

New survey map a sign of life for Cedar Vineyard

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port panel OKs CSM, clearing way for subdivision, preserve land purchase

The Port Washington Plan Commission last week approved a revised certified survey map for the proposed Cedar Vineyard subdivision on Port's southeast side — the first indication in months that the project is ready to move forward.

It's the last action the city needs to take before he can close on the purchase of the property, developer Tom Swarthout said.

"We are at the conclusion of this process," Swarthout told the commission June 15, adding he expected to complete the purchase of the property in the next two to three weeks.

The revised site plan approved last week shows the property is 234 acres — more than the 227 acres originally specified. The difference, Swarthout said, is due to the changing lake levels.

Immediately after Swarthout purchases the property from Waukesha State Bank, he will sell 101 acres of the most environmentally sensitive land, including Cedar Gorge, which Swarthout called the "gem" of the property, to the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust — a purchase being funded through a \$1 million stewardship grant from the Department of Natural Resources and \$1 million from the Wisconsin Coastal Management's coastal estuarine land conservation program.

The 101 acres will then be transferred to Ozaukee County, which will maintain it in perpetuity.

Swarthout, president of the Highview Group Ltd., plans to create 82 half-acre lots on the land, with a vineyard planned along Highway C and a winery on the west side of Highway C south of Stonecroft Drive.

Public trails along the bluff and access to the beach below are part of the proposal.

Prospective homeowners — including Swarthout himself — have already reserved a dozen lots in the subdivision, he said.

It's a far cry from the intense development once envisioned for the property by VK Development.

Swarthout said he hopes to begin work on the subdivision this year, noting he has 6,500 grapevines in refrigerated storage waiting to be planted on eight acres on the northern end of the property.

The area will have to be graded before the vines can be planted, he noted.

Swarthout said he also hopes to begin work on the winery, which will be built using pieces of several old barns the company has acquired, later this year, with an eye toward opening the facility in spring.

The winery and vineyard will be run by Steve and Maria Johnson, who own Parallel 44 Vineyard and Winery in Kewaunee and Door 44 Winery in Sturgeon Bay.

Swarthout said that while he is excited about Cedar Vineyard, he is also excited and supportive of the Prairie's Edge subdivision planned for 44 acres just north of his project.

"We're completely supportive of the project to our north," he said. "We're really enthused about being here."

Mayor Tom Mlada, chairman of the Plan Commission, said he is excited about Cedar Vineyard, noting it is not just "an incredible development" because of the housing but also because of the lakefront access and environmental protections involved.

Andrew Struck, Ozaukee County's director of planning and parks, acknowledged that the process has been a long one, but noted that other similar purchases such as Lions Den Gorge

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Nature Preserve in the Town of Grafton have also taken some time — in part because of the review process for the grant money.

“It does feel like it’s gone on for a long time,” he said. “When it’s a big acquisition and you have a number of partners, it does take a long time. It’s just the nature of the partnership.”