

City Reviews Financing Options for Golf Course Renovation

By Amanda Coscarelli Feb 28, 2025



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The Arroyo Seco Golf Course has been a South Pasadena staple since the 1950s when golf was taking off across the nation.

Throughout its history, it has served as a community gathering place and a destination for visitors to the Pasadena area. But as the golf course comes up on its 70th anniversary, the city of South Pasadena is looking for new ways to draw in the same enthusiasm it garnered at its opening in 1955.



At a meeting on Feb. 24, the City Council continued to discuss plans for a total renovation of facilities such as the 18-hole golf course, the driving range and the iconic nine-hole mini-golf course.

“We have a very, very long list of things that we feel can be improved and bettered, not only to bring them up to code and compliance, but also to make them viable for a new generation of users,” said Forrest Richardson, the principal golf course architect at his self-titled firm, who presented the master plan for the updates to the golf course. “The idea is to return this facility to a sense of pride.”

He continued to explain that there are more golfers in the United States than ever before. This includes participation in traditional 18-hole courses and at other attractions such as Top-Golf driving ranges. However, as Richardson explained, it is non-golf activities that are sustaining golf courses today.

The original developers intended for the Arroyo Seco course to be more than just a place for golf and mini-golf, and the new master plan was designed to highlight the various other possibilities for the grounds.

Because of this, Richardson suggests rebranding the golf course to “Arroyo Seco Golf Park and Trail Stop.” The new name is meant to establish it as “more than just a golf facility” and “create a sense of place that is more welcoming to non-golfers and the community as a whole,” according to his presentation.

It also aims to “establish the reimagined facility as a trail stop for hikers and bicyclists, offering food, drink and entertainment.”

But the rebranding is just one of 10 steps of the master plan. At the top of the priority list is developing a new maintenance building, as well as renovating other buildings where maintenance has been deferred.

After that, the plan includes a new arrival area, a new clubhouse, a new two-level driving range, a reimagined 18-hole golf course, two new wetland habitats, the preservation of the original mini-golf course plus the development of a new one, and an updated approach to lighting using solar-power technology.

In the lengthy presentation, Richardson talked about the logistics of each step in the renovation process, mentioning that the new mini-golf course could potentially be a public art project. He pointed to a few examples of nearby golf courses that have highlighted parts of their city’s history at each hole.

Similarly, the developers have taken inspiration from nearby driving ranges to propose a modern two-level facility. The plan is to remove the bright lights on the existing range that create light pollution for the surrounding neighborhoods and instead use light-up targets after dark. Participants will be able to track where their ball ends up on a screen, similarly to a bowling alley.

The new range is expected to cost between \$2.5 and \$2.9 million. The mini-golf restoration and the addition of a new mini-golf course is expected to cost between \$1.1 and \$1.3 million. In total, all of the components of the master plan are expected to cost between \$23 million and nearly \$27 million.

Richardson presented a long-range approach to the project that would involve three phases to the renovations.

Phase 1 would include a temporary clubhouse, the two-level driving range, a partially improved course, a new maintenance facility and a restored nine-hole mini-golf course. The expected cost is \$11-12 million.

Phase 2 would include course-wide improvements, the demolition of the old maintenance facility and a new mini-golf course. The expected cost is \$9-10 million.

Phase 3 would include a new entry drive with expanded parking and the new permanent clubhouse building. The expected cost is \$8-9 million.

After the presentation, the city council favored the long-range approach, though Mayor Janet Braun remains optimistic that the project can be done in the next few years. The main priority was to keep the course open to the public while making improvements that will attract new members of the community.

“Right now we’ve lost a municipal golf course in the area, so I think it’s a consideration that we would need to have as far as closing parts of this golf course,” said Councilmember Sheila Rossi.

No action was taken at the meeting but the council agreed to revisit the cost summary of each approach at a future meeting.



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