SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Planning and Development Services

TO: Sarasota County Commission

THROUGH: Jonathan R. Lewis, County Administrator

FROM: Matthew R. Osterhoudt, Director, Planning and Development Services

DATE: February 10, 2026

SUBJECT: **Gulf Gate Golf Course – Policy Discussion and Direction**

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S) OR ACTION(S):

A. To provide policy guidance regarding potential County acquisition and future use of the Gulf Gate Golf Course property and to authorize the County Administrator to negotiate a potential Purchase and Sale Agreement with the Property Owner, subject to future Board approval;

B. To authorize the County Administrator to engage the services of a qualified third-party engineering firm to analyze the site and develop cost estimates associated with environmental remediation, including arsenic impacts.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

2025 Strategic Plan

On January 15, 2025, the Board approved the Sarasota County 2025 Strategic Plan. As part of the Strategic Plan, the Board's Policy Agenda included "Consider Potential Impacts of Gulf Gate Golf Acquisition for Stormwater". The 48.9-acre Gulf Gate Golf Course property, Parcel Identification Numbers 0111030050 and 0111070035, (the "Property") has since been discussed periodically as a potential Sarasota County (the "County") acquisition for public benefit purposes.

More recently, Gulf Gate Holdings, LLC (the "Property Owner") has re-engaged County staff to gauge the County's current interest in acquisition.

Development Activity

In 2016, the Board approved Rezone No. 15-30 for the Property with the zoning changing from RE-1 (Residential, Estate) to RSF-1/PUD (Residential, Single-Family, Planned Unit Development), allowing for up to 106 single-family residential units. The rezoning generated significant concern and opposition from residents in the surrounding Gulf Gate community. Following the rezoning, the Gulf Gate Community Association formally requested that the County consider acquiring the Property for stormwater management purposes, citing potential benefits related to flood mitigation, water quality, and community resiliency. County staff subsequently began evaluating acquisition feasibility and potential public uses, consistent with prior Board interest.

In addition to being entitled with 106 residential units, the Property has also received construction approval for these units through Site Development 21-180216-DS. The construction authorization expires on April 16, 2027, unless otherwise extended through applicable procedures. To clarify, construction has not commenced as of yet.

Real Estate Considerations

County engagement with the Property Owner has occurred intermittently over several years. In August 2022, Property Management Division ("PMD") staff issued a letter of interest to determine the Property Owner's willingness to sell. In January 2023, PMD provided appraisals to the Public Works Department (now the Stormwater Department), including an appraisal prepared by Ronald M. Saba, MAI, valuing the Property at $4,586,000, and an internal PMD appraisal valuing the Property at $3,845,000, with valuation differences largely attributable to per-lot assumptions.

During 2023, Stormwater staff determined that a conceptual water quality and passive recreation project could be feasible on the Property; however, no funding was identified in the County's adopted five-year Capital Improvement Program.

In August 2023, County staff reengaged the Property Owner, who indicated a willingness to consider a sale, but stated that any offer would need to exceed appraised values, reiterating that development remained the preferred outcome.

On January 6, 2025, PMD staff contacted the Property Owner's representative, who indicated the Property Owner may be willing to consider an offer reflective of fair market value, although no asking price was established. A preliminary internal value analysis was prepared on February 5, 2025, by the County's certified appraiser on staff, which estimated fair market value at approximately $5,300,000.

On May 2 and May 9, 2025, reports were provided to the Board with updates on discussions with the Property Owner **(Attachments 1 and 2)**. On July 10, 2025, a subsequent report/update was provided to the Board **(Attachment 3)** regarding two additional appraisals valuing the Property at $9.5 million **(Attachment 4)** and $6.527 million **(Attachment 5)**. The Property Owner also provided a market study **(Attachment 6)** indicating that, if developed, the Property could be valued at approximately $25 million, reflecting the projected value of all entitled residential lots and associated infrastructure. During more recent discussions with the Property Owner's representatives, they expressed that the purchase price would be less, but did not declare a specific number.

As of the date of this report, the Property Owner has not formally provided an asking price.

The Property remains fully entitled for residential development under the existing RSF-1/PUD zoning, and the Property Owner has consistently indicated that development remains the primary objective. The Property Owner has also expressed a willingness to consider a sale to the County if a purchase price could reasonably approximate the anticipated financial return from development.

Pursuant to Florida Statute, any County acquisition at a purchase price exceeding the average appraised value would require approval by an extraordinary vote of the Board of County Commissioners (minimum of four affirmative votes).

Given the Property's size, location, entitlement status, and the range of potential valuation and development outcomes, several key considerations would need to be further evaluated should the Board wish to continue exploring a potential acquisition. These considerations include the feasibility and scope of potential stormwater and public use opportunities, environmental and regulatory requirements associated with the site, and the availability of funding to support acquisition, remediation, and long-term maintenance. The following sections are provided to outline these areas for discussion and future analysis.

Conceptual Stormwater and Public Use Opportunities

Conceptual planning for the Property envisions the creation of integrated flood mitigation systems; including open water features, constructed wetlands, and preserved open space with compatible public use, along with targeted upgrades to existing stormwater infrastructure in the surrounding area. Repurposing the site as a regional stormwater facility could reduce or eliminate existing level-of-service flooding deficiencies on seven local roadway segments. In addition, the project is expected to deliver measurable water quality benefits, with an estimated average annual reduction of approximately 400 pounds of total nitrogen and 250 pounds of total phosphorus, directly supporting the long-term protection of Little Sarasota Bay.

Environmental Considerations – FDEP and Arsenic Remediation

The site is currently undergoing remediation for soil and groundwater arsenic contamination under Florida Department of Environmental Protection ("FDEP") Project No. ERIC_175358. The conceptual improvements described above would likely require wastewater permitting through FDEP. However, the full scope, regulatory requirements, remediation costs, and any long-term management requirements have not been fully defined.

Consistent with the County's standard real estate acquisition practices, any negotiated Purchase and Sale Agreement would include a due diligence period to complete environmental investigations, with contractual provisions allowing the County to proceed, renegotiate, or terminate the agreement based on the results. Given the site's history, if the Board provides policy direction to initiate negotiations, staff recommends retaining a qualified third-party environmental engineering firm during due diligence to perform site assessments and develop order-of-magnitude remediation and long-term management cost estimates. Due to the nature of the known contamination and permitting considerations, an extended due diligence period would likely be required.

Funding Considerations

Total project costs would include property acquisition, design, permitting, construction of stormwater and public use features, environmental remediation, interim operations and maintenance, and long-term management obligations. At this time, no funding has been identified for either the acquisition of the Property or implementation of the conceptual improvements.

Potential funding strategies may include pursuit of applicable state and federal grant programs related to stormwater, flood mitigation, water quality, and resilience. Additional funding options could include a capital stormwater assessment within the Matheny Creek Basin or the Little Sarasota Bay Watershed, subject to Board direction. Any recommended funding approach would be returned to the Board for consideration as part of a future budget or Capital Improvement Program discussion.

RELEVANT PRIOR BOARD ACTION:

1. October 24, 2023 – The Board had consensus to request the County Administrator defer any plans to purchase the Property and to bring back to the Board in the future any information on other offers and interest of the Property Owner to sell.
2. January 15, 2025 – The Board the Sarasota County 2025 Strategic Plan (5-0 vote).

OUTREACH:

N/A

PROCUREMENT ACTION:

N/A

FUNDING:

N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Goal: Great place to live

Objective: Have a well-planned community with a mix of uses

NEXT STEPS:

This discussion item is intended for the Board to provide policy guidance regarding whether acquisition of the Property remains a County priority. If directed by the Board, County staff would continue discussions with the Property Owner to explore the terms of a potential Purchase and Sale Agreement. Staff would also procure the services of a qualified third-party engineering firm to further evaluate site conditions, including environmental considerations, and to develop preliminary cost estimates associated with any required remediation. Upon completion of these efforts, staff would return to the Board with the results of the analysis, associated cost information, and any proposed agreement for further Board consideration.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION(S):

Staff recommends that the Board provide policy guidance regarding the potential acquisition of the Gulf Gate Golf Course property and authorize the County Administrator to (1) negotiate with the Property Owner to explore a potential purchase and sale agreement, subject to future Board approval, and (2) engage the services of a qualified third-party engineering firm to evaluate site conditions and develop preliminary cost estimates associated with environmental remediation.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Gulf Gate Golf Course Report
2. Gulf Gate Golf Course Update
3. Gulf Gate Golf Course Update 2
4. Appraisal 1
5. Appraisal 2
6. Market Study