

MIDDLETOWN

Supervisors consider offers to run country club

One proposal suggests that Middletown run the country club.

By CHRIS ENGLISH STAFF WRITER

Several weeks ago, it appeared a new operator for the townshipowned Middletown Country Club was in place, but the township supervisors are now considering three alternatives for operation of the club on Bellevue Avenue.

At a Tuesday night executive session, the board is scheduled to discuss proposals from groups called Agro Golf Corp and Egos Inc., on running the country club, and also a proposal from parks and recreation director Debby Lamanna about operating the facility on a more direct basis and not under the license agreement arrangement that's been used since Middletown bought the country club in 1986.

Agro Golf is headed by Rick Begley, general manager at the club under the current operating company Mitchland Inc., which is headed by Newtown Township businessman Jim Worthington. Begley had reached an agreement with Worthington to buy the country club's license agreement for \$700,000. Begley is now running the club under a sublease with Mitchland Inc.

However, the supervisors came close but never signed off on a lease with Begley's group, and some board members said they're uncomfortable with aspects of Begley's financial backing.

Begley's proposal includes having the township use \$1 million from a bond issue to pay for improvements at the country club, and then Begley would repay the township over several years. He said he's getting a loan from Commerce Bank and other financing from his sister, Maureen Hill, and her husband, Bob.

Township officials wouldn't disclose details of the proposal from Egos Inc., saying the group has requested they be kept confidential. However, Begley said Egos Inc. includes his former financial consultant, Kim Kleinguenther, and his former attorney, Kim Piermattei, who were originally part of Agro Golf.

Begley said "the two Kims" left when they wouldn't make a financial commitment to Agro Golf. He wouldn't comment on their departure and involvement with a rival group, other than to say that if the supervisors pick Egos Inc., "The country club will be stepping backward."

Kleinguenther declined to comment. Piermattei, who also oversees and manages banquets and other events at the country club for Mitchland Inc., said she would continue in that role for Egos Inc. if that group is awarded the lease to run the facility.

"I have no financial interest, regardless of who gets it. I'm not an investor in any of it," said Piermattei.

She added that both she and Kleinguenther offered a financial commitment to Agro Golf, just not the size of commitment Begley was seeking.

"We offered to give him money, it was not enough, and so he went elsewhere with it," said Piermattei. "Neither one of us walked away. He asked us to leave once that happened. Rick is always entitled to his view and I wish him luck if his group gets the lease to run the country club. The supervisors are charged with doing what is in the best interest of the township, and I'm sure they will make a fair decision."

Begley has spent his entire working career in the golf business and has big plans for the country club if his group can reach an agreement with the township. With help from the township, he wants to expand the banquet facilities and make several improvements to the 18-hole golf course, including installing a driving range, a par 3 short course and starting more junior golf camps and other programs.

While Worthington is president of Mitchland Inc., the operating company since 1999, he has said that he's mostly hands-off and that Begley has essentially run the country club for much of that time.

Supervisors Chairman Robert McMonagle said Friday he'd spend the weekend and today going

over all three proposals and educating himself on them. He said the proposal from Lamanna about the township running the country club more directly is tempting.

"It could be the largest undertaking but also offer the most return," McMonagle said.

Supervisor Jasper Caro said he's leaning toward Begley's group, but hasn't made up his mind.

"We've had Rick's proposal the longest and he's certainly very knowledgeable about the golf course," said Caro. "Debby Lamanna's proposal is certainly something I want to think more about.

"I normally don't like the idea of government getting involved in running things other than police and fire and the necessities, but we've had such a hard time getting someone to run the country club in the manner I thought it should be," he added. "So, Debby's plan is something I have to consider now."



Golf Director Dan Hoban teaches putting at Middletown Country Club's practice green on Friday. Supervisors are weighing their options for management of the Bellevue Avenue club. **STEVE GENGLER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**