

Redevelopment of Rancho Vistoso golf course irks residents who feel voiceless

By Jamie Donnelly Special for the Arizona Daily Star

Apr 29, 2020 Updated May 22, 2020



Residents near the former Golf Club at Vistoso, which has sat vacant since closing in 2018, are frustrated with the town for moving public meetings to an online-only format while it discusses rezoning of the vacated golf course.

Mamta Popat / Arizona Daily Star

A group of Oro Valley residents is opposing possible plans to turn parts of the vacant **Rancho Vistoso golf course** into a mix of single-family housing, casitas and a senior living facility, claiming changes to the town's public meeting process in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic don't allow for community input.

In an effort to adhere to social-distancing guidelines, the town has ditched traditional public meetings and instead released informational videos to the public to collect feedback on certain projects. That's included a possible redevelopment and rezoning of

the Golf Club at Vistoso, which has sat vacant since closing in 2018 amid financial trouble.

“Our goal is to ensure everyone is provided with information regarding the upcoming public outreach process, the applicant’s proposal and the next steps,” Michael Spaeth, Oro Valley’s principal planner, said in the video. “The town requires all general planning rezoning applicants to engage in a community outreach at the front end of the process as it is important to hear your comments and questions early and often.”

Romspen Vistoso LLC, the company that owns the 202 acres of the land that the course sits on, has plans to redevelop 87 acres with single-family homes, casitas and a senior care facility, while leaving the remainder of the land for open space, [**according to the town’s project page.**](#)

The development would require an amendment to the town’s general plan to change the zoning from resort/golf course to account for a mix of medium- and high-density residential.

As of April 10, the town had not received a formal application from Romspen, but anticipate one soon.

Joe Lunne, town spokesman, said community members can send the town any questions they have regarding the rezoning.

Based on the comments it receives, the town will release another video responding to the concerns on April 30.

Quality journalism doesn't happen without your help.

Support local news coverage, and the people who report it, by [**subscribing to the Arizona Daily Star.**](#)

They uploaded a snapshot of the feedback they had received as of Monday, which included a number of comments concerned about the public process.

“We’re looking at doing some Zoom meetings in May, a large one with as many people as can attend,” Lunne said. “Then we’ll do some individual neighborhood meetings hopefully once the restrictions are lifted. If it’s safe to have meetings again, we’ll have meetings again later in the summer.”

Members of the group, **Preserve Vistoso**, have organized to push the town to pause moving forward with the development. The group has 1,200 members and was formed last year in order for community members to have a voice in figuring out what happens to the former golf course.

Patricia Sturmon, a director for Preserve Vistoso, said group members believe their questions are “going through a filter,” which “isn’t appropriate for something as important as this.”

“We really need this to be paused until we can have in-person meetings,” Sturmon said. “It’s an entirely different process than being able to walk up to the Romspen representative and ask them directly what they want.”

Sturmon said the group believes “the best interest would be keeping the area as a nature preserve and community trail.

“One of the reasons we were so adamant about turning this area into the nature preserve and community trail is because there are no Oro Valley park facilities or recreational facilities north of Tangerine Road,” Sturmon said.

Sturmon also said the group doesn’t think the property would be an appropriate place for a senior complex.

“If you stand in the middle of the driving range you’re surrounded by homes and to put a senior citizen complex in that area would not be ideal for the community with all the traffic, delivery trucks, fire trucks and ambulances,” Sturmon said.