

⊕ VENICE  
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**DIANE H. MCFARLIN**, Publisher

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EDITORIALS

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# Inside the VGA

*Private group leasing public land should open its books*

**W**ho owns stock in the Venice Golf Association, a private company that operates a course on public land in Venice? How much money do those stockholders make each year?

Don't ask Mayor Dean Calamaras or any other Venice official. Nobody at City Hall claims to know details about the VGA.

That's an inexcusable situation. The Venice City Council should find out how much profit the VGA makes and who benefits.

The city government and the VGA are locked in a 30-year contract negotiated on Venice's behalf by former City Manager George Hunt. The VGA pays the city \$180,000 annually for the land it uses for the 18-hole course.

Disclosure of the VGA's profits wouldn't change the terms of the 30-year contract City Hall has signed. But if the books are opened, the council and public could see if the VGA has a fair lease or a sweet deal.

Public land is involved, so citizens deserve to know the names of stockholders and how much they make.

Citizen Maxine Barrett asked at the June 22 City Council meeting, "Why is there so much mystery about who the Venice Golf Association is?" Mayor Dean Calamaras responded, "I've never heard a good reason for that."

Neither have we.

In Martin County, under a similar arrangement, public land is leased to the Martin County Golf and Country Club. In 2002, an advisory legal opinion issued by Florida's then-attorney general, Robert A. Butterworth, said the club's records are subject to disclosure under the state's open-records law.

Venice's City Council should direct City Attorney Bob Anderson to find out if that opinion, or any other statute or ruling, requires the VGA to come into the sunshine.