

# OFF COURSE

Plans for a new golf course at Fort Sheridan have come to a halt and whether they ever are restarted is a subject of great debate

By Ed Sherman

**W**hen Bill Lolli bought his house in the Fort Sheridan development, he and his wife decided to add one final touch. They built an addition with a balcony.

Lolli is a golfer, and the decision regarding the balcony was made so it would allow him to overlook an existing hole at the Fort Sheridan public course, located in northern Highland Park, hugging Highwood and Lake Forest.

"We built and invested in this property," Lolli said, "thinking there would be a new golf course here."

The previous course, a modest, yet inexpensive, 18-hole layout run by the

Lake County Forest Preserve, was closed in 2003. The intent was to replace it with a new, dramatically upgraded course.

At one point, there was a design done by Robert Trent Jones, Jr.'s company hanging in the old Fort Sheridan clubhouse. However, those plans were scuttled, and architect Brian Silva came up with a new layout featuring three holes along the lakefront.



**AREA  
CLOSED**  
**NO ENTRY  
UNTIL MADE  
ACCESSIBLE  
& SAFE FOR  
PUBLIC USE**

At the moment, the land proposed for a golf course at Fort Sheridan is strictly off-limits.



with the course meandering through the property's unique ravines and dunes. It looked to have the

potential to be a spectacular venue.

Libertyville-based golf course architect Rick Jacobson said of the property: "You don't see those types of sites around the country these days. You'd have to go to Whistling Straits to find something comparable."

However, the Fort Sheridan version of Whistling Straits never happened. More than six years later, the project has been bogged down by legal wrangling, the economic downturn and a general feeling among some politicians that Lake County can do without the expense required to support another golf course.

As a result, much of the property is now open fields with a few hiking paths, not the golf course residents like Lolli thought was destined for the land. The situation

has him fuming, and he isn't taking it sitting down.

Lolli has been the most vocal proponent among the residents pushing for Lake County to build a course. He said when he and others bought their homes, it came with the promise that they would have a course near their front door.

Actually, it was more than a promise. When developers took over the land after the Army closed its base at Fort Sheridan in the 1990s, it included a deed restriction that said the Forest Preserve "shall operate a golf course in perpetuity."

"It was an agreed-upon thing," said Lolli, a retired executive from Allstate Insurance. "That's where we stand. Don't just say things have changed. We feel like we've been cheated."

Initially, the golf course project was derailed by a dispute between the developers and the county over who was responsible for disposing of a

**Simplify.**

Business phones, networking, VoIP, internet, LAN, conferencing, data. All from one reliable source. One attentive point-of-contact. One comprehensive bill. That's business telecom, simplified.

**312-CallOne**  
callone.com

**CALLONE**  
312-225-5663

massive 40-foot-high dirt pile on the property. The litigation wasn't resolved until 2008.

Now the problems center on finances. Estimates to build the course, clubhouse and other operating costs are in the \$18 million to \$20 million range. Not only is the potential cost much higher than the budgeted \$14.5 million, but it comes at a time when money is extremely tight.

Lake County Forest Preserve Board President Bonnie Thompson Carter said building a golf course made sense to her in 2004. Not anymore.

"What I see happening with moving forward with any type of golf course is a train wreck," said Carter at a May board meeting. "Conditions are different and facts are different. I think it's a good thing to stop the train wreck and go back and evaluate it."

The number of rounds are down throughout the area and the country, detractors say. Also, a new course would take away business from nearby municipally-run city courses. There's also a concern to some that the Fort Sheridan course would have a great impact on Thunderhawk, Lake County's top-rated golf course in Beach Park.

Added board member Suzi Schmidt, "I hate to tell everybody, but times have changed. A lot of people are hurting out there."

Tom Hahn, the executive director of the Forest Preserve, said the high cost to build the course could require greens fees in excess of \$100. There is a concern golfers will shy away from paying top dollar. Besides, he said the Forest Preserve wants to keep fees reasonable.

"You have to look at the financial

implications," Hahn said. "It would be difficult to build a golf course with (reasonable) greens fees and sustain a debt service that would allow us to borrow the money. It comes down to a financial issue. It's a significant one."

When asked about the deed restriction, Hahn said, "The Forest

economically feasible to build a course at this time. The board might have already started the process during a May meeting when it formed a planning committee to evaluate other uses for the land.

Highland Park Mayor Michael Belsky is among those who remain

**A proposed course at Fort Sheridan already has been designed, but that's not to say Bill Lolli and others are any closer to playing there.**



committed to building the course, contending that homeowners are entitled to get what they were promised. He said Highland Park wouldn't participate in the planning committee unless a course still was one of the options.

Lolli says he will continue to push on, but even he concedes the prospects of building a new golf course at Fort Sheridan look dim.

"All you hear at these meetings is golf being bashed," Lolli said. "These people have all their reasons. This has gone on so long. I'm not optimistic it will ever get done." 🍷

Preserve acknowledges the deed restriction exists. It's definitely part of the puzzle."

Lolli believes the board will go to the Army and attempt to have the restriction removed, contending it isn't

*Ed Sherman is a recently retired golf writer for the Chicago Tribune. He also writes a sports business and weekly golf blog for Crain's Chicago Business.*