

Economy puts regional park west of Boynton on hold for seven years

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- A 52-acre plot of land scheduled to become a regional park west of Boynton Beach will instead be home to a plant nursery for the next seven years.

The land sits southeast of the intersection of Boynton Beach Boulevard and Lyons Road, near Sunset Palms Elementary School, a few residential communities and the 200,000-square-foot Canyon Town Center shopping plaza.

In 2002, developer GL Homes gave the land to the county specifically for a park. GL was responsible for building many of the nearby residential communities and Canyon Town Center.

The economy is to blame for putting the \$12 million project on hold, according to Bill Wilsher, superintendent of park planning and design for Palm Beach County.

"There's just not enough people moving into the area," he said. "The impact fees were going to drive the project."

The Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations, which represents 89 communities west of Boynton Beach, is working closely with county officials to ensure that if they support the leasing of the land, they will get something else they want in exchange.

Ken Lassiter, president of COBWRA, said that one possibility would be for the county to build more ball fields nearby. He said that there is a waiting list for sports teams to play on the field next to Park Vista High School.

"They're booked solid," he said. "You can't even find a place to park."

The county went out to bid to lease the park land more than a year ago, and in the end, received one response. The land can only be leased for agricultural use, and people in the agriculture business are being hit hard by the recession.

"The landscape guys have more land than they need," said Ross Hering, director of the county's property and real estate management department. "From 2005 to 2007, people were calling all the time asking if we had any property available. Now I don't get any calls."

Floral Acres Nursery has proposed to lease the land for seven years without any extensions for about \$13,000 annually. It's a bargain price, but it's the best the county can do right now, Hering said. It costs the county about \$20,000 per year to maintain the property.

A spokeswoman for Floral Acres said she was too busy to comment, but confirmed the nursery's plans.

The design plans for the park were completed in 2008 and Wilsher said they include many ball fields, basketball courts, picnic shelters and a dog park. He said that the park location presents a unique opportunity.

"We've never really built a park adjacent to a shopping center," he said. "I could see kids playing soccer and then walking across to Canyon Town Center for pizza and ice cream."

Although Wilsher said it's just a matter of time before the park happens, residents aren't so optimistic.

"We've seen in the past with promises and intentions, when push comes to shove, they don't happen," said Mitch Rubin, who lives in Cobblestone Creek, one of the neighborhoods near the park.

Lassiter said that COBWRA intends to hold the county to its promises.

"We don't forget," he said.