



Memorandum

To: Planning Commission Members
From: Elizabeth J Corwin, PE, AIPC; Planning Director
Date: December 4, 2025
Re: URSA 25-05 and RZ 25-02
Applicant: David Dowling, Yukon Building
Owner: Highland Hills Golf Club and SIGA Corporation
2075 Oakland Drive
PIN 11-01-351-002

The proposal under consideration requires a multi-process approach. The amendments to the Golf Club site including the parking lot redesign, the hole realignment and the addition of the golf simulator are an amendment to the existing Special Use Permit. The proposal to add some housing units along Oakland Drive requires rezoning action because there is no option for the duplex units under our current Planned Unit Development ordinance. Both special use approval and a rezoning action require a public hearing, with the uses finally determined by the Board of Trustees after a public hearing and recommendation from the Planning Commission.

This meeting is to provide the public an opportunity to comment on the sketch plans and on the offer of conditions from the developer. The sketch plan is the document that sets the basic parameters of the development—the site layout, basic concepts for grading/drainage, water supply, septic systems and other physical improvements. A special use permit can include reasonable conditions to be placed on the operations, such as hours of operation, noise and light limitations, screening requirements and other factors to mitigate potential impacts on surrounding properties. The rezoning action will also include consideration of conditions that might be offered by the applicant to mitigate concerns.

Rather than open two distinct public hearings on these two processes, we have noticed one hearing where the public may comment on both components of the proposal. But the Planning Commission will review the golf course improvements and the housing under two separate standards and processes.

Background and history:

Highland Hills Golf Course has been in continual operations since the 1920's, long before modern planning and zoning was ever considered. The property consists of one approximately 113-acre parcel lying on either side of Highland Hills and further split by an undeveloped right of way from Clubview Drive. These streets were developed as part of Duck Lakes Park Subdivision, a residential

subdivision platted in 1925. The golf course includes land on Oakland Drive that was originally platted as residential lots.

The roads are under the jurisdiction of the Road Commission for Oakland County. The property is, and has been owned, by partnerships dating back to the 1980's.

Golf Course Amendments:

The site plan submitted by the applicant includes reconfiguration of the existing parking lot, Hole 3, and the addition of a driving range/golf simulator. While the reconfiguration of the parking lot and hole 3 would probably not constitute enough of a change to garner a public hearing, the addition of the driving range/simulator does represent a significant change from existing conditions. This improvement would likely impact the surrounding neighborhood due to the visual prominence of the structure for the netting.

In your review of the land use, you must consider the factors published under Section 6.03.J. In the following analysis, I have outlined some of the factors you should consider in evaluating whether the proposal could meet the required standards of approval:

J. *Standards for special land use.* The Township Board shall approve the proposed special land use if it is determined to be in compliance with the standards and requirements of this Ordinance and the Standards for Site Plan Approval listed in Section 5.04.

1. All special land uses shall be designed, located, planned and operated so that the public health, safety and welfare will be protected.

The golf course has operated with little or no public complaint for many years. We have no record of concerns about the safety of the access points, the soundness of the septic system or water supply, the food safety in the clubhouse or other such factors where the public interacts with the users of the course.

The proposal includes a significant netting structure to capture the balls as they are driven from the tee positions in the range/simulator. This should mitigate concerns about property damage or personal injury from the new use.

The Planning Commission could find this standard is satisfied, if upon hearing from the public and the operator, that you are satisfied that proper precautions have been taken in the design and operation of the new elements of the golf course.

2. All special land uses shall be compatible and harmonious with the surrounding land uses taking into consideration the size, location and character of the proposed special land use within the context of surrounding land uses and the Master Plan. Furthermore, the proposed special land use shall not cause substantial injury to the value of other property in the area in which it is located.

In this case, the golf course has coexisted peacefully with neighboring land uses for 100 years. The golf driving range/simulator and its netting structure is a new element that is difficult to visually screen from view of the neighbors. The near proximity of a golf course, with or without a simulator tends to have a positive impact on property values. In discussion with the operator regarding such factors as hours of operation, lighting and shielding of lighting, outdoor sound systems and the like are factors you should determine whether the addition of the simulator unreasonably alters harmony with the neighbors. You may identify mitigating conditions that could improve such compatibility and harmony.

3. The proposed special land use shall be in general agreement with the Master Plan designation for the area where the use is proposed.

The golf course is an existing land use that has been recognized in the Master Plan and Recreation Plan for the Township. Its continued presence in community fosters the goals of preserving open space, natural features and Highland's identity as a "reprieve" from urban sprawl. Investment in the golf course sends a signal that the golf course and its open space will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

4. All special land uses shall provide facilities for safe and convenient vehicular and pedestrian traffic, including but not limited to: turning movements, traffic flow, proximity and relationship to intersections, adequacy of sight distances, location and access of off-street parking, and provisions for pedestrian traffic.

The driving range/golf simulator would presumably increase the use of the golf course, and therefore the trips to and from the course. The Institute of Transportation Engineers forecast the p.m. peak hour rate as 1.25 spaces per tee position, or approximately or approximately 25 trips. Generally speaking, uses that generate fewer than 100 peak hour trips do not garner significant engineering consideration unless there is already a known safety issue at the intersections. The Road Commission for Oakland County will review the access points to determine if any improvements are necessary to mitigate any impacts.

5. All special land uses shall be designed, constructed and operated in a manner that prevents detrimental impacts to surrounding properties such as noise, dust, fumes, smoke, air, water, odor, light and/or vibration, etc. The special land use shall be designed, constructed and operated in a manner that does not detract from area aesthetics.

As discussed in the above factors, the Planning Commission should discuss how the driving range/simulator will be operated to determine if there are any conditions that could be included in the proposal to prevent detrimental impacts to the neighbors, particularly lighting and sound systems. The netting structure will be visible from neighboring properties, so commitments about its maintenance, hours of operation, lighting levels and similar conditions would factor into your decision as to whether this standard can be satisfied.

6. The proposed special land use shall not unreasonably burden the capacity of public services and/or facilities.

The golf course does not currently burden the capacity of public services and/or facilities nor is the nature of the proposed improvements likely to add to the burden for police and fire. The site is served by private water supply and sewage disposal.

7. The proposed special land use shall comply with any specific standards set forth in Article 10, Supplemental Use Regulations, that are applicable to the use.

*The golf course currently complies with the standards set forth in **Sec. 10.14. - Golf courses, par 3 courses and driving ranges**. Provided that the operating plan minimizes impacts to the residential neighbors, the proposal will continue to comply with these standards.*

The proposed site plan for the improvements will not be reviewed in detail as to the engineering design until after a decision has been made regarding the Special Land Use. A couple of observations about compliance with the zoning ordinance regulations follow:

The parking lot and site circulation is satisfactory although the zoning ordinance requires 20-foot deep parking spaces with a 24-foot drive aisle. The number of spaces exceed the requirements of the zoning ordinance, although the parking calculation table should be amended as the driving range parking is to be calculated separate from the golf course as a whole, and there is also a basic parking requirement associated with the clubhouse. Pavement cross sections and curb details should be provided with the detailed site plan.

The parking lot is dependent on surface flow to a ditch which outlets to a retention basin. The slopes are steep in parts of the parking lot and across the lawn areas, but meet standards. Detailed drainage calculations will be reviewed later.

The size and location of the existing septic system should be added to the plans to demonstrate that the new improvements will not impair their use. The wellhead protection area is noted on the site plan.

I also note that although this is a golf course, and obviously has been landscaped, there is no landscaping plan in the plan set. Since the parking lot is in the interior of a well planted and wooded site, the Planning Commission can allow some flexibility in the strict application of the standards.

There is also no lighting plan for the site. When detailed site plans are submitted for review, there should be a lighting plan, with particular attention given to any lighting allowed on the netting structure itself, due to its height and potential to be seen from a great distance if the lighting is not properly shielded.

The Planning Commission will have to make a decision as to how to address the height of the netting structure. The ordinance is silent on this structure. The tallest structures allowed in the Township under the current ordinance is 50 feet for flagpoles and antennae. Cell towers are the only structure that is allowed higher than 50 feet, and those require special approval as well. The other issue relative to the screening structure is its proximity to the property line. Whereas the dimension is not called out, the nearest column seems to be only 60 feet from the south lot line.

Rezoning Application for Proposed Housing

As noted previously, a project such as this would typically be considered under a Mixed Use Planned Unit Development, which would result in agreement as to the use and operations of the site as a whole. The Planning Commission has in the past discussed the wisdom of having such a planning tool, and has reserved space in the Zoning Ordinance to develop regulations, but has never completed that exercise.

The applicant has proposed eight housing units, essentially eight homes in the range of 1400 to 1600 square feet per home. The proposal is to develop these as a condominium, with shared elements such as the driveways, lawn areas and landscaped areas. If these were fully separate dwelling units, they could have been permissible under the Special Land Use for the golf course. However, since three of the structures are "duplex" units, with a shared wall, the only zoning regulations applicable are multiple family residential. Therefore, the request for the designation as RM, Multiple Family residential.

The conceptual site plan shows these units accessing a shared driveway system off Oakland Drive, which is a public street under the jurisdiction of the Road Commission for Oakland County. This area overlies the area platted as Lots 35 through 53 of Duck Lake Park Subdivision. Had these lots been developed previously, they could have been the sites for up to 18 houses.

The applicant is willing to offer conditions to restrict the development to comply with the proposed site plan. Upon hearing the concerns of the neighborhood, he is willing to consider other conditions

as well. The Planning Commission may discuss the proposal and its perceived potential impacts to the neighboring properties; and assess the appropriateness of any offer of conditions. But once the conditions are formalized and the rezoning proposal is forwarded with a recommendation to the Board, the Board must either accept the conditions, reject the proposal with conditions or send it back to the Planning Commission for further clarification.

In reviewing the proposal, you will evaluate the factors outlined in Section 19.05 of the Zoning Ordinance.

One point I would like to clarify is the issue of compliance with the Master Plan. This parcel is clearly identified on the Future Land Use Map as Rural Residential. This portion of the site is immediately adjacent to the Small Lot Residential Classification on the Future Land Use Map. Should you decide that the merits of this proposal satisfy other factors of the Master Plan such as the goals and objectives surrounding housing diversity and preservation of open space, such a recommendation is not opposed to the Master Plan even though it varies from the Future Land Use Map. The Master Plan should be considered as a whole, and the Future Land Use Map does not take precedence over the written goals and objectives.

The exact limits of the proposed rezoning area have not yet been defined but should be before the final offer of conditions is considered by the Planning Commission. A condominium will be established for the housing; which will be divided from the parent parcel of the golf course. Since the new homes will be served by a septic system, there will likely be conditions specifically to address the Oakland County Health Division environmental protection provisions that will place limitations on the remainder golf course parcel as well as the condominium unit.

The applicant has provided some elevation views for your consideration. If there are design elements in the presentation that you believe are critical to making an acceptable project, this should be identified so that the applicant can consider including those elements in his offer of conditions.

The conceptual site plan for the housing element is sufficiently detailed to support the rezoning application except that the boundary of the rezoning is not yet identified. The Fire Department is not concerned about the driveway layout of the site, since they will be able to reach the homes from Oakland.

Once you have developed a recommendation for the rezoning application, with its offer of conditions, the application will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for final decision. If approved, then the applicant could proceed to a detailed site plan for your review and approval.