

# City gets green light to buy IF golf course

*Management district wants city to turn clubhouse into community center/neighborhood hub*

By Greg Densmore  
Editor

Maybe "giddy" isn't the correct word to describe how Wayne Norden felt when he learned the Houston City Council had given the green light for the city's purchase of the 227-acre Inwood Forest Golf Course.

But after hoping and planning for that very outcome, you couldn't blame Norden for feeling a bit giddy. After all, the council's go-ahead for the city to buy the golf course and clubhouse property for \$9.25 million is a major step in revitalizing the long-ne-

glected Antoine/DeSoto/Hollyview neighborhoods in northwest Houston.

Norden, President/CEO of the Near Northwest Management District and longtime Inwood Forest resident, announced the news of the council's decision at last week's quarterly meeting of the NNMD's Business Network Breakfast held at Cafe Red Onion.

"We are very excited that the City of Houston approved the purchase of the property for use as green space," Norden told the group of business owners in attendance. "It opens up an entire new opportunity for park space and

flood detention."

According to Norden, the city will close on the property — "they'll sign on the dotted line" — March 25.

Andy Icken, the city's chief development officer, has said Harris County Flood Control District is looking at nine different plans for water detention/features regarding the property. HCFCD estimates it will be able to get about 1,000 acre feet of water detention. Icken said the land acquisition will also help the city meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act.

According to the HCFCD's Mike Talbott, excavation for the water detention would be

confined to the golf course's fairway areas. He said the district was looking at "long, skinny detention" that would not extend over to the areas where cart paths or trees are located.

Because there is not a lot of funding available from the city for maintenance issues, Icken said city officials will be working with Near Northwest Management District, Greater Inwood Partnership, Inwood Forest Community Improvement Association and other community groups to come up with a maintenance plan for both the property and clubhouse.

"We want to be the property manager," said Dorothy Miller, NNWD board chairman. "We want to keep it (the property) strictly recreational, with a community center (the former clubhouse) as the focal point."

In addition, the Houston Parks Board has expressed interest in extending bike trails through this area and have been speaking with Norden about this idea.

"The city will lay over the course where they need detention," said Norden. "Then we'll lay over what we want and we'll massage it and get amenities where they're needed."



The City of Houston and the Harris County Flood Control District plan to utilize the pastoral setting of the Inwood Forest golf course as the site for water detention.

# NNWD wants to turn clubhouse into first-class community center

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Norden cautioned that while this is an important step in the revitalization of the Antoine Corridor, progress will probably be slow.

"Adding 227 acres to the park budget is not a little thing," he said, "so implementation will be gradual, as money becomes available. We'll work with the city and start slowly."

NNWD's plan is to focus first on turning the 8.8-acre clubhouse site into a world-class community center that is accessible to all, and then gradually build out from there, said Norden.

Norden, Miller and other NNMD representatives foresee the community center as a neighborhood hub, hosting weddings and anniversaries, club meetings and other important events.

"We're excited about the whole concept and envision a community center driven by lots and lots of activity," said Norden.

The city's purchase of the Inwood Forest golf course follows in the wake of several other eye-catching events that have residents of northwest Houston feeling better about the future of their community. The most important — and visible — steps taken by the city: demolishing the Candlelight Trails Condominiums and the Gables Apartments, two neighborhood eyesores that had become magnets for criminal behavior.

Two more run-down complexes, the Oakbrook Apartments and Candlewood Glen Condominiums, are next on the chopping block.

"We're here to put the slum lords on notice," said District A Councilmember Brenda Stardig. "Blight in northwest Houston is going away."

Norden said one of the next moves is to attract high-quality retail to relocate to the area.

"It is imperative that we attract higher-level retail and commercial businesses," he said. "We have to put some uniformity back into what we look like. We need to brand ourselves."

Norden said one of the most important goals is to change the mindset of northwest Houston residents and business owners.

"We have to get rid of the negative thinking," he said. "We're trying to plant a vision of total change. We're trying to build a foundation on which to build from."

No matter what plans are being made regarding the country club property, nothing concrete will be proposed until two studies on the Antoine Corridor are completed. One is a Livable Centers Study being conducted by the Houston-Galveston Area Council; the other is a study being conducted by the Urban Land Institute.

The Livable Centers Study is looking at existing forms of transportation, support infrastructure, current and potential

use of land for business and residential or greenspace. This study will also develop concepts, an implementation plan and potential funding opportunities.

The Livable Centers Study is focusing on the Antoine Corridor area from Pinemont to West Gulf Bank, T. C. Jester to Bingle/North Houston Rosslyn.

By centering on this section, "we will be looking at a microcosm of the total 16 square miles that comprise the Near Northwest Management District," explained Norden.

The Livable Centers Study will provide third-party support for the District's plans that will enhance northwest Houston "as a place to live, work and play," he said.

"Our proposal is to consider the development of a Town Center in the Antoine Corridor with improved pedestrian walkways and connections to the new bike trail along White Oak Bayou," added Norden.

A very important interactive stakeholder meeting tied to the Livable Centers study will be held 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 26, at Advent Lutheran Church, 5820 Pinemont. Two days later at the church, at 6 p.m. Thursday, April 28, a final public meeting will be held to unveil the final plan.

"It is imperative that area residents take part in the April 26 meeting," said Norden. "People need to come out and help us build a distinctive community. This study is going to change our community, and this will be our chance to tell us what you want to see in the Antoine Corridor."

