



Excessive amenities and unsustainable playing conditions can send a golf course down the road to ruin.

HOW TO PUT A GOLF COURSE OUT OF BUSINESS

BY USGA GREEN SECTION STAFF

Sustainability is a term that gets used in the golf world a lot, but often without a clear meaning. Are we talking about environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, or both? What do these concepts really mean, and how are golf courses supposed to achieve them? While it may not always be easy to identify a clear path to achieve sustainability, it is easy to find examples of unsustainable practices that will ultimately lead most golf facilities down the road to ruin.

As golfers, we need to ask ourselves whether some of the playing conditions and amenities being offered are really necessary, especially when asking for them could push our favorite course into a slow spiral of steady decline. Here are a few examples from the highly dubious to-do list for making a golf course unsustainable:

- Strive to have the fastest greens possible for daily play. This will increase costs and make the game less fun for many players, but just think of the bragging rights.

- Post a Stimpmeter reading prominently near the first tee every day to reinforce the misconception that green speed is the one and only factor that determines putting green quality.
- Ignore the invisible. Only a fool spends good money for something and then buries it. If drainage and irrigation were really that important, they would be on prominent display like a new fountain in a pond.
- Always prioritize clubhouse improvements over golf course improvements. Never replace any maintenance equipment that still starts when the key is turned. Remember, golfers who foot the bill sit on barstools not rough mowers.
- Add flowers and course accessories to every available location. The view of an intricate course logo comprised of multi-colored annual flowers will always make golfers forget soft, bumpy greens. Who needs mowed roughs when you have a bench, trash can, ball washer, club cleaner, shoe cleaner and a solid oak chest of ice-cold water bottles next to each and every tee?
- Start a tree planting program and focus on areas near greens, tees and fairways. Pay no heed to any adverse effects tree roots or shade have on turf quality because bare ground and clogged drainage are a small price to pay
- Spend as much for bunker maintenance as putting green maintenance. Why should an area that players are trying to avoid have anything less than a perfect lie?

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Perhaps the road to golf facility failure is paved with unsustainable practices and policies?