

Pines

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property known as "Eleven Pines" – residents are either unconcerned or uninformed about which vision is danger.

In an interview Tuesday, Hills City Manager Steve Brock said city officials were well aware of the site's problems before they purchased it from a trust two years ago. They had wanted to expand San Marino Golf Course to 18 holes, and the pentacolor-turned-municipal-landfill was among the few large, undeveloped parcels left in the community.

State law had changed so that liability for cleaning up any past contamination was better defined.

"Given the changes in the law, given the fact we knew it wasn't a toxic site or a medical waste site, this was a managed risk," Brock said. "We felt we could improve on what was there right now."

Brock said the city is protected from liability over past contamination by a baseline environmental assessment. The BEA consisted of soil borings and water testing, which revealed elevated concentrations of manganese and magnesium, with manganese exceeding residential drinking water standards.

However, DEQ Specialist Steve Kitter said the contamination wasn't significant because all the homes in the area are on city water. Kitter also pointed out, however, that standards for human contact and natural environment and wildlife sometimes vary greatly.

"If there were people on well water in the area, we'd be more concerned," he said.

Approved in October of 1998, the baseline assessment focused primarily on groundwater data compiled by consultants at Conestoga-Rovers in 1997, which confirmed the presence of PCBs

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and volatile organic compounds.

Kitter said while the results indicated the site met the state's criteria for contamination, "the data collected didn't indicate any danger to human health."

What does the presence of contaminants mean? Kitter admitted the DEQ doesn't know at this point. He also said it's not unusual to find contamination in areas around major roadways.

As the property owner, the city has to file a plan that shows its intent to exercise "due care" in developing the property. While taxpayers aren't liable for past contamination, they will be if anything is done to make it worse.

That also means keeping contractors or city workers from being exposed to contamination.

"They have responsibilities, and the redevelopment will have to address those responsibilities," Kitter said.

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city staffers, city council members Barry Bricker and Chris McRae, and citizens Tom Horton, Kurt Brauer and Jody Soronen will present their findings to the council for approval.

Brock has every confidence the project will get under way this year, but Kitter just smiles when asked whether he thinks that could happen.

"We're wrangling now about the proposed use of the property, specifically the golf course, and how do they accomplish that and still take care of their responsibilities," he said. "The problem is we don't know what's in the landfill itself."

One of the DEQ's primary concerns is how watering will affect the area, Kitter said.

"Watering on an old landfill could cause a lot of problems, especially when we don't know what's in it," he explained, adding that if watering the area caused contamination to spread, the city would be held liable for cleaning it up.

Brock said there are strategies for filtering stormwater or watering runoff that have worked in other communities. In the Tollwood drainage district in Lansing, for instance, runoff is directed into ponds lined with peat. Those natural filters are removed and disposed of at a regulated waste facility.

The Eleven Pines landfill is already capped, but the city plans to cover it with an approved base of clay. The DEQ prefers leaving these types of sites under cover, rather than trying to dig them up, Brock said.

Whether it's regular grass to stabilize the area over the winter or bent grass seed, he indicated planting will begin this fall. While city officials hope to start soon, they've still got a number of

state hoops to clear.

Obtaining DEQ approval means the difference between capturing just the city's portion of property taxes or all revenues from the site – primarily school taxes, which amount to about four times the amount generated by the municipal millage. Less money collected means it will take longer to recover the money Hills officials have already borrowed from internal resources.

Kitter remained cautious at a meeting held in January, prior to the first public hearing on the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

"I told them I wasn't real confident we could get this done in their time frame," he said. "We've formulated plans to do some more investigation of the property in the next couple of weeks, but there's no guarantee we'll support what they're proposing."

■ What's next? The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority Board will meet, and draft a redevelopment plan, which will be presented to city officials. Over the next few weeks, consultants will conduct more in-depth tests to determine the full extent of contamination.

Why take a swing at another course?

BY JONI HUDRED
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With three private and one public golf courses already established in Farmington Hills, does the community really need another nine holes of golf?

You bet your spikes, according to city manager Steve Brock.

Demand has never been high-

■ 'A golf course, after we pay back the debt, makes money. We can reinvest that in improvements, and it keeps the rates low.'

Steve Brock
—City manager

Halsted, probably via a bridge over the busy street.

The city is also in it for the bucks – in a manner of speaking. "A golf course, after we pay back the debt, makes money," Brock explained. "We can reinvest that in improvements, and it keeps the rates low."

Fees will go up a quarter this coming season, he said.

An apartment complex and upscale townhomes have also been proposed as part of the development. The Planning Commission will consider a request for a Planned Unit Development zoning qualification at its Feb. 17 meeting.

Brock said developers will raze the existing club house, which will no longer be centrally located when the course expands. Plans call for a new facility farther west, which will be larger to accommodate the 18-hole course and have cart storage underneath the building.

■ ELEVEN PINES

er for one of the area's most popular sports and expanding San Marino Public Golf Course will provide residents more opportunities to enjoy it at their leisure.

"We'd like to have some more open tree times," he explained. "This gives us a little more flexibility."

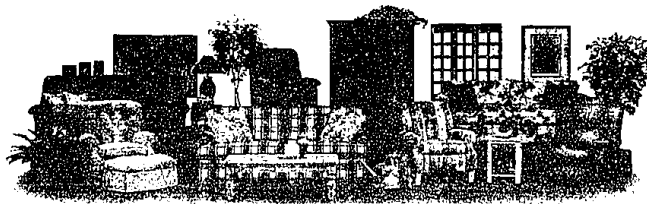
Located across Halsted from the proposed expansion, San Marino could best be described as "booked solid" during the season. Golfers swing through about 45,000 games every season, and most of the high-demand tee times, like after work and early evenings, are taken by leagues.

In addition, Brock said, Hills organizations that want to have a golf outing or fund-raiser on a public course have to book outside the community to play 18 holes. With the additional space, all they'll have to do is get across

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