

March 15, 2022

Assembly Housing & Community Development Committee  
Assembly Member Buffy Wicks, Chair  
Assembly Local Government Committee  
Assembly Member Cecilia M. Aguiar-Curry, Chair

**Re: Opposition to Assembly Bill 1910 [Conversion of Publicly Owned Golf Courses to Affordable Housing].**

Dear Chairs Wicks and Aguiar-Curry, and Committee Members:

The United States Golf Association, the governing body and steward of golf in America, exists to promote the benefits of affordable, accessible and sustainable recreational golf, in a country that has the most vibrant golf economy in the world. It is only right given our mission to champion and advance the game of golf that we would advocate for its survival, for the more than 25 million who play it, and the 2 million who earn a living working in it every day. It is also critical to share data points that the public can trust are factual regarding accessible and affordable golf as the State of California ponders its social, economic and environmental value in your communities.

Despite recent comments to the contrary, we can easily confirm through National Golf Foundation (NGF) data that the vast majority – nearly 75 percent – of the 16,000 golf courses in the United States are publicly accessible, and affordable. The average cost of a round of golf is less than \$40 for four hours of recreation. As a counterpart to many community sports, golf can be played by anyone, of any skill level and any age – from 8 to 80 and beyond.

Year-end reports from 2021 likewise show that participation in golf has never been stronger, experiencing year-over-year growth in the number of golfers and rounds played for the third year in a row. The NGF reported that the strongest growth was seen among youths (+22% vs. 2019), African Americans (+18%), women (+11%) and Latinos (+9%). More than 3 million people took up the sport for the first time in 2021 – the most ever recorded, 37% of whom are female and 31% people of color.

Golf in America and California also encompasses an inclusive community – a welcoming population from diverse gender, ethnic, racial, economic and lifestyle backgrounds who find common ground on community courses. Given California reports that detail more than one-third of those who play golf in the state have median incomes below the 50th percentile, we can easily deduce that that number is likely much higher when looking solely at public and municipal golf. Golf is clearly accessible to the masses, and golfers across socio-economic backgrounds are playing as a way to connect to their families, their friends and their communities – at a time when it's needed most.

From a golf supply perspective, municipal and public golf courses play a critical role in the American golf ecosystem that should not be overlooked. Municipal and public golf grew to prominence more than 100 years ago, in cities like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles (the latter in 1916), to break down class barriers and promote accessible outdoor recreation for the masses. Today, NGF research tells us that California's availability of publicly accessible courses has fallen below the national average considering the state's population, ranking at the bottom in per capita public golf supply. The state would need 533 more public golf courses to maintain the same pace as others. Given the growth of rounds and rising popularity of golf, going backwards on supply is taking golf in California in the wrong direction.

Municipal golf courses also generate valuable revenue that funds a variety of community programs – an important component that remains true today, when compared to many other public green spaces. Their economic value to communities goes beyond jobs, delivering countless opportunities for charitable events while raising revenue through green fees that is invested directly into programs and the communities they serve – well beyond the golf course.

Leading environmental scientists have also quantified the community value of golf courses and the natural capital of these green spaces. [Recent research funded by the USGA and conducted by the University of Minnesota and Michigan State University](#) confirm that golf courses provide a critical environmental benefit to their surrounding communities, as cooling zones among a growing map of heat islands in urban centers, while also providing positive stormwater mitigation benefits, nutrient retention and space for pollinator and animal habitats.

The research shows what communities across America will lose if these green spaces are converted to housing:

**“The urban heat island model predicted that if a golf course were developed into residential housing, the nighttime temperature experienced by homes within one-third of a mile of the development would increase by 0.17 to 0.23 degrees F per evening— increases which are even higher for houses immediately adjacent to the former golf course.”**

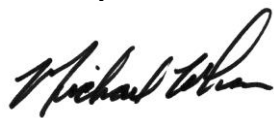
*– “Ecosystem Services Provided by Golf Courses,” Brian Horgan, Ph.D., Michigan State University*

As a result of increased development and similar land uses that take away needed green spaces, biodiversity is interrupted, cleaner air is affected, jobs are lost and the mental-health benefits of affordable, accessible outdoor recreation go away.

We understand that the need for affordable housing is a very real and human need. But to singly focus the solution on eliminating publicly accessible golf courses, given all the economic, environmental, social and health benefits they provide to communities, will produce a net loss to your citizens. It also threatens green spaces everywhere, at a time when climate change data point us in a very different direction.

We urge you toward data-driven decision-making and a vision that protects public golf courses and the immense value they provide.

Sincerely,



Mike Whan  
Chief Executive Officer  
United States Golf Association