

Another Ag Reserve project scuttled

PBC commissioners refuse to change rules for warehouse plans

Mike Diamond Palm Beach Post | USA TODAY NETWORK

A proposed warehouse project in the Agricultural Reserve that critics say would have destroyed an adjacent rural development is dead — at least for the time

being.

The developer, Gold Coast Logistics, requested a postponement Nov. 1 but no Palm Beach County commissioner agreed to it. The company's agent, George Gentile, sensing defeat, then told commissioners that his client wanted to withdraw his plans, eliminating the need for a public hearing.

It marked the second time in a week that county commissioners refused to change the Ag Reserve rules

to accommodate a developer.

On Oct. 24, county commissioners killed the land swap proposed by GL Homes. It would have allowed the homebuilder to put a high-end development west of Boca Raton on preserved land in the Ag Reserve. In exchange, GL Homes would have built a multi-million dollar water resource project in The Acreage area and

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significantly reduce the size of an approved GL Homes development in that area.

Approval would have set a precedent allowing preserve parcels to be swapped outside of the Ag Reserve. Preserve parcels can currently be swapped but only if they are within the Ag Reserve. The Acreage is about 20 miles north of the Ag Reserve, a 21,500-acre zone west of Florida's Turnpike and west of Boca Raton, Boynton Beach and Lake Worth Beach. The area was created to limit development and protect agriculture.

How and why the developer wanted to move the boundary line

Like GL Homes, Gold Coast Logistics called on the county to change the Ag Reserve rules so a warehouse project could be built. It wanted to use the new Commerce designation created for the Ag Reserve that could have resulted in the approval of the warehouse project. But there was one problem — the boundary for such development ended at Rio Grande Avenue on State Road 7, about a quarter mile south of the 6.3 acre Gold Coast parcel.

Gold Coast Logistics was founded in 2007 by Dragos Sprinceana, who emigrated to the U.S. from Romania. On his website, Sprinceana calls himself an example of the "American success story." He started with two trucks and today has more than 1,500 and employs more than 1,000 people.

The Gold Coast parcel site is located on the northwest corner of State Road 7 and La Reina Road. Sprinceana wanted to move the boundary line to La Reina Road, adjacent to Tierra del Rey Estates; county planners urged it not be done, noting the request "would be incompatible with residential developments in the area and would negatively impact them."

Several speakers urged that the postponement not be granted, noting they had scheduled their day to testify against the project. Had the proposal not been withdrawn and had commissioners rejected the plan, it could not have been heard again for at least two years. Because it was not denied, the plans could be resubmitted as early as next May. Most applicants, though, prepare new plans that have a better chance of gaining approval and support from neighboring property owners.

At issue Nov. 1 was whether to transmit the project for state review. Residents of Tierra del Rey Estates along with other communities lobbied hard against transmittal. They met a number

of times with each county commissioner and staff to note their concerns.

Andrew Ripps, the president of the HOA at Tierra del Rey Estates, said he was pleased with the way county commissioners listened to issues they raised, noting: "We presented our case. It was refreshing the way each county commissioner and staff considered our positions. They understood how important this was to us."

Ripps said he believed the Ag Reserve vote had an impact. "This was another case of a developer trying to change the rules," he noted, "and if this project was built, it would have had a devastating impact on our community."

Ripps said he recognizes that something will probably be built on the parcel. "We just want it to be compatible," he told The Palm Beach Post.

Tierra del Rey Estates consists of 78 single-family homes. Almost all of the homeowners have horses that roam their five-acre lots. They see their equestrian lifestyle jeopardized by a warehouse with buses coming in and out on a daily basis. The warehouse could have been as large as 96,507 square feet.

Nearby communities Rico POCO and Dakota joined Tierra del Rey Estates in opposing the request to extend the Commerce boundary line to La Reina Road. Also speaking out against it were the Alliance of Delray Residential Associations and the Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations (COBWRA).

This year, The Post featured the equestrian community and the concerns residents had about the project. Homeowners feared their horses would be spooked by the truck traffic generated by the warehouse. They also noted that large trucks would be making U-turns on State Road 7 to get in and out of the site, causing traffic safety issues.

Ripps said he believes the article played a role in the outcome on Nov. 1.

This year, county commissioners agreed to initiate a text amendment or a change to the zoning code, the first step in the process for Sprinceana's project to move forward. Ripps was disappointed the commission instructed staff to initiate the text amendment but noted that at the end of the day, the process worked as staff and commissioners listened to their concerns in refusing to send the plans for state review.

Efforts to obtain comment from Sprinceana and Gentile were unsuccessful.

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