access for a variety of user types (including pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders).** The site is 'tucked away' and 'out of sight, out of mind' and would benefit from greater visibility off Vonn and Walsingham Roads.
8. **Build strategic partnerships with the county and local organizations.** The site's location so close to the City/County line necessitates a good working relationship between the two governing bodies and related place-based and/or community-serving organizations. Through strong partnerships, the site and related programming can gain more traction with residents of the surrounding community.
9. **Expand marketing and outreach programs.** While the course management is doing an admirable job of maintaining the course and beginning to spread the

The era of the single-use site is over.

– TAP Panelist

word around additional programming, a more aggressive marketing approach would support current and future programs at the site.

10. Capitalize on assets and maintain fiscal

responsibility. The site enjoys a host of assets that could be leveraged further. From smooth cart paths to wide open green spaces, leveraging these assets to improve or expand the recreational experience at the site is encouraged.

Alignment with Recreation, Parks & Arts Strategic Plan

The City has invested a good deal of time, effort, and community engagement to arrive at the *Recreation, Parks & Arts Strategic Plan*. With a focus on sustainability, public health and safety, and community pride, this is a good plan that should serve as a touchstone for any efforts at the site. Similarly, the pillars detailed within the

plan should also guide recreation and future use of the course, including health and physical activity, community pride and engagement, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

Green Infrastructure Connectivity Considerations (for all plans)

Regardless of the path the City chooses for the site, the Panel strongly encourages a connectivity mindset. As mentioned, the City is home to several City parks and two County parks. The connections between these parks, evidenced in the proposed Urban Trails and Park Network, is sure to become a highly-desirable and functional recreational asset for the City. Planning for those connections should include partnerships with the County and FDOT, an understanding of needed drainage easements, improvements to the existing streets, and connection(s) to the Pinellas Trail.

TAP PANEL



Envisioning the course as a park and trail connector, one can begin to see how a network of recreational uses emerges. Dotted green lines are potential new on-street trails with yellow circles marking particularly busy intersections that may/will require modifications for safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 46+ acres of the Largo Golf Course provide an interesting development and recreational opportunity for the community. With varying interests and financial complications informing the discussions, the Panel arrived at three development scenarios that the City could consider for the future of this site.

Scenario 1: Retain and Enhance the Existing 18-hole Golf Course

As a baseline development scenario, the City could maintain the status quo and keep the course in its current form. If so, the following guidance may prove beneficial in this pursuit.

Fiscal Challenges

There are challenges ahead that may effect the viability of the course as it is today. The combined impacts of golf declining in popularity, the anticipated upcoming capital costs, and inconsistent revenues from the course pose a triple-threat when it comes to the future financial health of the course. While other nearby Pinellas County courses are closing or have closed, the reduction in course options may drive more golfers to the Largo course. It may also be a signal that golf is losing popularity as a recreational pursuit in the County (and the other courses have simply responded to this trend early).

To address the financial health and management of the course, should it remain in its current form with anticipated use and revenue, it would make sense to transition the course from enterprise funding to the general fund as it will soon be unable to meet the enterprise obligations. City leadership and course management may also wish to consider restructuring the fees for play in order to produce a more predictable revenue stream.

Good Course, Great Staff

As it is today, the Largo Golf Course has some positive attributes which support maintaining the status quo. The

course is visually appealing and features mature trees, appealing landscaping, and well-maintained greens. According to national trends, the three-hours (or less) it takes to finish a 'short-course' such as the Largo Golf Course makes this course appealing to a growing number of golfers. The course has a dedicated golf community, including a number of leagues that play on a regular basis.

The staff and leadership at the course are talented and are working hard to maintain the affordability of a round of golf at the course while also seeking additional programming to maximize the use and revenue at the site. This on-the-ground leadership is key to the success of a course of this nature.

Marketing & Partnerships

As course management explores ways to increase play and related revenue at the course, a greater focus on marketing is needed. To start, it would be beneficial to better understand the demographics of the course's current visitors. Are the primary users Largo residents, adjacent residents, neighboring community members, and/or visitors? Answers to these questions can provide clarity in marketing approach, geographic reach, and scope and level of services provided on site. Another important step is to identify and independently benchmark the course's competition. Through benchmarking, the course can better understand its current position in the market and see where and how the competition is currently performing at a higher level. Additionally, it will be helpful to benchmark all recreation opportunities in the City with a needs assessment. This assessment can help identify what Largo may be missing today AND what

TAP PANEL



The course clubhouse and carts lined up for play.

it currently provides that other nearby cities do not. With this information in hand, course management and City leadership can better equip marketing professionals with the data they need to better position the course in the market to draw more users, including the next generation of golfers, to the site and drive revenue.

It may also be worthwhile to consider marketing partnerships with other City departments including of course the Parks Department. Integrated marketing, and the budget benefits that come with combining resources, can produce marketing that has a wider reach and potentially a deeper impact than stand-alone marketing efforts just for the course.

There may also be interesting partnerships with organizations seeking access to wide-open green spaces on which to host their programs. Local schools, the YMCA, the Rotary Club, and the Audubon Society might enjoy certain limited access to the course to study the environment and enhance their current educational programs. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses is a good example of this type of cooperative partnership.

TAP PANEL



The view down one of the compact course holes.

As mentioned previously, the course is located along an interesting path of recreational assets, transportation corridors, and the beach. Highlighting the course's location and accessibility could also help position the site as a recreational opportunity of choice for the area.

Clubhouse & Programming

The clubhouse serves several purposes today, including pro shop, cafe, and event space. It is nicely maintained yet fairly utilitarian. With certain upgrades, the clubhouse could become a more flexible and appealing amenity, accessible and appealing to a wider audience. With this shift in approach and a revitalized design, including a large multi-purpose room, the clubhouse could become the site for community gatherings and fees for hosting events could provide additional revenue. Shifting the clubhouse from a golfing asset to a community-focused amenity would provide the community with the gathering space it desires and provide a more welcoming and inclusive asset for the entire community. Additionally, through some enhancements to the outdoor covered spaces, the City may be able to provide even more opportunities for both revenue generating and community-serving events. The

goal is to activate the clubhouse and potentially generate revenue every month of the year, expanding the clubhouse's potential beyond the months that are prime for golf.

As with the course generally, marketing for the clubhouse and recreation at the site needs to be coordinated with the course marketing and enhanced and expanded overall.

Programming at the site and within the clubhouse could use a boost. Multi-generational events and programming to reach a wider demographic will help to expand the user base for the course and its related amenities. By adding robust fitness, health, and wellness programming as well as group activities for targeted age ranges, course management may be able to draw more users to the site and potentially drive revenue and build a foundation for both golf and non-golf activities.

While there is a growing sense of urgency around the fiscal health of the course, these suggestions can be implemented via phased approach over time as funds become available.

Scenario 2: Repurpose for a Mix of Recreational Uses

Should the City determine that the entire site would be best repurposed into something other than an 18-hole golf course, a mix of recreational uses at the site might be of particular interest.

Preliminary Planning Considerations

Before determining what that mix of uses might be, there are a host of planning considerations that need to be addressed.

- **Site Context.** What are the potential opportunities available for the site, what are the physical constraints of the site, and what other considerations may impact the choice of recreational uses delivered? Additionally, what are visitors able to see of the site today and what do neighbors see – or wish to see? What are the potential noise implications for the uses under consideration? How do visitors move to and through

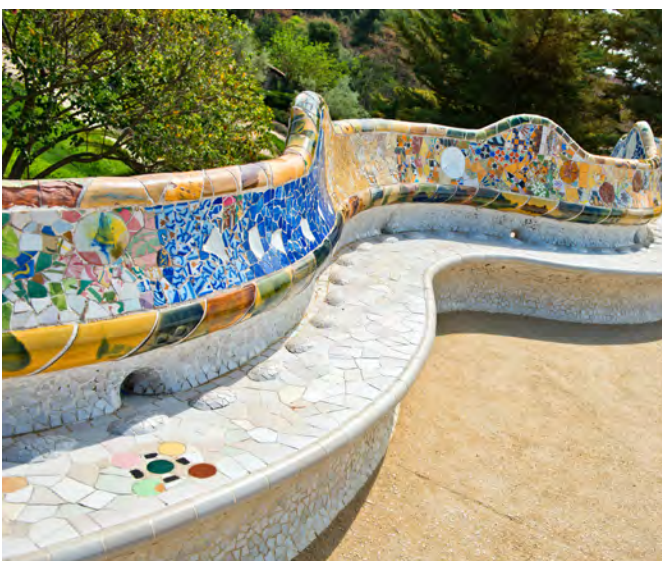


ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK



Yoga, wetlands restoration, and community gardens can activate public spaces and parks, inviting community in.

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK



Community event space, co-working space, and public art installations can invite community to enjoy spaces together.

the site, including vehicular, pedestrian, bicycling, and other modes of transportation? What is the context for the site over 24 hours and over 12 months?

- **Connectivity.** How does the site connect to the neighborhoods surrounding it? How should it connect? How does the site connect to the broader region and network of streets, trails, and sidewalks?
- **Recreation Programming.** How can the site deliver inclusive recreational opportunities, attracting and delivering enjoyable experiences for diverse age groups, ethnicities, and abilities? How do visitors physically access the recreational opportunities? How do they find social access and connections? What are the community needs not currently met elsewhere in the City?
- **Recreation Preferences.** What recreational uses are currently available in Largo? An analysis of the existing recreational activities in the City would help the leadership team better understand any recreational gaps that might be filled with new uses at the site. To help inform this analysis, a review of County and City demographic projections would be helpful as would a review of community targeted recreation information and additional community outreach.
- **Educational Opportunities.** Are there organizations who are seeking opportunities to host outdoor educational programs? With 46 acres, the City could host a wonderful outdoor classroom – figuratively and literally. Outdoor learning opportunities for local schools and after-school programs could take place on site. Adult, life-long learners could host programming on the site and vocational and trade organizations could host enriching educational programs, professional development, and/or other experiences on the site.
- **Social and Cultural Opportunities.** Does the community wish there were additional spaces for social gatherings or spaces to highlight the culture and traditions of the area? Whether in the current

Case Study

Orenco Nature Park Hillsboro, Oregon



HILLSBORO, OR

Quick Facts

- +/- 40 Ac.
- Trails
- Playground
- Arts
- Boardwalks
- Greenhouse
- Habitat Creation

Orenco Woods Nature Park is a park located in Hillsboro, Oregon. The site was formerly a privately owned nine-hole golf course and at one point was slated to be rezoned for single family development. Changing economics and community feedback precipitated the shift to create a public park. The City of Hillsboro and Metro, a regional governance organization, purchased the land in 2011. The city sold 9.7 acres at the southeast corner to a home builder. The proceeds were planned to be used to develop the park. The park opened on February 4, 2017.

"Orenco Woods Nature Park is a partnership between the City of Hillsboro and Metro in preserving one of the largest remaining open spaces along the Rock Creek Greenway corridor. The 42-acre park features a scenic blend of rolling landscape, open

meadows, riparian habitat and forested areas for a variety of birds and wildlife. A network of looped trails and bridges weave their way through the site providing visitors with a variety of experiences. A segment of the Rock Creek Trail runs through the park connecting to Orchard Park and to the Rock Creek Trailhead at Rock Creek Boulevard just north of Highway 26. Over a century ago, Orenco Woods was part of the Oregon Nursery Company, the largest nursery on the west coast and best known for Orenco apples.

Orenco Woods offers a nature themed playground that includes elements such as a stream channel with water pumps and sand areas, logs, a large net climber and swings. A covered picnic shelter is available for rental."

www.hillsboro-oregon.gov

or redesigned clubhouse or out on the grass, there are plenty of opportunities for hosting cultural events and programming to enhance the social lives of Largo's residents and visitors.

- **Foster Environmental Resilience.** Finally, how can the course be used and maintained in a way that fosters environmental sustainability and resilience? While golf courses are not known for their environmental sustainability, going forward the site could be managed and maintained with an eye toward sustainability and resilience. As noted earlier, the mature trees on the site are impressive and add to the City's urban canopy. Modifications to the greens and ponds could be made to support environmental awareness and promote land stewardship activities.

Option 2.A. 46+ Acre Passive Park

Should the City decide to no longer operate the site as a golf course, it could become a 46-acre passive City park. (Passive parks typically provide open space without structured play equipment or sports fields.) A passive park would require only a minimal level of service in order to mow grassy areas and maintain existing paths/trails. The greens and fairways could transform into open space for play and still provide structured opportunities for foot golf and disc golf. The cart paths would transform into walking trails during all hours of the day and, perhaps with the addition of an exterior trail, provide a venue for 5k fundraising events and trail fitness

With some light programming assistance from the City, the park could host movie nights on the greens and possibly other programming and/or fitness opportunities in the clubhouse building. Light enhancements to the landscape could also begin to diversify and strengthen the tree canopy.

The public would not have to pay a fee to use the park and the hours of use/operation could expand from dawn to dusk (or later in the event of a Movie-in-the-Park event). Passive parks also tend to draw a wider range of visitors than golf courses, thereby potentially serving a broader range of Largo residents.

Option 2.B. Mixed Recreation, Relocated Uses

Given the proximity to the Southwest Recreation Center and the desire to enhance or improve that Center's recreational options, there is a potential to co-locate certain recreational

uses between the two sites. To explore the idea further, the City would need to work with the Rec Center to identify the potential improvements and consider which activities might be more easily relocated. For example, it may be possible to relocate certain swimming, cross-country, or track and field activities to the former golf course site. The City would also be encouraged to connect with the Ridgecrest YMCA to identify programming they have noted as missing from the community.

Option 2.C. Destination Park

With 46 acres to play with, the sky is the limit as to how the City might redesign the area to potentially become a destination park for the City and the entire Tampa Bay area. A destination park might include any number of the following:

- Habitat Creation / Urban Canopy

Case Study

Forest Beach Migratory Preserve

This 116-acre site, located on the Lake Michigan shoreline, was previously a golf course. The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust (OWLT) purchased the land because the property's location and attributes lend itself to supporting migratory birds along the Lake Michigan Flyway. The property features a 5-acre hardwood forest with ephemeral (seasonal) ponds, open grassland and prairie, a partially wooded ravine and five constructed wetland ponds. Immediately upon acquisition, OWLT began stewardship activities including invasive and exotic plant control. Key restoration projects and restoration preparation activities, including wetland restoration and activities began in 2009.

Now also home to the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, the Preserve is a perfect match to study the birds that migrate through the preserve. The mission of the Observatory is to: Advance knowledge of bird and bat populations and their conservation in Wisconsin and throughout the Western Great Lakes region through coordinated research, monitoring, and education using good science.

www.treasuresofoz.org

Quick Facts

- Former Golf Course
- 116 Ac.
- Bird Habitat
- Bat Observatory

TREASURES OF OZ



- Stormwater/Floodplain/Wetland Enhancement
- Playground
- Fishing
- Community Center
- Outdoor Gathering
- Gymnasium (Youth and Adult Fitness Programming)
- Non-Profit Incubator Space
- Pump Track and or a Skate Park
- Dog Park and/or Pet Friendly Areas
- Partnership for Community Arts
- Community Garden
- Education/Vocational Training Opportunities

The opportunities are wide-ranging in this option and the City would benefit from expanded community outreach to help drive the planning and delivery of a destination park.

Fiscal Considerations

Converting the Largo Golf Course into a park would ensure that it serves a broader reach of the public, but it will be important to assess and evaluate the financial implications of this alternative. Funding will be required for the conversion of the golf course, as well as for continued operations and maintenance. Examples from around the country have achieved repurposing efforts using a variety of funding sources and partnerships. If this scenario is pursued, one of the decision points will be whether an alternative recreational use could or should be revenue generating.

Case Study Orchard Hills Park Chesterland, Ohio

Quick Facts

- 237 Ac.
- Former Golf Course
- Orchard Themed Playground
- Pond with Fishing Pier
- Lighting Sled Hill
- Wetland Reconstruction

This 237-acre park was formerly a privately owned golf course. The Geauga Park District partnered with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy to buy the land in 2007. With funding assistance from entities including the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Environmental Protection Agency, the property became part of the Geauga Park District, with specified designation as a passive use public park. Since then, the site is in the process of being reclaimed as a natural landscape with over 6 trails totaling 3.6 acres.

www.geaugaparkdistrict.org



GEAUGA PARK DISTRICT, JIM MARQUART

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK



Case Study Meadowbrook Park Prairie Village, Kansas

Quick Facts

- 129 Ac.
- Former Golf Course
- 45 Ac. Mixed-use Development
- 84 Ac. Park
- Community Amenities

"In Prairie Village, Kansas, an inner-ring suburb of Kansas City, Missouri, VanTrust Real Estate recognized the potential for roadblocks when it bought the struggling 80-year-old Meadowbrook Golf and Country Club in 2010 for \$4.2 million. After closing the club a few years later, VanTrust, along with Prairie Village and Johnson County officials, held numerous public meetings to solicit ideas and feedback on how the site should be reused.

"Eventually the effort produced a plan for a 45-acre (18.2 ha) mixed-use development surrounded by an 84-acre (34 ha) county-owned park that will feature jogging trails, a playground, open space, a community center, and other amenities when it opens this fall.

"There were a lot of ways to develop the site, and we could have developed every square inch into something, but it wasn't best for the community or the dirt,' said Richard Muller, an executive vice president for VanTrust.

"The plan centered on using \$19.2 million in taxes generated by the private project to pay for infrastructure and to provide the county with \$10.6 million to purchase and develop the park acreage."

UrbanLand.uli.org

URBAN LAND



Scenario 3: Redevelop Partially and Reconfigure the Site

Given the municipal ownership of the golf course site, an evaluation of its development potential extended beyond just the monetary benefits of development. The redevelopment evaluation the Panel conducted took a community-minded, “highest and best” property approach that focused on considerations of the neighbors and immediate surrounding area, the physical property characteristics (what land is developable), the community that could be served by development at the site, and the economic viability of the development options. The options under consideration needed to address all of these items and not just deliver a monetary return to the City. The result is a redevelopment concept plan that takes a multi-year, phased assessment and approach.

At the northern end of the site, labeled “Parcel A” on the site plan (opposite page), the City has approximately 20 acres that could be redeveloped into multifamily residential buildings. With the opportunity for roughly 20 dwellings per acre, Parcel A could deliver 400 residential units to the Largo market. Whether positioned as market-rate or workforce housing, there is energy around delivering additional housing options to the Largo community. The benefits of placing the housing on this northernmost section of the site is that it is rather easy to parcel off from the rest of the site but would also tie-in via physical connections to the rest of the site.

In the middle of the site, on approximately 24 acres, a golf course could remain. At this smaller size, it would make sense to pare the experience down to a 9-hole course or even, following an interesting national trend, a 6-hole course that is played three times to deliver a full 18 holes when complete. (Management estimates that currently about 1/3 of all rounds at Largo Golf Course are 9-hole play.) Modifications to this section of the site could include improvements to provide for greater environmental resiliency. As a golf course, Parcel B remains in play for a future passive park or other recreational use should the City wish to pursue that option at a later date.



TAP PANEL

At the southern end of the site, approximately two acres tie the site to Walsingham Road. As Walsingham enjoys greater vehicular traffic than Vonn Road, this highly-visible section of the site could be the location for a new course clubhouse that could also serve as a multi-use amenity, a more vibrant, welcoming, and community-facing asset for all of Largo to enjoy.

Area, Neighbor, and Property Considerations

Given the residential nature of the land immediately surrounding the site, it makes sense that new development would add to or complement those residential uses. This contextual evaluation also plays a role in the placement of any residential development on the site. To the north, a new development would provide the least disruption to existing neighbors and, with the preservation of golf in Parcel B, neighbors along the eastern and western boundaries of the site are able to

ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK



maintain their golf course views. The placement of the new clubhouse/multi-use amenity on Walsingham also fits nicely with the quasi-retail nature of that road versus the Vonn Road frontage and residential nature of the current clubhouse surroundings.

Community-serving

Population trends in Florida and in the City of Largo are on the rise. Although Largo may not be experiencing a housing shortage today, careful residential planning for the future, to include workforce and/or attainable housing, might serve the City well. At the same time, this development scenario preserves recreation and golf at the site and continues to serve the limited golfing community. Additionally, there are interesting opportunities to promote the game of golf to populations for whom a \$35 round of golf is still out of reach. Through partnerships with community organizations it might even be possible to provide a certain number of free rounds of golf to help

support and encourage new golfers in the community for whom the greens fee is a barrier to play.

Economic Viability

The fiscal challenges that sparked this study can be addressed via new development on Parcel A. Revenue generated through the sale of the land and any potential development fees can help pay for the new multi-use amenity in Parcel C, the redevelopment of the golf course in Parcel B, and a certain period (potentially 5-10 years) of sustained recreation use on the rest of the site. While the City experiments with various pricing options (including free golf) to expand its reach into new population of golfers on the reconfigured course, it should continue to track course usage. If course usage plateaus or even further declines, the City can then make a determination as to how it could reconfigure or develop the land in Parcel B, perhaps considering an active or passive park as discussed in Scenario 2.

CONCLUSION

The City of Largo is taking a thoughtful approach as it considers the future of the Largo Municipal Golf Course. Situated in a neighborhood setting one mile from the ocean, the compact 18-hole course provides fast play to residents and visitors. The course is facing declining rounds and revenue, and City leadership is aware of the deferred maintenance and unfunded looming capital improvements. To-date, the City has done an admirable job of staffing the course, running a lean operation, and engaging with surrounding residents and golfers to begin to chart a path forward.

As the City looks to the next five to ten years for the future of the course, it is encouraged to build on engagement efforts to date and continue to scenario plan with the entire community, including golfers, Largo residents, and surrounding County residents.

It would also be wise to begin conducting certain due diligence work to better understand the potential for any development on the site. Title work, environmental evaluations, transportation impact studies, and drainage considerations will all impact the development decision-making process and are helpful to understand in any early-stage development discussions. Beyond the typical due diligence measures, more site investigation is needed and the City should also consider the planning and referendum process that may be necessary with any land use change for a large recreational parcel like this.

In the meantime, there are a host of 'soft' changes that can be made to help improve activity and revenue at the course. More intense marketing efforts for expanded program offerings, bringing more people to the course to connect, play, and recreate will help raise the visibility of the course, inspire additional/future golfers, and potentially generate additional revenue to meet some of the financial needs of the course.

Ultimately, this is a policy decision that the City will have to make in the face of impending capital costs on a roughly 10-year horizon. The threshold for converting the course from an enterprise asset to a general fund recreational use line item will necessitate a certain level of change in service which may also attract Largo's more diverse residents and visitors, thereby serving an even broader community than it does today.



TAP PANEL

ABOUT THE PANEL



Jim Cloar

President, Downtown Development Strategies

Jim Cloar is a Past Chair of the Urban Land Institute's Tampa Bay District Council and a Past Chair of ULI's Public-Private Partnership Council. He is a former CEO of ULI and principal author of the ULI-published book "Centralized Retail Management: New Strategies for Downtown". He has chaired or participated in 9 ULI Advisory Panels, most recently in Omaha, San Antonio, Oklahoma City and Colorado Springs and was a panelist on ULI/NLC Rose Center for Civic Leadership visits to Omaha and Rochester NY. He chaired the 'Realizing Resilience' technical assistance panel in St. Petersburg in 2016 and another TAP focused on the City's Coastal High Hazard Area in 2019.

He has spent over 40 years as a professional urban planner and downtown manager. He led public-private partnership entities in Dallas, TX, Tampa, FL and St. Louis, MO for a collective total of 26 years. In 2010-2011, he served as the Interim President of

the Washington, DC-based International Downtown Association and is a former IDA Chair. In 2013, IDA presented him with its Dan. E. Sweat Award for Lifetime Achievement in Downtown Leadership. Cloar has been a consultant, advisor and/or speaker to over 50 cities across the U.S. and abroad. Recent projects include establishing urban development/management entities in Rochester, NY and Omaha, NE.

William Zeh Herbig

Senior Director, ULI Building Healthy Places Initiative

William is Senior Director of ULI's Building Healthy Places Initiative, where he oversees a portfolio of content and programs focused on the intersection of health and social equity in the built environment. This work includes managing ULI's District Council Task Forces for Health and Social Equity, a program that is addressing land use and transportation barriers and providing recommendations for local policy shifts and reforms.

Prior to ULI, he co-led Kimley-Horn's Atlanta-based Planning and Urban Design Studio where oversaw master planning for the conversion of the 130-acre former Milton Country Club into a public passive preserve. He has also directed a variety of design-related projects at Midtown Alliance in Atlanta, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the Congress for New Urbanism both in Washington, D.C., and the Markle Foundation in Manhattan. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).

Hannah McAleer

Senior Landscape Architect, Clearview Land Design

As a Landscape Architect at Clearview Land Design, Hannah is involved in all aspects of planning and design projects, applying site analysis, research, and concept visions throughout the design, permitting, and construction phases. Through 17 years of landscape architecture and land planning practice in Southwest Florida, her involvement with multi-discipline projects has provided an understanding of design challenges and ability to present solutions related to permitting processes, environmental constraints, creative site planning, construction methods, and budget controls.

She provides staff resource allocation and project management for various types of development projects. She has led teams to design and implement parks, amenities, trails, streetscapes, master-planned communities, multifamily, office, and commercial projects. In addition to design and planning, Hannah has served on committees to rewrite municipal land development codes and has crafted community design guidelines.

Hannah holds a Master of Landscape Architecture and Bachelor of Science in Environmental Design, both from Auburn University and is a registered Landscape Architect in the State of Florida. As a ULI member for 7 years, she has been involved with the Tampa Bay Development Trends Conference planning committee and has guided planning exercises for high school students during Urban Land Institute's collaboration with Hillsborough County's Future Leaders in Planning Program (FLiP).

Michael Nunziata

Division President, 13th Floor Homes

Michael Nunziata serves as Division President of 13th Floor Homes, the homebuilding division of 13th Floor Investments. Under Mr. Nunziata's leadership, 13th Floor Homes has grown to become one of South Florida's largest and most respected private development and homebuilding companies. Mr. Nunziata has over 15 years of direct experience in the real estate investment and development industry. Mr. Nunziata received a BS in Economics from the University of Florida and a MS in Real Estate Development from Columbia University.

Anne Pollack

Partner, Fletcher Fischer Pollack

Anne Pollack is a partner with Fletcher Fischer Pollack, P.L. Over the past 20 years she has leveraged her knowledge to become a recognized expert in acquiring development approvals and land use entitlements for real estate projects of all types and sizes across Florida, and in representing both private and governmental clients in connection with the sale, acquisition and development of real estate. Recently, Anne augmented her practice to include consultation on sustainability, resiliency, and corporate social responsibility - reflecting the firm's expanded commitment to serving businesses with holistic legal advice as they launch and thrive. Anne is a fixture in multiple industry, bar, and community-based organizations, and is currently on the boards of the St. Pete Chamber of Commerce, REIC, and Creative Clay, is a Past President of CREW Tampa Bay, and is active with ULI and the Florida Bar.

Paula Randolph

Associate Director Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Paula Randolph has worked in the “community” business for over 20 years. Prior to her tenure with the Institute she was the President of Associa Arizona, a global leader in association management as well as 12 years working for two Arizona based planned community developers whose focus is on building award-winning lifestyle communities. Her leadership roles have included strategically planning communities that live well from a resident’s perspective, functional well from an operational perspective as well as ensure legacy opportunities for the Developer and community members. She is known for her passion for “great communities” – “Legacy communities are about land planning and architecture,” she says, “but equally important, they are about the people.”

John Rymer

Principal, Rymer Strategies

John Rymer is a leading authority on the sales and marketing of residential properties in the United States. His career in real estate has spanned more than twenty years and has accounted for more than five billion dollars in sales directly under his supervision.

Mr. Rymer is an active member of the Urban Land Institute and the National Home Builders Association. He is been a frequent speaker at the International Builders Show. Mr. Rymer is a graduate of Florida State University with a degree in economics and holds an MBA from the University of Miami.



Tampa Bay

ULI Tampa Bay
4830 W Kennedy Blvd
Suite 400
Tampa, FL 33609

813 262 2742
tampabay@uli.org

tampabay.uli.org



knowledge.uli.org