

## **St. Johns County passes incentive package for new PGA Tour headquarters**

By Jake Martin  
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A big step towards a bigger home for the PGA Tour was taken on Tuesday — one that also ensures the Tour will remain in St. Johns County.

The St. Johns County commission voted unanimously to approve a \$2.8 million incentive package for the Tour to build a 210,000 square foot headquarters building on property it owns on Palm Valley Road. The Tour told the commission in its proposal that the larger headquarters building and continued growth of the Tour will result in more than 300 additional jobs created by 2030, at an average salary of \$79,442.

The estimated cost of the new headquarters is \$81 million. It would enable the Tour to bring all of its staff of more than 800 back into one structure, rather than scattered in 17 rented office spaces at the Sawgrass Village Shopping Center and the Veranda.

The current headquarters buildings, near the second hole of the TPC Sawgrass Players Stadium Course, are 35 years old. The new building will be on land that currently is used for public parking for The Players Championship.

The package includes expedited permitting and an economic development grant for up to 100 percent of fees paid to the county (impact fees and water/sewer connection fees) plus four years of ad valorem taxes (general county portion) on capital improvements and tangible personal property valued at \$86 million.

The first annual grant payment would be anticipated during the 2022 fiscal year, with an estimated annual payout of \$440,320. The total estimated value of the incentive is \$2,758,310.

“It’s been a journey for us to get to this point and we’re really pleased to get the county’s approval,” said Kirsten Sabia, the Tour’s vice president for Integrated Communications.

Sabia said yet to be decided are when the ground-breaking will be or when construction will be completed.

“We have no firm dates,” she said.

She also said the Tour has not yet decided what to do with the two current headquarters buildings once it moves into the new structure.

Melissa Glasgow, director of economic development for the county, estimated that the new building and additional jobs will add \$24 million in countywide tax revenues over 20 years.

The incentives are performance-based, meaning the Tour will not receive funding if it doesn't hit the agreed-upon parameters.

Glasgow said the deal should represent a "win-win" for both parties.

"We can't be presumptuous and think they can't move their headquarters elsewhere," she told commissioners, adding the Tour has "evaluated other areas" and that the company could "easily move elsewhere."

During public comment, former commissioner Mary Kohnke said she didn't believe veiled references to the Tour moving away from the TPC Sawgrass — home of its signature tournament, The Players Championship — and called the agreement "blatant favoritism."

Resident Tom Reynolds said the agreement was "corporate welfare" and claimed the \$2.8 million would be better spent improving public transportation or flooding abatement.

However, Gerry Klingman, president of the Sawgrass Players Club Association, said the Tour is a "fantastic neighbor" that has always considered the concerns of nearby communities.

Commissioner Jay Morris took issue with the idea that the county was subsidizing the Tour.

"We're not spending or giving away anything with this project," he said, adding the PGA Tour is "paying themselves back with their own money."

Morris said the county will be getting \$7.50 back on every \$1 spent.

Commissioners also unanimously approved selling the county's adjacent property, which includes the Ponte Vedra Courthouse Annex and a communications tower, to the PGA Tour.

In exchange, the Tour will pay about \$700,000 cash and take various measures worth about \$950,000 (at its sole cost and expense) to ensure all public safety communications equipment is relocated without disruption and given a new home, in perpetuity, in a replacement tower nearby.

Garry Smits also contributed to this report.