

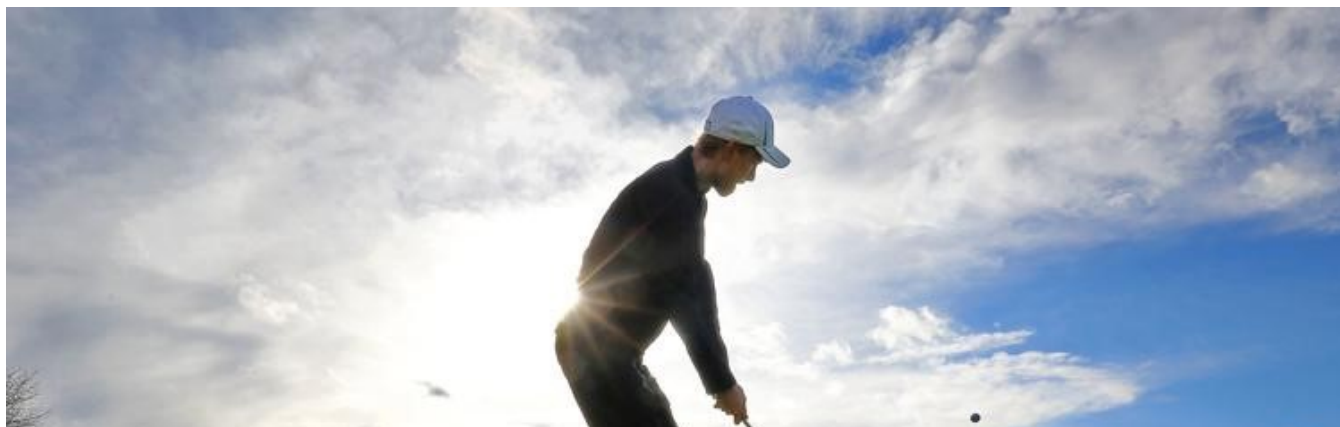
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## Don't be scared by golf upkeep costs -- Dan Smith

Jan 16, 2020

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JOHN HART — State Journal archives

Fifty-two million dollars is a big number. The State Journal calls it a “whopping” amount in its Jan. 14 article "Upkeep may cost tens of millions." That’s the number the Madison Parks Division says it needs to bring its four golf courses up to par.

But the report to a golf task force suggests that everything needs to be done quickly. Really?



**Madison public golf courses need investments of \$34.7 million to \$52.5 million**

Dean Mosiman | Wisconsin State Journal

Every city entity would like to make improvements, such as to streets, Monona Terrace, schools, Olbrich Gardens, the pool and police. Look around your house and add up what needs to be improved. At my house, it’s a "whopping" amount.

My advice to the task force: Don’t let the big numbers (or **editorial cartoons** by the State Journal's Phil Hands) scare you. Try something that doesn’t cost a dime: imagination.



**Hands on Wisconsin: Taxpayers can only afford essential services -- like golf**

Phil Hands | Wisconsin State Journal

Imagine a multi-use, year-round facility where the Odana clubhouse now sits -- a place to meet friends for lunch and in the dead of winter, hold a neighborhood meeting, offer a space for after-school programs, or watch your daughter get married.

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Urban planners know that cities of the future need to have amenities that attract people with talent. Cities look to make their cities more attractive to seniors.

Let's continue to improve Madison. Let's use our collective imaginations to find ways to keep affordable, public golf part of Madison.

Dan Smith, Madison, chair, the golf sub-committee, Madison Parks Division

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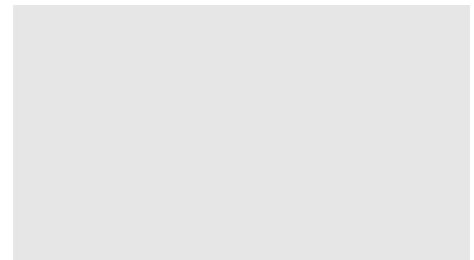
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## **Golf courses don't need drastic plan -- Charlie Johnson**

Jan 27, 2020

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**R**egarding recent talk about shutting down Madison's city golf courses, I am a lifelong resident of Dane County and have enjoyed these courses for many years.

The courses provide more than golf to their users. It is an opportunity to get together with friends and family, to enjoy the outside, get exercise and more.

I am by no means a good golfer -- most would say I am a “hacker” -- but I enjoy golfing several times a week. The city courses allow for my lifelong buddies to gather a few times a week to connect, swing the club, talk and laugh -- mostly at me. My wife and I also enjoy the ability to play nine holes after a busy work day.

Discussions of shutting all the courses seems drastic. Instead, the city should consider reviewing the courses with the greatest deficits. Or the city could close and sell the course with the worst drainage issues.

Many of us older “wanna-be golfers” would like to be able to continue to enjoy local golfing and make more memories.

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Charlie Johnson, Oregon

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## **Golfers don't want fancy clubhouses -- Gary Spaeni**

Feb 7, 2020

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**A**s an avid municipal golfer for the last 40 years, it has been pathetic to watch Madison stumble and bumble through its golf course decision.

The top priority for my golfing buddies and me is to have our courses in nice condition. We don't care about fancy clubhouses, and we don't want Monona, Glenway or Odana closed. These courses provide wonderful golfing opportunities for retired and young golfers at an affordable price.

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Yahara Hills is a mess. Weather has certainly been a major problem for the past two years. But besides that, the layout is so labor and equipment demanding that it overwhelms the whole system. Plus, it has so much low land that any abnormal rain makes the course unplayable. Either sell it or redesign it to 18 holes, and take advantage of the Yahara "Hills."

I know the clubhouses at Monona, Glenway and Odana are old and have infrastructure issues. But for golfers like me, they are functional. Fix them, don't replace them. No one I know cares about a fancy clubhouse, we just want well kept golf courses at a reasonable price, and somewhere to have a beer or two afterwards. Period.

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Gary Spaeni, Madison

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## Madison courses offer more than golf -- Brian Stouffer

Feb 7, 2020

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SALE! Subscribe for \$1/mo.

**I**n the 16 years my family has lived in the Glendale neighborhood on Madison's Southeast Side, we've never played a single round of golf. But the Monona Golf Course has been a valuable and memorable part of our lives. It's a beautiful, quiet green space whose benefits may be hard to quantify, but easy to experience.

Kids from the neighborhood have collected pine cones from golf course trees for school projects, and learned about polliwogs in the golf course ponds. They've



climbed their first trees there, and spotted foxes, coyotes and owls. It's been a safe, nearby destination for them to meet friends and develop their independence. It also makes a nice buffer space behind Sennett Middle School and LaFollette High School.

The neighborhood especially embraces the course in the winter, when it's enjoyed by cross-country skiers, snowshoers, night hikers and sledding families.

Please consider the Monona Golf Course as true parkland that benefits every resident, not just a golf course only used by a few people for half the year.

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Brian Stouffer, Madison

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## Bruce A. Johnson: Some suggestions for Madison's public golf courses

2 minutes

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Dear Editor: I read with great interest the story on the deficiencies of the four Madison municipal golf courses, which together lost close to a million dollars in 2019. Considering the decreasing interest in golf as a participatory sport overall, I have some suggestions as to the future of the public courses.

1. Sell Yahara Hills to the Ho-Chunk Nation, who could rebuild it and add it as an attraction to their casino.
2. Sell Monona Golf Course to developers, who would then create a new-urbanism development not unlike Grandview Commons, with the caveat that there be significant numbers of affordable units included.
3. Take the money generated by these sales and use it to improve Odana Hills and Glenway. Use the leftover money for Bus Rapid Transit or other needs in Madison that are far more pressing than rebuilding a golf course.

Who's with me?

**Bruce A. Johnson**

Madison

Send your letter to the editor to [tctvoice@madison.com](mailto:tctvoice@madison.com). Include

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## Charge less to attract golfers -- Tim Yaroch

Feb 14, 2020

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SALE! Subscribe for \$1/mo.

**I**f Madison can't manage its golf courses, it should lower its green fees and make it cheaper to golf.

I'm a retiree and a recreational golfer on a budget. I look for cheap golf and use coupons. Yahara Hills has 36 holes of golf. It's a nice course. How about charging \$15 for nine holes and a cart, or \$25-30 for 18 holes with a cart?

Isn't it better to pay less for golf and have a busy golf course than to pay more for golfing on a half-full golf course with empty tee times? Give it a try.

Remember, not all golfers can afford to golf at Hawk's Landing or University Ridge. I for one don't want to lose a good 36-hole golf course such as Yahara Hills.

Tim Yaroch, Beaver Dam

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**To:** [Knepp, Eric](#); [Laschinger, Lisa](#); [Steindl, Theran](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Golf during coronavirus gains burst of popularity - The Washington Post  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 26, 2020 9:56:05 AM

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Bob would like this submitted to task force. Probably too late, but I am passing on.



Ryan M. Brinza, PGA  
Head Golf Professional  
City of Madison Parks  
4635 Odana Rd.  
Madison, WI. 53711  
(P): 608-266-4710

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**From:** Robert Stockton  
**Sent:** Sunday, May 24, 2020 7:44 PM  
**To:** Brinza, Ryan <RBrinza@cityofmadison.com>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Golf during coronavirus gains burst of popularity - The Washington Post

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Please forward to Golf Task Force under my name please! Our past consultant is quoted in the article!  
Thanks  
Bob

**Subject: Golf during coronavirus gains burst of popularity - Washington Post**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/20/coronavirus-lockdowns-are-making-golf-courses-an-oasis-stir-crazy-americans-eager-get-out-tee-up/>

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# Coronavirus shutdowns are making golf courses an oasis for stir-crazy Americans eager to get out and tee it up

*Jena McGregor*

9-11 minutes

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“We’d been stuck in our house the last eight weeks, and we didn’t want to go to her house to just sit around,” said Chamberlin, 27, who was on her high school golf team but gave up playing in college after getting frustrated with the mental aspects of the game.

Despite safety precautions — no ball washers, no rakes in the sand traps, a foam pool-noodle ring for touchless ball retrieval from the hole, and a closed clubhouse — “we had a blast,” Chamberlin said. “I didn’t play as terrible as I thought I would after not playing for eight years, and my mom played better than I did my first time out.”

Across the country, Americans remain deeply divided about leaving the house for work and leisure activities, except, apparently, when it comes to golf, giving an unexpected jolt to a sport that has seen declining popularity.

It’s too early to say whether the heightened demand will continue, especially in the middle of an economic recession, or how much the cost of safety protocols will affect course revenue.

But some in the golf industry are hoping that the interest in a relatively safe outdoor activity — and the expected [return of the PGA Tour](#) to television on June 11, at a time when there are few alternatives for watching live sports — could boost enthusiasm for the game.

“People are itching to get outside,” said Stuart Lindsay, a principal with Edgehill Golf Advisors. “They can’t go to a bar. They can’t go to a restaurant. They can’t play softball. Golf is one of the few things they can do that’s a variation of riding a bike or walking the dog.”

After months of binging on Netflix and jogging around their neighborhoods, many Americans appear to see golf as an escape. It involves acres of outdoor expanses for natural social distancing, and advance tee time bookings help control the flow of people into all that open space.

In a recent Washington Post-University of Maryland [poll](#), 41 percent of Americans supported their states allowing the reopening of golf courses, a greater percentage than for any other type of business measured in the poll.

Many courses are reporting increased demand. “Our rounds are through the roof,” said David Pillsbury, the chief executive of ClubCorp, which owns or operates 173 private golf or country clubs nationally. “It’s up 25 to 30 percent over the prior year. Our members are using the club more than they’ve ever used it before.”

Some data shows a big leap in demand for public golf courses, too. Between April 23 and May 5, the number of rounds sold online at public courses that remained open throughout the [coronavirus](#) pandemic were up 60 percent over the previous year, according to

GolfNow, an online tee time reservations platform used at nearly 7,000 U.S. courses. “There’s just a massive amount of demand,” said GolfNow Senior Vice President Jeff Foster. “The big question is will that demand stay.”

If more people like Chamberlin and her family — first-timers, younger players, lapsed golfers — are playing more often, the sport might experience a boost after years of decline, some in the golf industry say.

In 2002, nearly 30 million people played golf at least once a year, according to Pellucid Corp., a provider of industry information and insights. But that number had steadily declined, leveling off in the 21 million range starting in 2015. (The National Golf Foundation, an industry association, [put the number of golf course players at 24.3 million people](#) in 2019, with another 9.9 million who only use places like driving ranges or venues such as Topgolf.)

“We think this ultimately can actually be a real growth opportunity for the game,” Seth Waugh, the president of PGA of America, said in a conference call with reporters on May 5 announcing industry guidelines for safely returning to the game. “We think there’ll be obviously a lot of pent-up demand. But we also think that given those specific natural advantages that we have, that we may draw new and interested people.”

Adrian Stills, who runs the Osceola Municipal Golf Course in Pensacola, Fla., said he saw an 18 to 20 percent increase in rounds played during April, when Florida’s beaches were closed but golf courses remained open. Even when the beaches reopened, he said, he’s still up 10 percent over the previous year, with locals replacing snowbirds as customers.

“I started noticing a lot of new faces — a lot of younger new faces,” he said. “A lot of them had been in quarantine, working from home — they just wanted to get out and have an activity they could enjoy, and they chose the golf course. I’m hoping that continues.”

In San Francisco, a golf course offered a different kind of escape: The Presidio Golf Course, located within a former Army post, was converted into a public park for a time during the shutdown. “It was a unique opportunity for nongolfers to come check out what is a beautiful golf course,” said Mark Luthman, president of Touchstone Golf, which operates the course for the Presidio Trust.

Touchstone operates 38 courses in all, and Luthman said rounds played have been higher — “in some examples, dramatically.” Although he’s encouraged, Luthman also warns that it’s early. “It’s difficult to make any large sweeping conclusions about the business,” he said. “Is this just the initial pop of people who are coming out to play golf because they’ve been cooped up in their house for six or seven weeks, or are lapsed golfers coming back in greater numbers and golf is going to be experiencing a bit of a renaissance? I think it’s too early to say.”

Even as people flock to get back on the greens, the impact on golf courses could be uneven, depending on local restrictions and how reliant courses are on other forms of revenue.

Some safety measures require relatively little expense, such as no-touch precautions like removing ball washers and retrofitting cups to prevent handling the flags. But there are additional labor costs for doing extra sanitation of carts between players and positioning more workers on the course to ensure social distancing.

Other precautions may impinge on revenue by reducing the number



of golfers. Courses in some states remained closed for weeks in March and April. To help control the flow of people onto the course, some states are requiring tee time intervals of 15 or 16 minutes upon reopening, rather than every seven to nine minutes. Some places, such as New Jersey, have limited groups to twosomes except for families isolating together.

Requirements can also cut into cart-rental revenue, said Pellucid President Jim Koppenhaver, if courses can only charge for single occupancy or run out of carts.

At Renditions Golf Course in Davidsonville, Md., where golf resumed earlier this month, the single-occupancy cart requirement means General Manager Steve Peterson has had to space out tee times to wait for carts to return, reducing overall capacity.

“Demand has been really high, because people are just now being allowed to get out,” Peterson said. “But at the same time, our supply of number of tee times available has gone down because of [cart] guidelines.”

Greens fees may be what drives revenue at public courses, but other sources of income, such as wedding receptions or banquets, have been postponed because of the virus. Shuttered pro shops and dining rooms that remain closed or at reduced capacity also are likely to ding sales.

High unemployment and less disposable income could prompt some golfers to rethink membership dues or frequency of play. The average price of a round of golf at a public course is \$35, according to the World Golf Foundation. “As the economy goes, so does golf,” said Bill Golden, chief executive of Golf Tourism Solutions, a marketing agency that represents the golf industry in Myrtle Beach,

S.C. “If we have a prolonged economic recession, that’s going to have an impact on the golf business.”

Some resort-based or destination courses are bracing for a falloff in business. Golden’s agency [projects](#) a 61.5 percent drop in revenue for Myrtle Beach-area courses in the first five months of 2020 compared with 2019, despite remaining open.

Yet others predict that the flexibility of working from home, the lack of commitments to afternoon and weekend youth sports and less traveling overall could prompt golfers to play their local courses more often.

People probably won’t be “jumping on planes and traveling to Europe for the summer,” said Greg McLaughlin, chief executive of the World Golf Foundation, who added that open courses are seeing rounds at an “all-time high.” “People are working from home. Do you have an opportunity, potentially, in the afternoon to slip out and play nine holes if it’s light until 8 o’clock? We think it’s going to create another alternative.”

Cathy Harbin, the owner of Pine Ridge Golf Course in Paris, Tex., had a group of infrequent players tell her one recent evening that “now we can come here, get in our single carts, and we can still play golf and honor social distancing,” she recalled.

“Maybe these were guys who were meeting for a drink somewhere else” before the coronavirus, she said. “My prediction is we’ve created a new normal for them.”