

IN THE NEWS



Contra Costa Country Club golf course to get safety, play upgrades

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PLEASANT HILL -- The environmentally friendly plan for a Robert Trent Jones II-designed golf course renovation at the Contra Costa Country Club has received approval by the Pleasant Hill Planning and Architectural Review commissions. Although club board member John Walz described the project as maintenance, the improvements are expected to make a big impact on water savings, safety and amenities.

"All of these changes are part of the evolution of any golf course," Walz said. "It will be a better course to play on, cut water consumption by 20 percent, require fewer fertilizers, reduce all aspects of maintenance and improve safety for all of our neighbors, members and guests."

Originally designed in 1925 by Arthur Vernon Macan, the course is on land that was described by a government surveyor in the late 1800s as "The Pleasant Hills," possibly making it the first Pleasant Hill landmark.

It was the early 1990s when Robert Muir Graves last redesigned the course. The current plan brings it up to USGA (United States Golf Association) specifications

with new greens, traps, tees, a new irrigation system and an improved practice area.

The golf course will also remain an open space oasis for wildlife, according to John Martin, course superintendent. Both Martin and his assistant are environmental landscape graduates from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

"There is a history here," Martin said. "We support deer, wild turkeys, geese, egrets and nesting sites for owls. Biologists found more than a dozen species of birds that make home here."

Those species were taken into consideration when planning for the removal of 181 trees in order to accommodate "open view corridors," according to Martin. One hundred and eighty-five new trees will replace them in "selected grove sites."

Martin is especially enthusiastic about the computerized "state of the art" irrigation system and new grasses, designed to reduce maintenance.

Two independent consulting agronomists have agreed with the staff about the impact of reclaimed water on existing vegetation and other agronomic issues.

According to the club website, both experts reported that current turf and trees would continue to be challenged because of the poor water quality (recycled), poor green structure, invasive grasses and weak drainage in some places.

The use of herbicide to get rid of the grass there now was initially a concern for neighbors, but plans are to notify them 14 days before application, and have an observer from the county agriculture department on site. The application will occur in a phased approach, said Greg Fuz, of the Pleasant Hill Planning Department.

The new greens will be planted with bent grass. Fairways, roughs and tees will be a combination of 70 percent rye and 30 percent fescue grasses, according to Martin.

"It will improve the quality of the fairways," golfing member David Contrares said.

The routing of the golf course will about the same, with the exception of repositioning and extending the 17th hole, but changes will make it more competitive with other courses, Martin said.

With a design by Robert Trent Jones II, Martin and Walz believe the improvements will help to re-brand Contra Costa Country Club.

The prestigious landscape design firm recently renovated the Poppy Hills course at Pebble Beach and designed the new Chambers Bay course, the site for the 2015 U.S. Open.

Mike Cox, golfer and member agrees.

"It will be a lot more fun for members who enjoy the natural surroundings, pool and social life, as well as golf."

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Zell and Associates assisted the Contra Costa Country Club with community outreach and navigating the planning process.