



## Deer Ridge Golf Course focusing on sustainability

By Tim Epperson, Staff Writer  
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The sustainable future of the Deer Ridge Golf Club on Foothill Drive in Brentwood is still very much at the forefront of progress as efforts to convert the golf course and its clubhouse into a new venue of walking trails, vineyards and a high-end restaurant are underway.

The new owner of the golf course, the non-profit World Business Academy, said the future is not reopening a golf course, but rather planting wine grapes, olive trees and lavender on the site.

“The mission is sustainable, renewable energy in an environmentally conscious manner,” said Academy Vice President and Program Lead for Sustainable Development, Robert Shelton.

Plans are in place to lease part of the 195-acre facility to an existing vineyard to produce wine commercially and seek a higher-end restaurant to lease the clubhouse as a new facility.

“We are currently in negotiations with two local restaurateurs to turn the clubhouse into a fine-dining establishment as a means to generate revenue,” Shelton said.

He said while there is a desire of golf to make a comeback to Deer Ridge, the model is unsustainable.



World Business Academy Vice President Robert Shelton shows the Brentwood Press the proposed development site of the Deer Ridge golf club and clubhouse.

He said that the Academy’s notion is sustainability so that each crop is organic, using solar power for energy. This would include purchasing a tractor that does not use fossil fuel.

The planned farm-to-fork restaurant and events center at the 8,500 square-foot golf clubhouse would feature food that is grown locally in Contra Costa County, possibly including organic food that is grown in a community garden located as part of a farming education center on the property.

The existing clubhouse will be redeveloped as a three-meal restaurant with a full bar, wine cellar and outdoor dining areas that are intertwined with a

renewable energy demonstration center, through the sources of power these consumer-facing uses employ, the vehicles, the appliances they utilize, and the infrastructure that at every turn explains “how what we’re doing is different from the norm ... and why it’s superior,” Shelton said in an email.

Through these familiar end uses, the Academy plans to demonstrate a fuel-cell assisted community microgrid system, and will explain how, if embraced, this technology could eliminate the need for fossil fuel or nuclear power plants as well as overhead transmission lines, would reduce energy costs and cut carbon emissions.

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Because the clubhouse previously served food and alcoholic beverages, it can be reopened for the intended restaurant and bar purposes as an existing right of zone. The Academy has submitted its preliminary plans to the city and is waiting to receive staff feedback prior to filing its formal application.

That application will include a plan to convert the former fairways of the golf course into a lush vineyard, olive trees and lavender fields. The Academy has hired SDG Architects of Brentwood to prepare a conceptual site plan and preliminary floor plans for the restaurant and wine cellar based on repurposing the existing two-story building and parking lot; and has been in discussion with several restaurant operators who've expressed interest in operating the restaurant, Shelton said.

He said that one of the Academy's board members recently introduced him to the founders of the No Kid Hungry/Share Our Strength organization, who've expressed a willingness to help attract a restaurateur with interests in sustainable practices and organic farming, in addition to the discussions the Academy has held with local restaurateurs.

Residents of Deer Ridge, whose homes back up to the former golf course will be given the opportunity to expand their current backyard at a substantial discount to the average assessed value of residential property in the area.

Shelton said the Academy is open to working with the city to make the trails public, but while these details are being pursued, they plan to reopen them to use on a private-membership basis for community residents.

"We think it's a win-win for existing property owners," Shelton said.

The Academy has hired Brentwood-based real estate company Marple and Associates, owned by Cathie and Matt Maples, to serve as a local property manager and leasing/sales agent for key elements of the project, including the planned leasing to vintners and restaurateurs.

"When people see the project happening, it will narrow skepticism of the project," Cathie Maples said.

In February, through its wholly owned subsidiary, World Business Academy Sustainable Vision I, LLC, the Academy received the Deer Ridge property and clubhouse as a donation from its owner, Deer Ridge Golf Club, LP. During the entire 17-year period - from 2002 to 2019 - the golf course was never financially successful, prompting the last owner to permanently close the course and clubhouse in September 2019.

Over the past 18 months, the Academy has explored various ways to redevelop the property to provide visually appealing open space and be financially self-sustaining.

Two master plan concepts were submitted to the city for informal review under the city's Preliminary Review Process.

City staff developed and published an unscientific online survey regarding the potential reuse of the property. The survey was open from April 12 to April 28. There were 484 responses to the survey. Of those respondents, 48.5 % identified themselves as living in the Deer Ridge area, with an additional 16.5% reporting living in the Shadow Lakes area.

- 70.5% of all respondents preferred organic agricultural use in preference to leaving the property as is.
- The agricultural crop most preferred was grapevines. Lavender and olive trees were also supported to a lesser extent.
- 87% supported public trails on the former golf course, while 5.6% preferred a private, fee-based trail system.

City staff have not completed its analysis of the proposal. The proposal may be considered by the Brentwood Planning Commission and City Council this summer.