

## Tim Steller's column: Randolph golfers should compromise on paths for walkers, runners

Tim Steller, *Arizona Daily Star* ([tucson.com](http://tucson.com)), Dec. 4, 2023

First, there was [the uproar over Barnum Hill](#), the duck pond and the expansion of the Reid Park Zoo. After [months of protests](#), the [expansion was reconfigured](#), and now construction is charging forward.

Now we're approaching the next stage in the great debates over central Tucson's vast and precious green space. This time, it's over an even more sensitive spot than the duck ponds and the baseball fields.

Yes, we're talking about the Randolph golf courses. These courses, [Randolph North](#) and [Dell Urich](#), are the centerpieces of [Tucson's five-course municipal golf system](#), both treasured and profitable.

[A preliminary plan by the Tucson Parks and Recreation Department](#) would reduce the footprint of those two courses, redesign them in part, and create a publicly accessible greenway that passes east-west between these two courses, connecting South Alvernon and South Randolph ways halfway between East Broadway and East 22nd Street.

The concept is intended to give the general public greater access to the green space of the golf courses without playing the links. The popular 3-mile path that runs around the courses would be moved inward into the edges of the courses and behind some city buildings, while still remaining separated from golfers.

The idea is to move the walking and cycling paths back away from the traffic, heat and noise of East Broadway, South Alvernon Way and East 22nd Street.

It's a desire that city officials heard a lot about when they were going through the process of redesigning adjacent Reid Park, deputy director Greg Jackson said. And there is almost \$1 million in Prop. 407 park bond money available for it.

Under the new concept, both golf courses would remain and be improved to championship-level courses, but some of the holes would be redesigned, especially at Randolph North. The driving range would be expanded, and the clubhouse would be updated.

During a meeting of the city's Parks and Recreation Commission on Wednesday, Parks and Recreation Director Lara Hamwey noted that at this stage, "This is just a conceptual plan." They need the go-ahead of the mayor and council before proceeding further, she added.

"It's about whether they want us to proceed to actually flesh this out in a more schematic, technical way and bring forth actual designs," she said.

### Golfers are outraged

Preliminary or not, the plan has golfers outraged. They lined up to pan the idea at Wednesday's meetings, citing safety concerns, disruption of golfing during construction and the fact that golfers pay to use the courses, creating a profitable operation.

"Why destroy two profitable golf courses by putting a pathway between them that is not needed," golfer Zee Conroy asked. "Very few people will benefit from that, and it will disrupt a lot of people."

Chris Seiberlich of the Dell Urich women's league noted "golfers pay to use these facilities."

"We're the revenue makers," she said. "We use the restaurant. We buy merchandise. Walkers and hikers and bikers do not."

Jim Sims of the Pima Golf League said the whole idea “makes no sense.”

“No one in the golfing community that we know is in support of this.”

The Dell Urich and Randolph golfers, are, of course, right that they actually produce a profit for the city: \$650,641 in fiscal year 2022.

But the pay-to-play nature of this area is exactly what some Tucsonans have targeted for years.

Nine years ago [I wrote about a new citizen effort](#), called [Expand Reid Park](#), that proposed eliminating one or both of the golf courses and turning them, along with Reid, into Tucson’s version of Central Park.

It never got anywhere, of course. The mayor and City Council members are smart enough to know the legacy of golf at Randolph, the power of golfing interests and the value of the money they pay.

### **An undeniable point**

But there was an undeniably strong point underlying the brazen proposal to sweep golf away, one that I think golfers should heed.

The 3-mile walking and biking path that goes around those golf courses is well-used but incredibly disappointing. The path runs for two out of the three miles along heavy traffic on one side, with the chain link fence surrounding the golf course on the other side.

It should be better.

One of the founders of the Expand Reid Park group, Daniel Brockert, was among five supporters of the plan who spoke at Wednesday’s meeting.

“I’m still not opposed to repurposing the entire golf courses for recreation,” he said, staking out his original, 2013 position. He called the new concept “a great compromise.”

Andrew Christopher, president of the Arroyo Chico Neighborhood Association, also supported increasing the general public’s access to the green space occupied by golf.

“The reality is, the golf course is behind a paywall,” he said. “It’s a huge amount of acreage. Some reduction of that acreage that’s behind a paywall, and bringing that into the freely accessible public realm is a good thing. I think there’s a way to do that that.”

There are other obstacles, though. For example, the golf courses also serve as water detention and retention basins, preventing floods from sweeping down the Arroyo Chico toward downtown.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which led the original flood-control design, would probably have to get involved.

“Any additional improvements within that area would have to maintain existing grades or be approved by the Army Corps of Engineers,” said Brian Jones, the Pima County Flood Control District’s floodplain administrator.

In other words, the topography would have to remain the same to perform the same flood-control function, but it’s possible new paths could be built without changing the topography.

“Theoretically, it could be done,” Jones said.

### **‘Nice to have more greenery’**

When I talked to a couple of walkers along South Alvernon Way Friday, one knew all about the plan. Htay Hla said he’s been walking the route for 20 years and would love to see it improved.

“It would be nice to have more greenery between where you walk and where the street is,” Hla said. “That would make it feel more like you’re in a park, as opposed to on Alvernon or on 22nd.”

The other person I stopped, it turned out, is not just a walker but also a golfer who uses these courses.

William Colgrove was wearing noise-canceling earphones to drown out the traffic noise when I stopped him. He didn't see the need for the change, unless it can be done without diminishing golfing.

That is, inevitably, going to be the hitch here. Can we improve the walking, biking and running experience without ruining the performance of the golf courses?

That is one of the principles of the concept that the parks and recreation department has staked out. I'd like to see the City Council give them the go-ahead to try and figure out whether they can make it work and how much it would cost.

After all, we've shown right in this area that we know how to work out a good compromise.