

To: Mayor Chadwick, Councilman David Hershey, Councilman Kevan Wheelock, Councilwoman Jennifer Salmonsens,  
Councilman Kevin Nielsen  
From: Citizens for Star  
Subject: Willowbrook Development Golf Course

April 11, 2023

Dear City Council,

Golf and golf courses have had a rather bumpy past and trends in golf and should be considered when evaluating the current Willowbrook proposal. We have attached several articles to help you understand the issues at hand. Please note that these are only a few of the articles of the many that are available through a google search.

In the 1980's and 1990's, golf courses were in their heyday in the US. During that time, a new golf course was created each day. Developers saw it as a way to attract buyers for the houses surrounding the golf courses. Since then, golf participation has been declining at ~4% per year. In fact, many golf courses have gone out of business. leaving the surrounding developments with housing prices that have dropped by as much as 40%. City governments have had the choice of either buying the courses to keep the land from going fallow or finding an operator who would be willing to take on the risk of a failing business. Lawsuits between HOAs, the owner/operators of the course, and the cities that have been party to the developments, are common.

Approximately 8% of the population plays golf While there are several letters in your prep packet for the Willowbrook Golf Development in favor of another golf course, most of these people are not financially involved and therefore, have no responsibility for the success or failure of yet another one. The parties that are financially involved are the future development homeowners, the HOAs, the golf course owners, the surrounding neighborhoods, and the cities involved in the approval of the developments. The golfers who play the courses make a lot of noise about how the public wants another course, or about how "this one" cannot fail because of who designed it. But if it does fail, they can simply play somewhere else. They will have no legal standing in future lawsuits arising from a business failure and therefore, their opinions have little value in the decision-making process or the approval of any new development proposal.

This letter is short because the attached articles reveal the whole truth about golf courses that have come and gone in the US. Please read them and decide for yourself if the Willowbrook proposal is a reasonable enterprise in a sinking market.

If you had time to watch only one video, we recommend that you watch the following one from the Wall Street Journal:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8bz\\_TtnkDM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8bz_TtnkDM)

Sincerely,  
The Citizens for Star organization

Anadeane Galbraith 9758 W. Lanktree Gulch Road, Star  
Cherie Shields 9947 W. Lanktree Gulch Rd., Star  
Rochelle Henson 5233 N. High Prairie Place, Star  
Lisa Priapi 10325 W. Lanktree Gulch Road, Star  
Sabrina Newberry 9909 W. Lanktree Gulch Rd., Star  
Sara Kalfas 4241 Cowboy Lane, Star  
Kyriacos Kalfas 4241 Cowboy Lane, Star  
Richard Moore 25385 Desert Springs Circle, Star  
Monte Smith 10257 W. Lanktree Gulch Road, Star



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## tee times

Jason Scott Deegan

August 21, 2015



**Glen Garden Golf & C.C. in San Antonio closed in 2014, putting the ghosts of Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson to rest.**

Mike Bailey/Golf Advisor

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Hundreds of courses have closed across America over the last decade.

The National Golf Foundation reported that 643 18-hole layouts closed from 2006-2013, the most recent numbers available. A number of them are probably gone for a reason. The recession helped cull the weak from the herd. Many struggling and now shuttered facilities weren't run well, weren't well maintained or weren't well designed.

Not every club that went under was a total failure. Some closures hurt. Here's a collection of courses closed since 2005 that we wish were still taking tee times today.

## **The Links at Cottonwood, Tunica, Miss.**

Harrans Tunica. Financial pressures forced Harrans to abandon its casinos and golf course in 2014.

## **Marsh Harbour Golf Links, Calabash, N.C.**

No region has lost more courses (roughly 25) since the turn of the century than the "Grand Strand," a 90-mile stretch from Pawleys Island, S.C., through Myrtle Beach and into the southern edge of North Carolina. Marsh Harbour was a local favorite until its land lease ran out, and the course ceased operations in 2005. A year later, in 2006, the Wild Wing Resort in Conway, S.C., closed three of its four courses – Hummingbird, Woodstork and Falcon. [Waterway Hills Golf Club](#) became Myrtle Beach's most recent victim, ceasing operations in June 2015. Probably a few more will falter before a proper balance is restored.

## **Two steps back in Texas: Glen Garden and Pecan Valley**

Losing Glen Garden Golf & Country Club in Forth Worth and Pecan Valley Golf Club in San Antonio was a blow to golf history. Kid caddies Byron Nelson and Ben Hogan battled in a nine-hole caddie championship in 1926 at Glen Garden. Nelson later won his 18th PGA event at the course in his record-setting season in 1945. Pecan Valley hosted the 1968 PGA Championship won by Julius Boros and Texas Opens in 1967, 1969 and 1970. Pecan Valley closed in 2012, followed by Glen Garden in 2014.

## **The Pit Golf Links, Aberdeen, N.C.**

This wild and wonky Dan Maples design created a stir when it opened in 1985. No golfer -- especially those coming to a timeless resort such as nearby Pinehurst -- had seen such quirky golf holes cut from a former sand quarry. The Pit garnered the cache of a "cult classic" until Mike Strantz created an even more dramatic version called [Tobacco Road Golf Club](#) in 1998. The Pit eventually succumbed to financial pressures and closed. Pinehurst stepped in to buy its 900 acres in 2011. Reports have indicated that a Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw design could be built there should Pinehurst ever need to expand again.

## **Falls Course at Lake Las Vegas, Henderson, Nev.**

reopened in 2014 after a partial redesign by original architect Jack Nicklaus, but the Falls, designed by Tom Weiskopf, will get no such reprieve. Although it is green again, chunks are being sold off as real estate. Without 36 holes open to the public, it's hard to envision Lake Las Vegas ever blossoming into a true golf destination.

## **Great White, Trump National Doral Miami (Fla.)**

The Great White, a Greg Norman design characterized by water and cart paths lined with crushed coquina shells, was the second-best course at Doral behind the Blue Monster, but its isolated location doomed the design. When Donald Trump bought Doral in 2012, he poured money toward improving the resort's four other courses, while setting aside the Great White to make way for more real estate. It closed in January.

## **High Pointe Golf Club, Williamsburg, Mich.**

High Pointe goes back to the age-old question: Which is more important, golf or beer? Tom Doak's first solo design garnered some honors, but with so much nearby competition – mainly Grand Traverse Resort & Spa -- it closed in 2008. The site sat fallow until spring of 2015 when the land was purchased and transformed into a hops farm to support the state's growing micro-brewery business. At least this closure has a happy ending.

## **East Course at Blue Heron Pines, Egg Harbor City, N.J.**

When I finally got the chance to play golf in Atlantic City in 2013, turns out I was a couple years too late. I enjoyed the surviving Steve Kay course at Blue Heron Pines, owned by Ron Jaworski, just fine. All the locals swear, however, that the East was the better play. The former Golf Magazine top 100 public selection opened in 2000, hosted a U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship in 2003 and closed in 2006 to make room for a housing project that still hasn't gotten off the ground.

## **Beechtree Golf Club, Aberdeen, Md.**

[Cape Kidnappers](#) in New Zealand. Yep, you guessed it: Beechtree, another former Golf Magazine top 100 public pick, closed to make way for a housing development 30 miles east of Baltimore.

## California's Stevinson Ranch and Diablo Grande runs dry

The sustained drought has claimed the two best public courses in the Central Valley south of the Bay Area – Stevinson Ranch Golf Club in Stevinson and the Legends Course at the Diablo Grande Golf & Country Club in Patterson. Stevinson Ranch's demise made national news. Owner George Kelley co-designed the unique links-style course on his family's farm with John Harbottle III in 1995. It regularly ranked among the top public [golf courses in California](#). Ultimately, the recession, a clubhouse fire and government-mandated water restrictions caught up to Kelley's playground. Golf Magazine chronicled its last hurrah, a 36-hole shotgun in July.

Diablo Grande's Nicklaus/Gene Sarazen course closed without as much fanfare in 2014. Its less heralded [Ranch Course](#), designed by Denis Griffiths in 1996, still endures. Summer's searing heat continues to scorch the earth in the bone-dry Golden State. You have to wonder how many other courses can continue to survive such extreme conditions.

*In just about every part of the country, a golf course has been lost in recent years. Did you have an old favorite that is gone forever? Let us know in the comments below.*

[Trends](#)[Roundups](#)

### Jason Scott Deegan

Jason Scott Deegan has reviewed and photographed more than 1,000 courses and written about golf destinations in 20 countries for some of the industry's biggest publications. His work has been honored by the Golf Writer's Association of America and the Michigan Press Association. Follow him on Instagram at [@jasondeegangolfpass](#) and Twitter at [@WorldGolfer](#).

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## 16 Comments






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**2018**

Jason Scott Deegan  
December 28, 2018



**The super-exclusive Adena, one of the best courses in Florida, surprisingly called it quits in July.**

Mike Lowe/Golf Advisor



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It's becoming a morbid annual holiday tradition of mine every December.

I've been compiling an end-of-the-year story of the best courses to close each year since 2015. It tends to be one of my most-read stories of the year. Golfers are a sad and sadistic bunch, aren't we?

The story isn't meant to fuel the debate if golf is failing or merely stagnant as most statistics imply. This is just a new normal until the game reaches a better balance of supply and demand - courses vs. players. Golf is paying for the sins of our fathers - the building boom of the 1990s and 2000s - when they built courses in real estate developments that nobody really needed. The National Golf Foundation estimates roughly 200 courses closed in 2018, similar numbers to the year before.

I also don't write this Deegan's Dozen piece to criticize the owners and operators for running their facilities into the ground. It's simply to celebrate the lives of these places - when they were green,

one reason or another, they were no longer viable in their communities. These obituaries are the perfect way to say goodbye.

It's not out of the question that a few may actually rise from the dead. Three of the shuttered facilities I profiled in 2017 are returning to life - the [Wynn Golf Club in Las Vegas](#) and the [Ocean Links at the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort](#) are scheduled to be revived and the [San Geronimo Golf Club](#) in Northern California reopened in April after a three-month hiatus. Now that's a more uplifting story I look forward to writing: Miraculous golf course comebacks. Until then, let's salute the fallen.

**Have a favorite recently closed course not listed in this story? Let us know in the comments below.**

## **12. Oakhurst Country Club, Grove City, Ohio**



the Jack Kidwell design in 2009, but just couldn't sustain it. It's unclear what's next for the 159-acre property, according to [Club & Resort Business](#). Central Ohio has purged a number of solid courses in recent years. Appropriately, user [RIP1959](#) wrote the course's last review in 2017: "Fairways a little burnt out but great course for the price. Very challenging."

## **11. Legends Golf & Country Club, Clermont, Florida**

Central Florida is another region where only the strong survive. Although the course closed last spring, there is a chance that it could be saved by locals to salvage their home values, [according to this report](#). The website and phone are still active, although no one answered our call. The final Golf Advisor reviews are a mix of anger at the downward spiral of course conditions and somber memories. User [gailpat](#) wrote: "Very disappointed this course is closing as this was one of our favorite courses."

## **10. Glenbrook Golf Course, Houston, Texas**

It has been a tumultuous year for golf in Houston. While the [Golf Club of Houston](#) losing the Shell Houston Open was a low point, the news that Tom Doak hopes to redesign [Memorial Park](#) for a return of the PGA Tour event is a big shot in the arm to the local muni scene, which took a hit with the April 1 closure of Glenbrook. That muni, dating to 1935, is being transformed into a botanical garden, [according to the Houston Chronicle](#). User [SmokeWagon](#) wrote: "The COH (City of Houston) needs to reconsider closing this course. There have already been too many greater Houston area courses closed recently. This is a nice golf course, with a challenging layout. We don't need another garden, we need more GOLF."

## **9. Cahoon Plantation Golf Club, Chesapeake, Virginia**



Sharp mounding and bunkering on the par-4 12th hole at Cahoon Plantation Golf Club give the intimate green site definition.

Kevin Dunleavy/Golf Advisor

Golf Advisor users ranked Cahoon Plantation among the top 20 courses in the state the past two seasons, but those ringing endorsements weren't enough to save a course under constant pressure since opening in 1999. The facility started with 27 holes but eventually shrank to 18 holes. The Nov. 5 closure leaves Chesapeake with just two public courses, [according to Resort Club & Business](#). User [jeffnelson82](#) gave his October round four stars, writing: "Both my wife I loved the layout and look forward to another round at Cahoon Plantation. Recent rains made the course soggy, but it still played well. Nice greens, somewhat tight fairways, and challenging wedge shots make for a fun 18 holes."

## **8. Carmel Mountain Ranch Country Club, San Diego, California**



The par-5 10th hole at Carmel Mountain Ranch CC heads severely downhill and can be reached in two shots with a good drive.

Brandon Tucker/Golf Advisor

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San Diego's inland courses have been particularly hard hit by the California drought and rising water costs. Carmel Mountain Ranch, which closed July 8, is the seventh San Diego County course to close since 2013, [according to the San Diego Tribune](#). Not even a \$4.4 million rebate for turf reduction in 2014 could turn the tide for the Ron Fream design from 1986. California Golf Advisor [nickesquire](#) wrote the course's final review on June 22: "Sorry to hear that this course is scheduled for closure. You can see the bones are there for an above average, hilly, challenging course."

## **7. Salt Creek Golf Club, Chula Vista, California**

Here's where the [March 18 closure of Salt Creek](#) hurts most: Five high school golf teams - three boys and two girls - had to find a new home to play and practice. It stifles potential growth of the game for the next generation. Salt Creek, another San Diego area gem lost, was designed by Cary Bickler and John Cook in 2001. User [splincman](#) sang its praises in a review on March 9: "this is a tough but fair course...i am so sorry to see this place close."



A view of an undulating bunker from Kayak Point Golf Course

This one hit me personally. I had a fun round at Kayak Point in 2013, cherishing the beautiful hills and towering old growth cedar and fir trees on a course located halfway between my father's house in Mount Vernon and downtown Seattle. I'm not sure if Snohomish County followed up with the \$500,000 in improvements I [wrote about in this story](#), but it was evident the heydays of the 6,719-yard course, designed by Ronald Fream in 1977, were gone. The terrain, however, was heavenly, as it is for most backwoods courses in the Pacific Northwest. Although Kayak Point closed in October, there remains some hope for the future, [according to this article](#). User [joefiloseta](#) begged for a mulligan in his course review Sept. 29: "I really hope the County comes up with a partner that has a vision for this great layout to bring it back to some shape of its former glory. Within an hour's drive of Seattle, the course would be played if it were in decent shape."

## **5. Hombre Golf Club, Panama City, Florida**



Hombre Golf Club in Panama City Beach, Fla., boasts three courses: The Good, The Bad (shown here), and The Ugly.

What else can you say?

Courtesy photo

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Hurricane Michael dealt the death blow October 10 to the Hombre, which opened as 18 holes in 1989, added another nine and then returned to 18 holes in recent years. The nines were creatively named the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. [This local report](#) estimates it would have taken a million dollars to revive the Hombre, a stalwart on the Florida Panhandle that had glowing four- and five-star Golf Advisor reviews in its final days. It ranked No. 7 among the [most improved courses on Golf Advisor](#) in 2017. User [RobbyBarbre](#) wrote a final review on Sept. 25: "First time here and it was great. Course was beautiful with the exception of a couple rough patches. Got to see great scenery and wildlife."

#### **4. Southern Oaks Golf Club, Burleson, Texas**



A view of the clubhouse at Southern Oaks Golf Club  
Southern Oaks Golf Club

This once-proud private club closed abruptly in November and is for sale, according to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Southern Oaks, designed by pro Mark Brooks in 1999, is the third local course in greater Fort Worth to close this year. User Robert5611627 lamented the loss December 1 on Golf Advisor: "Closed suddenly without warning. Too bad, it was very nice. Hope someone buys it soon."

### **3. Stonehenge Golf Club, Winona Lake, Indiana**

My story earlier this year listing warning signs that your favorite course might be closing unfortunately played out at Stonehenge, which shuttered for good Nov. 17 according to local reports. The one-time private club went public a few years ago in a last-ditch effort to save the Ron Garl design. With more access, Golf Advisor users responded with a flurry of good reviews, ranking it among the top 15 courses in the state the past two years. User DrOldSchool gave its final review in October: "The layout was fun and interesting, with some moderately-sloped greens and a neat island green hole on the front. ... Sadly just found out the course has closed and will not reopen."

### **2. Aetna Springs Golf Course, Pope Valley, California**





It looks like more than a century of golf at Aetna Springs has come to a close  
Aetna Springs Golf Course

Our [Tim Gavrich](#) chronicled earlier this year why losing a somewhat obscure nine-hole course near Napa Valley tugs at our heartstrings. The course was thought to be one of the oldest west of the Mississippi (dating to 1891), but a 2008 renovation by Tom Doak's Renaissance Golf Design team should have secured its future for the next generation. It is the sixth course associated with Doak to close in the past decade, a staggering stat considering he's one of golf's most popular modern architects. After the course closed Jan. 15, the land is likely to be redeveloped into housing, [according to the Napa Valley Register](#), forever altering a once peaceful haven. User [dojousa](#) captured the scene best with his review in 2015: "Just a wonderful no frills very scenic course. Some challenging holes and some easier ones mixed in. Fun to play the same holes twice and get better on the second nine. If you are looking for lush country club setting this isn't it. But if you're in the mood for relaxed setting with great golf you can't go wrong here."

## **1. Adena Golf & Country Club, Ocala, Florida**



The clubhouse at Adena Golf & Country Club (Mike Lowe)

Mike Lowe

It's rare - and big news - when a five-star golf course bites the dust. But I guess it's okay when that said course is one that 99.9 percent of golfers will never get to play. Adena, an ultra-private club, closed abruptly in July, [according to the Ocala Star Banner](#). It was the \$50-million playground of billionaire Frank Stronach, who built it in 2015 and had hopes of an exclusive golf community of 120 homes along its fairways. The layout cut from a rock quarry was thought to be among the best courses in Florida. Both Golf Advisor reviews brag about a Shangri-La for those who got inside the gates. User [PasqualiV](#) played it in December of 2017, writing in his review: "When I say phenomenal, I mean there wasn't one blade of grass out of line."

To relive my other closed courses pieces, click here to read [2015](#), [2016](#) or [2017](#).

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written about golf destinations in 20 countries for some of the industry's biggest publications. His work has been honored by the Golf Writer's Association of America and the Michigan Press Association. Follow him on Instagram at @jasondeegangolfpass and Twitter at @WorldGolfer.

## 42 Comments



**Aleem Hussain**

Commented on March 27, 2019 12:24 PM

I am trying to establish a small 9-hole course in the Caribbean and would like to know which courses are liquidating equipment due to closure so I can do the start-up at lowest cost possible! Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

[Report](#) [Share](#)



**Alex B.**

Commented on February 11, 2019 10:44 AM

test3

[Report](#) [Share](#)



**Alex B.**

Commented on February 12, 2019 01:01 PM

test4

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## Failing golf communities not on par with neighborhoods

When real estate switched from building mixed-use cities, towns, and neighborhoods, the industry adopted less sustainable selling points—like golf.

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE (/node/538) JAN. 22, 2019



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The failure of golf course communities continues to be a massive problem nationwide, according to an article (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/golf-home-owners-find-themselves-in-a-hole-11547135191>) in *The Wall Street Journal*. With 1,200 golf communities nationwide, and golf declining as a past-time, many homeowners face declining property values and are saddled with heavy membership dues that they no longer can afford.

When a golf course closes, the value of homes in an associated subdivision typically drop 25 percent—but may decline 40–50 percent if a legal battle ensues, the *Journal* reports. Developments are selling lots, once valued at a quarter million, for a dollar (<https://www.islandpacket.com/news/local/article92644712.html>). Often, they can't sell even at that price, because buyers must pay the course dues. The economic losses are likely in the tens of billions of dollars nationwide.

The problem is not just golf, but selling “amenities” without the density to support them. The new urbanist way is to build a mixed-use neighborhood—and that is the amenity. The neighborhood model has two advantages. First, a walkable neighborhood is probably about triple the density—which means that more homeowners can support common amenities like a park or a pool. Second, many of the amenities are self-supporting, such as main street businesses or a school.

This problem reported by the *Journal* was predicted two decades ago by new urban developer Bob Turner of Beaufort, South Carolina. In a paper, *Sustainability Through Design*, Turner pointed out that low-density developments spread too many amenities over too few homeowners, creating an unsustainable burden. New Urbanism's higher density and more efficient infrastructure makes it more financially sustainable in the long run, Turner said. Instead of a clubhouse with restaurants, New Urbanism offers a main street with private businesses. Instead of an expensive golf course, New Urbanism provides parks, playgrounds, and schools that serve people of all ages.

The problems of golf course communities will be even more pronounced in age-restricted developments, predicts Turner, the developer of several traditional neighborhood developments, including Habersham in Beaufort County. “History has proven that for a society to be sustainable there must be a diverse population within that society,” he wrote in 1998, and that rings true today.

For “golf course communities,” the problem is likely to get worse before it gets better. The *Journal* writes:

*Forty years after developers started blanketing the Sunbelt with housing developments built around golf, many courses are closing amid a decline in golf participation, leaving homeowners to grapple with the consequences. People often believe a course will bolster their property values. But many are discovering the opposite can now be true—and legal disputes are erupting as communities fight over how to handle the struggling courses.*

*“There are hundreds of other communities in this situation, and they're trapped and they don't know what to do,” says Peter Nanula, chief executive of Concert Golf Partners, a golf club owner-operator that owns about 20 private clubs across the U.S. One of his current projects is the rehabilitation of a recently acquired club in Florida that had shut one of its three golf courses and sued residents who had stopped paying membership fees.*

*More than 200 golf courses closed in 2017 across the country, while only about 15 new ones opened, according to the National Golf Foundation, a golf market-research provider.*

Many golf course closures present opportunities for retrofit. Georgia Tech professor Ellen Dunham-Jones—co-author of *Retrofitting Suburbia*—maintains a nationwide suburban retrofit database, which includes 130 golf course retrofits. “A few have gone from 18 holes to 9 to build senior housing for the folks who want to ‘age in place,’ she said in an email. “Quite a lot have simply been filled in with more single-family homes. Some have been redeveloped with mixed-use—but more often due to deed restrictions as open space, they've been turned into parks, preserves, farms, even a cemetery. Even then, remediating the pesticide-ridden soils is quite a job. Houston and Louisville have incorporated them into regional park systems, in Houston's case as flood control.”

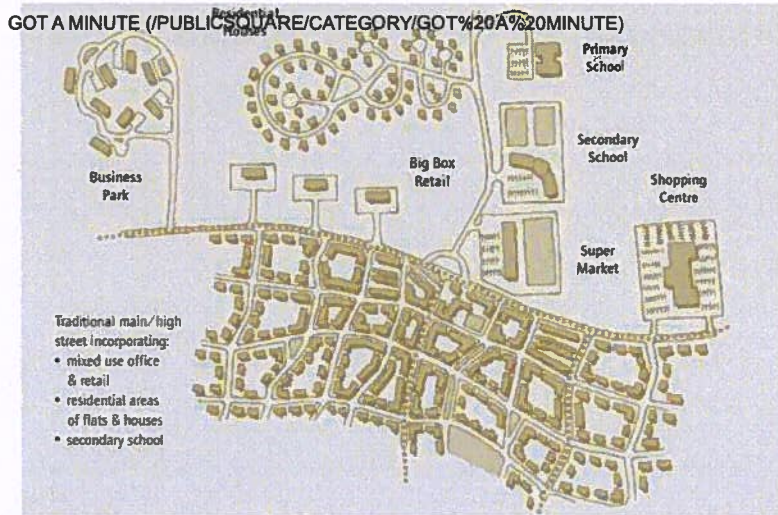
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Robert Steuteville is editor of Public Square: A CNU Journal and senior communications adviser for the Congress for the New Urbanism.

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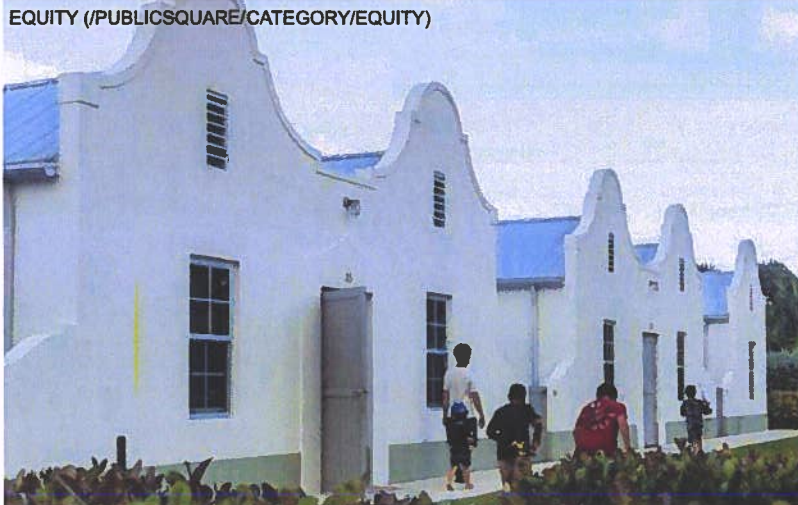
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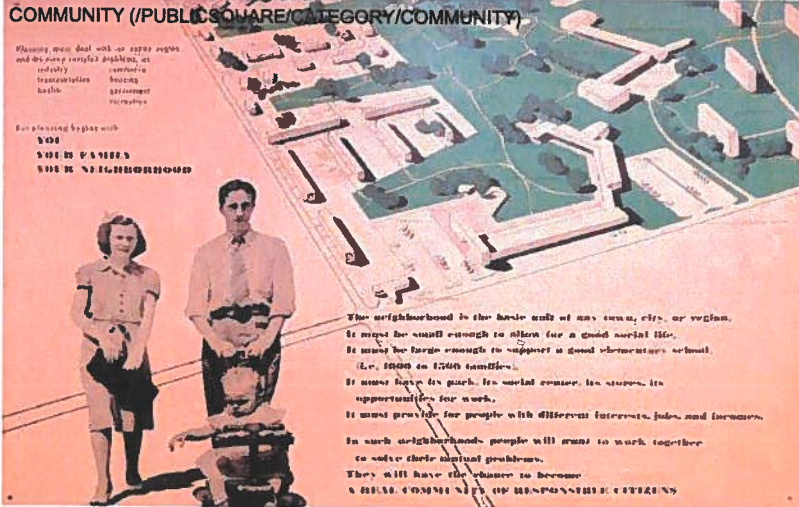
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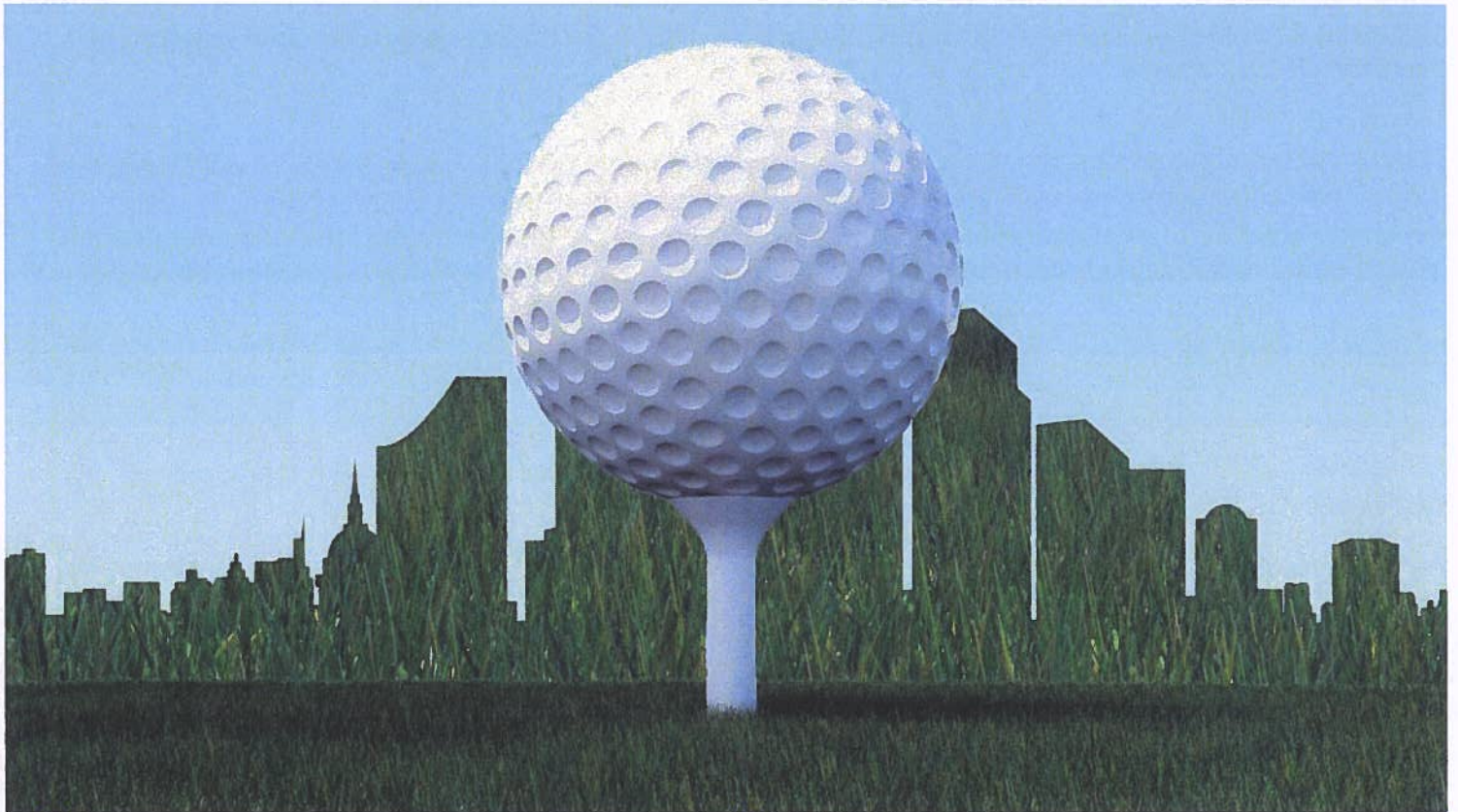


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03-06-19

# Need land for parks and housing? There are plenty of useless golf courses to repurpose

“We have land shortages in lots of our fast-growth cities and suburbs and we have an overabundance of golf courses.”



[Image: Rost/iStock]

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**BY ADELE PETERS**

**3 MINUTE READ**

In Akron, Ohio, a former golf course is **turning into a park** and being replanted with native trees. In Kent, Washington, a new mixed-use apartment complex is **under construction** on another former golf course. Near Palm Springs, a golf course is becoming a mixed-use “agrihood” with **75 acres of olive groves** that will be used to produce olive oil. In Japan, a massive **solar farm** now sprawls over what used to be another 27-hole course.

“I think that there is an opportunity given the fact that we have land shortages in lots of our fast-growth cities and suburbs and we have an overabundance of golf courses,” says Ed McMahon, a senior resident fellow at the nonprofit research and education organization the **Urban Land Institute**. “I think you’re going to see in the future an even greater push to redevelop some of this land into other things.”

More than 200 golf courses closed in the U.S. in 2017, according to a **report** last year from the National Golf Foundation. After a rush to build courses before the recession—thousands opened between 1998 and 2006, in many areas alongside new housing development—the current trend of closures began. More than 1,200 have closed since 2005. Demand from golfers didn’t keep up with the supply of facilities.



A concept image for Riverwalk San Diego, a proposed development that includes repurposed golf courses. [Image: Hines]

"I think a lot of both private developers, as well as public parks systems, are seeing that and they're making the decision: Okay, what's the better thing here?" says Charlie McCabe, the director for the Center for City Park Excellence at the nonprofit Trust for Public Land. As the courses have closed, more than a dozen started turning into parks or nature preserves. In Detroit, the city plans to **turn a course into a park** with nature trails and space to capture stormwater. Near Seattle, the city of Bothell bought an 87-acre course to **create public open space and to restore wildlife habitat**. In Wisconsin, one former course now has wetlands and forested areas to **support migratory birds**. In Englewood, Florida, another is now a **wildflower preserve**.

#### ADVERTISEMENT

In some cases, those parks were first slated for housing development, but neighbors resisted. In areas with severe housing shortages, NIMBYism poses a challenge to any hope for building homes on golf courses. Courses tend to be in wealthier neighborhoods, since the open space pushes up home values, and residents usually want to preserve their views. In Denver, an idea to turn a **golf course into affordable housing** faced opposition from those who wanted it to become open space (as of the beginning of 2019, **the future of the site** was unclear). When a developer proposed building housing, including some affordable units, on a golf course in New Jersey, residents **raised concerns about traffic**. A proposal in Pennsylvania led to **protests** from some residents. "Most of the proposals for redevelopment that I have seen tend to run into some opposition," says McMahon.

Developers may have more success when they keep open space as part of the plan. In San Diego, one new proposed development includes plans for 100 acres of public parks and open space along the San Diego River. "Out of a total 200 acres available to us, we're setting aside 100 acres for open space, and



San Diego, which is suffering from the same housing crisis as the rest of California—all next to a transit line. “The housing that we’re producing and the open space that we’re providing is all accessible via transit, which really is a huge issue from an environmental perspective because we’re able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

It’s something that’s likely to continue to happen in other cities. “Obviously, large tracts of land in close-in suburbs and cities are hard to find,” says McMahon. “So you’re going to see a lot more pressure on these golf courses.”



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TOP STORY

## Oro Valley takes action on town's two defunct golf courses

Austin Counts, Tucson Local Media

Nov 25, 2020



The Oro Valley Town Council has voted in favor of maintaining two of the town's out-of-commission golf courses at their council meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 18.

The council plans to purchase the former Vistoso golf course for fair market value by April 1, 2021, and designate the property as open space, as well as initiate discussions with interested parties on ways to recommission the Pusch Ridge nine-hole course in the near future.

"I think it's been very evident by the community that there's a significant interest in contributing towards the purchase and maintenance of this property going into the future," Mayor Joe Winfield said about the potential Vistoso purchase during Wednesday's meeting.

Winfield said the town plans to hire an appraiser to determine the Vistoso property's fair market value and direct Town Manager Mary Jacobs and Town Attorney Gary Cohen to negotiate with the property owner: Romspen Vistoso LLC, a Canadian non-bank mortgage lender.

Before the vote, Council Member Steve Solomon questioned what the town's monthly cost to maintain the property would be, should Romspen agree to sell. Winfield said he discovered Oro Valley is eligible for grants to help offset the cost of maintaining the property after speaking with officials from Arizona State Parks and Trails.

"There's also significant grants from the Water Conservation Fund that the town can apply for and would most likely pay dollar to dollar," Winfield said. "So, if we contributed a million and a half, the Water Conservation Fund would contribute a million and a half."

Council Member Dr. Harry 'Mo' Greene also questioned why the town was setting a five-month timeline to complete the potential land purchase, instead of trying to expedite the process.

"Why April? We've heard from these folks during the [public hearing] they're on pins and needles. It seems to me if we could resolve it by February it would be certainly advantageous," Greene said. "The longer we drag it out, the more miserable it is for the people who are living there."

Winfield said the April 1 deadline would give town staff enough time to get an appraisal of the property, negotiate a deal and (hopefully) complete the transaction as the holiday season approaches and a global pandemic rages on.

"An appraisal is needed and that process takes time, about 30 to 60 days," Winfield said. "I was thinking of staff and giving a reasonable timeframe. This gives it a hard date and we're talking months, not years."

The fate of the Vistoso property has been hanging in the balance after the golf course closed in 2018 and was subsequently purchased by Romspen. The mortgage lender originally planned to build a senior care facility and residential housing on the property, but outcry from surrounding homeowners associations put those plans on hold.

Romspen recently declined a fair market value offer from national environmental nonprofit organization, The Conservation Fund, who wanted to repurpose the course for recreational use. Romspen attorney Pat Lopez said the nonprofit's offer was declined because neither party could agree on the property's fair market value, despite the Conservation Fund paying for and submitting a professional appraisal to Romspen. The details of the appraisal are sealed due to a nondisclosure agreement between the nonprofit and Romspen.

Should Rompsen not accept Oro Valley's offer, the town could try to claim the property through a condemnation process under eminent domain, with a fair market value ultimately determined by a jury. The process normally lasts about one to two years during normal times but would take even longer during the pandemic, according to Town Attorney Gary Cohen.

Later in Wednesday's meeting, the council voted 6-1 to initiate discussions with HSL Properties and area HOA's to decide a future plan to operate and maintain the Pusch Ridge nine hole course.

Council Member Tim Bohan voted against the motion.

Recently, HSL announced they may not operate the property as a golf course should they choose to exercise their lease option by January 31. The property management group entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Oro Valley last February to reopen and operate the nine hole course, which is located near El Conquistador Resort that HSL owns. However, HSL recently chose to back out of the deal due to financial uncertainty created by COVID-19.

Solomon said he was concerned by HSL's announcement because it was assumed the property manager would continue golf operations when discussed in previous negotiations.

"Throughout the entire process, we never discussed closing the course down and abandoning golf on that course," Solomon said. "We had always discussed the fact that the town would effectively let HSL assume operation of it as a golf course. That was on track until COVID hit."

Solomon said he sympathises with HSL's financial concerns during the pandemic, but an alternate plan to use the property in any other way than a golf course was not discussed and should not be entertained.

"It came as a shock to a lot of the golf community and the surrounding HOAs that all of the sudden it might not be a golf course because HSL is not in a financial position to operate it," Solomon said. "We've never really discussed the future of the Pusch Ridge nine-hole course other than HSL will take it over, along with the homeowners and operate it as this special golf course."

Greene also said he wants to see Pusch Ridge nine hole course restored to its former glory, rather than seeing it converted to other uses by HSL. He warned that the course is headed down the same path as Vistoso if the council fails to take action.

"I think we've seen this movie before. I've lived here long enough to watch Vistoso gradually deteriorate with very little owner participation. For every year a golf course is fallow, it takes two to three years to bring it back," Greene said. "I think we should do what we can as a council to bridge over the COVID period and try to keep it up to the level it can be a golf course. It's an absolute gem. It's a beautiful piece of property and it's an asset to us as Oro Valley residents."