

Ocean Breeze counter accepted

Owners of the mobile home village agree to residents' reduced offer of \$26 million for the 45-acre park.

By JASON SCHULTZ
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OCEAN BREEZE — Residents of the mobile home village that doubles as its own town appear closer than ever to owning their own homes.

"We're ecstatic. We think we have the makings of a deal," said Bill Gorman, a consultant working for the residents of Ocean Breeze Park, after the park's owners agreed Wednesday to the \$26 million price the residents have offered to buy the park.

The owners, three descendants of park founders Harry and Queena Hoke, accepted the counteroffer from the residents of the 70-year-old park. Gorman said he expected a homeowners association representing the residents to sign the new contract by Friday and they will have until August to get financing for the \$26 million and complete the sale.

"It sounds pretty darn good right now," Gorman said.

Ocean Breeze Park, a mobile home village for residents aged 55 and older, makes up most of the town of Ocean Breeze. The Hokes founded the park in 1938 and incorporated it as a town in 1960, fearing that the nearby community of Jensen Beach would incorporate around it.

The three descendants who own the park, Gary Hendry, Marcia Coker and Kathie Teal, have been trying to sell all 90 acres they own to residents and developers for almost a year.

The owners had originally offered to sell the 45 acres containing the mobile homes to residents, or to developers if the residents would not buy it, for \$29.5 million. The homeowners association countered with an offer of \$26 million, which Gorman said was the appraised value of the property.

Morgan said the owners disagree with that appraisal but felt the price was close enough and they are eager to move forward with the sale, so they accepted the price.

"We feel there was money left on the table on our part," said Jim Morgan, a real estate agent representing the owners. "But we think it is in the best interests of everybody to go forward so the residents can own the park."

Longtime residents were ecstatic.

"How wonderful," said Mayor Dorothy Geeben, who turns 100 on March 31. "I think it will be great if the people can afford it."

The residents have discussed getting a financing company to loan the homeowners association the \$26 million in bonds needed to buy the park. Residents would then pay

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rent to the homeowners association over 30 years to pay back that loan.

The financing would require rents to increase an average of \$200 per lot per month, Gorman said.

Resident Frank Unterberger was not as happy with news of the imminent sale. He said a rent increase might drive residents away, and he didn't think the remaining residents would be able to afford to pay back such a big bond.

"I don't want to buy it," Unterberger said. "These people can't afford the rents they have now that are some of the lowest in Florida. I don't think it's going to fly, to be honest."

Geeben said that if the residents do not buy the park, they will not have anywhere else to go if the park is sold to a developer.

"I don't know where else I could afford to live," she said.

The owners are also trying to sell a vacant 45 acres to the Publix grocery store chain and other developers. That deal requires the town of Ocean Breeze's council to change the land use from



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residential to commercial on that vacant land.

The town council will discuss those changes at its 10 a.m. meeting Monday, Geeben said. Afterward, homeowners association President Phil Guay and Hendry will hold a ceremonial contract signing.

Morgan said the owners of the park were equally excited to finally be near a sale and that the decision was made by the residents.

"They are now in control of their own destinies, which is what they always wanted."

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