

Parks and Recreation, Bicycle  
Pedestrian, and Sustainability  
Commissions

Special Joint Meeting

September 8, 2022

Written Communications

Item 1

Consider an update on Fiscal  
Year 2021-22 City Work Program  
item regarding the Blackberry  
Farm Golf Course Needs  
Assessment

**From:** [Edson Whitehurst](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Bike and Ped Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Sustainability Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Sept 8 meeting and BBFGC  
**Date:** Wednesday, September 7, 2022 1:35:17 PM

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I wanted to offer comments on the future of Blackberry Farm Golf Course. I have been playing at BBFGC for over 25 years. I am also a member and past president of the Blue Pheasant Hackers, a golf league which has been playing at BBFGC since 1976. We even still have one founding member playing. Over the 47 years of its existence, the Hackers have had many members, at its height, over 90. It has been a great source of comradery and interaction.

Over the 25+ years I've been playing at BBFGC, it has become a second home. I cannot imagine how my life would be different without it. All the friends and relationships over the years. I have met people from all ages and walks of life and all over the world. There is no other place (or golf course) like it.

It seems to me that if the decision was being made over an empty, unused piece of land, the arguments for both sides, and the considerations overall, would be completely different. But we are talking about destroying something to replace it with something else. And I intentionally used the word 'destroy', because once it's gone, there will never be another. It will never be rebuilt, newly built, or anything. It will be gone forever. Natural Habitats can be built, created, recreated, almost anywhere. And very likely will in the future whatever the decision on this particular plot of land. There WILL BE more (and that is a good thing).

But there will NEVER be another place like Blackberry Farm Golf Course. Once it's gone, it's gone. Where many people over the years learned to play golf. Friends and families from all over the bay area (and the world for that matter) have met and gathered. Children as young as 6 learning to play with their parents, to retirees in their 80's and 90's. I've met parents who learned to play at BBFGC when they were kids, bringing their children for the first time. I'm almost in tears thinking of all the friends and people I have met who have moved on from this world. All the people, moments, memories, and the possibility of future friends and moments and memories that will never happen.

It really breaks my heart.

Just my two cents I hope you take into consideration on this very difficult, and momentous decision.

Edson Whitehurst

**From:** [Charles Crane](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Bike and Ped Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Sustainability Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [City Clerk](#); [City Council](#)  
**Subject:** Blackberry Farm Golf Course  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 10:56:37 AM

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September 9, 2022

Dear Cupertino Commissioners and City Council,

I urge the city to keep the golf course Option A. Please do not replace it with natural plantings Option B. I am a retired fire chief and I am writing you to caution the city against considering Option B because it would create a health and safety hazard to nearby homes. Replacing the irrigated golf course with natural habitat creates a Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) issue which increases the hazards of wildfire. Recent days further show that we are entering a period of extreme weather which will further aggravate the situation. Additionally, the city has drastically underestimated the cost of maintaining this land once the watering stops. Keeping the underbrush short enough to prevent a wildfire risk is not feasible. The golf course greens provide natural fire breaks. One only needs to look at the fires that approached Silverado Golf course in Napa just a short time ago. In this case the fires came from outside of the golf course, but the golf course served as a natural fire break, saving many other homes. If not for any other reason, the City of Cupertino should retain the Blackberry Farm Golf Course to protect its citizens from fire.

Sincerely,



Charles Crane  
BC Retired

--

**Charles Crane**

*Director of Emergency Services*

O: [844-623-3946](tel:844-623-3946) ext. 710

M: [415-377-8888](tel:415-377-8888)

E: [1-800-262-7387](mailto:1-800-262-7387)

[1570 Wistaria Lane, Los Altos, CA](#)

[94024](#)



**From:** [Don Halsey](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [Jim Lee](#); [Mehul Dholakia](#)  
**Subject:** Slides to be presented at 9/8 P&R meeting  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 4:18:21 PM  
**Attachments:** [Slides for Parks and Rec on 9-8-22 r00.pdf](#)

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

I have registered to make comments during tonight's meeting. I would like to share this document / visual material so the slides can be presented during item 1 E (Analysis of Comparative Costs ...). I will have 2 co-presenters, Jim Lee and Mehul Dholakia, both Cupertino residents. I might have another person from our group "Friends of Blackberry Farm golf" attend the meeting virtually. If so I think we will have 8 minutes to present.

Thank You

Don Halsey  
650 996 3021

Public Comments  
to  
**Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission**  
about  
Blackberry Farm Golf vs. Natural Habitat

9/8/22

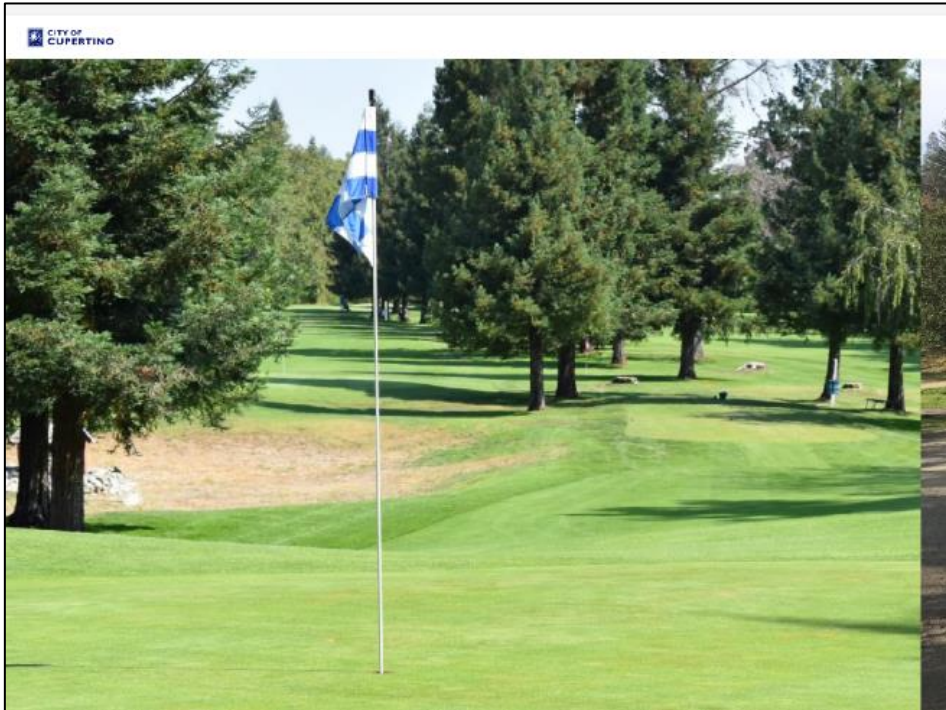
**Friends of Blackberry Farm Golf**

Contacts: Don Halsey 650 996 3021 or [donhalsey3021@gmail.com](mailto:donhalsey3021@gmail.com)  
Next Door group: <https://nextdoor.com/city/cupertino--ca/>

(E) Blackberry Farm Course  
Use Analysis and Comparative Costs – 25  
Year Outlook

2 ways golf course revenue can be increased

# Quick overview of Costs and Revenue



## Blackberry Farm Golf Course Feasibility Study



Blackberry Farm Golf Course was constructed in 1962 and was privately owned until 1991, when the City of Cupertino purchased the property. The City has operated the golf course since that time. It is a 1,544 yard, 9-hole, par-29 course and lies within the Stevens Creek Corridor. For several years, portions of the course have needed repairs and improvements, including extensive improvements to the irrigation system.

In 2014, the City began working on a new Master Plan for the Stevens Creek Corridor (SCCMP). Its goal was to create an updated vision and plan for the public lands along Stevens Creek, from McClellan Road northward to Stevens Creek Boulevard. Among the sites addressed by this Master Plan was the Blackberry Farm Golf Course. City Council reviewed several options for the creek corridor in addition to a report regarding the Blackberry Farm Golf Course, prepared by National Golf Foundation (NGF) Consulting.

In 2016, a feasibility study for a draft preferred alternative for the golf course was presented to the City Council. The City Council chose not to take any action at that time, and the Stevens Creek Corridor Master Plan was put on hold until the completion of the Parks and Recreation System Master Plan. The Parks and Recreation System Master Plan ([found here](#)) was completed and adopted on February 18, 2020.

In May 2021, the City Council included a needs assessment to identify options for short and long-term improvements for the golf course in the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 City Work Program. In June 2021, City Council further directs staff to study 1) conducting necessary repairs and minor improvements to the golf course and 2) discontinuing the use of the site as a golf course and restoring the site to natural habitat and trails.

The City has moved into the community input phase and is looking for community members to share their feedback on the preferred future use of the Blackberry Farm Golf Course site.



**Blackberry Farm Golf Course Use Analysis  
Comparative Costs - 25 Year Outlook**

		Option A	Option B
Item #	Item	Repair Golf Course	Natural Habitat
1	Capital Cost	\$1,970,000	\$1,882,825
2	Total O&M Expenditure (0-25 yr)	\$17,626,250	\$10,720,594
	O&M Expenditure Breakdown		
	2A Irrigation Water Cost ***	\$1,575,000	\$100,800
	2B Sewer Discharge Cost	\$525,000	\$297,200
	2C City Labor Costs	\$7,569,500	\$9,591,844
	2D Contracted O&M Services	\$7,610,000	\$562,000
	2E O&M Miscellaneous	\$346,750	\$168,750
3	Estimated Revenue (0-25 yrs)	\$9,378,624	\$500,000
4	O&M Expenditure minus Revenue (0-25 yrs)	\$8,247,626	\$10,220,594
5	Total Cost minus Revenue (0-25 yrs)	\$10,217,626	\$12,103,419
6	Irrigation Water Use (0-25 yrs) Gallons*	168 to 212 million Gallons	14 million Gallons
7	Grant Funding Potential**	N/A	\$600,000

**Golf course costs the city more!**

**But golf course makes a LOT more revenue.**

**Altogether, golf course is \$2 million more favorable**

<https://engagecupertino.org/bbfgolcourse>



Blackberry Farm non-resident greens Fee is \$18.00

Sunken Gardens, a similar course, has a weekday non-resident rate of \$23.00.  
(For residents it is \$16 and \$21.)

28% more

### Rates

Weekdays

22%

\$22.00

Weekends

\$24.00

Holidays

\$24.00

Seniors

60 years and older

\$17.00

Valid weekdays only. Holidays excluded

Juniors

17 years and under

\$12.00

Valid 7 days a week including holidays

Pruneridge

### WEEKDAY GREEN FEES (MONDAY - FRIDAY)

Monday - Friday

\$41

Player's Club  
Members  
\$29

Senior Players Cl  
Members (60+)  
\$25

9 Holes

44%

\$26

\$21

\$19

Twilight

\$29

\$25

Super Twilight

\$26

\$21

\$19

Deep Cliff

**Other nearby 9 hole courses charge at least 20% more than Blackberry Farm**

**Blackberry Farm Golf Course Use Analysis  
Comparative Costs - 25 Year Outlook**

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7	Grant Funding Potential**	N/A	\$600,000

# ← Table from Blackberry Farm Feasibility Study

- <https://engagecupertino.org/bbfgolfcourse>
- Sunken Gardens: 28% premium
- Pruneridge: 22% premium
- Deep Cliff: 44% premium

- **If estimated revenue was increased 25% it would grow by \$2,344,656 to \$11,723,280.**
- **City could give the \$2.3 M extra to Cupertino teachers**
- **Or give a number of free season passes to Monta Vista HS golf team**
- **Or some other good purpose.**

**Blackberry Farm Golf Course Use Analysis  
Comparative Costs - 25 Year Outlook**

			Option A	Option B
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## Second way: Education

- \$500 K revenue under the Natural Habitat option
- \$20 K / year x 25 years
- A variety of ranger programs in classroom or on the trail
- how different plants and animals interact in an ecosystem ...
- how ancient people lived off the land ...
- how geologic processes have shaped the landscape ...
- ranger walks and interpretive programs ...
- animals and plants on the trail, the creeks, etc.

# Examples of courses and venues

(Parks and Recreation brochure, Fall 2022)



**Join-A-Ranger** is park ranger-led, family-friendly programs in the Stevens Creek Corridor. These programs educate and entertain park visitors. City of Cupertino park rangers are your local experts, with plenty of stories and fascinating facts about steelhead trout, mountain lions, native raptors, the riparian ecosystem, local history, and more.

### Join-A-Ranger: Wildlife Tracking 5Y+

Join the Park Rangers for a fun-filled wildlife tracking class. You'll learn about species identification through their tracks and sign-tracking. Become a nature detective and learn to read the ground like a storybook through the art of tracking. All attendees must register and children must be accompanied by an adult. Please wear sturdy walking shoes and long pants that can get dirty.

Environmental Education Center at McClellan Ranch Preserve						
Codes	Days	Times	Dates	Mtgs	R	NR
18468	Sa	1:00p-2:30p	9/17	1	\$6	\$8

Instructor/Recreation Staff

### Join-A-Ranger: Night Hike and Flashlight Tour 5Y+

Come and enjoy a fun-filled Night Hike and Flashlight Tour of McClellan Ranch Preserve and Blackberry Farm! We will explore the woods and nature at night, learn about nocturnal animals' special adaptations, and test our heightened senses in the dark with games and activities. The hike is approximately one mile on a combination of dirt trails and paved paths. Please wear sturdy walking shoes, a warm jacket, and bring a flashlight or head-lamp. All attendees must register and children must be accompanied by an adult.

Environmental Education Center at McClellan Ranch Preserve						
Codes	Days	Times	Dates	Mtgs	R	NR
18470	Sa	5:30p-7:00p	11/12	1	\$6	\$8

Instructor/Recreation Staff

### Join-A-Ranger: Apex Predators 5Y+

The Park Rangers invite you to an Apex Predator workshop! Learn about local Apex Predators like coyotes and owls, and how they play an important role in the ecology of their environment. All attendees must register and children must be accompanied by an adult. Please wear sturdy walking shoes.

Environmental Education Center at McClellan Ranch Preserve						
Codes	Days	Times	Dates	Mtgs	R	NR
18474	Su	10:00a-11:30a	10/30	1	\$6	\$8

Instructor/Recreation Staff



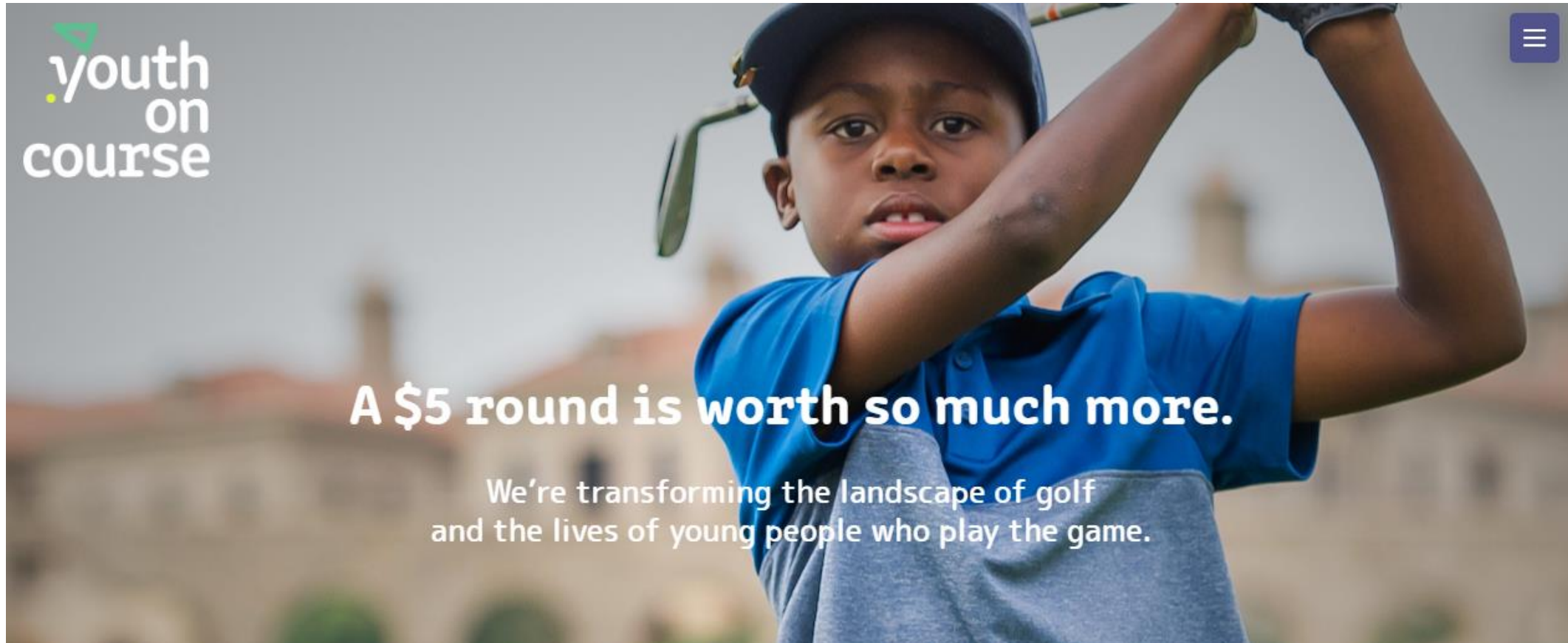
- Q: Is the \$500K of courses duplicative to courses already being offered? Perhaps.
- Q: Is the plowing up the fairways and greens required in order to give courses? No.
- Q: Will course subscribers repeat, or will the revenue tail off?
- A: Offer the new courses whether or not there is golf.
- Add \$500K to Alternative A side of the table also.



Blackberry Farm is  
Cupertino's best location for  
kids to get exposed to golf

# Blackberry Farm golf – a family-oriented activity in Cupertino

- Youth On Course foundation





MEMBER STORIES

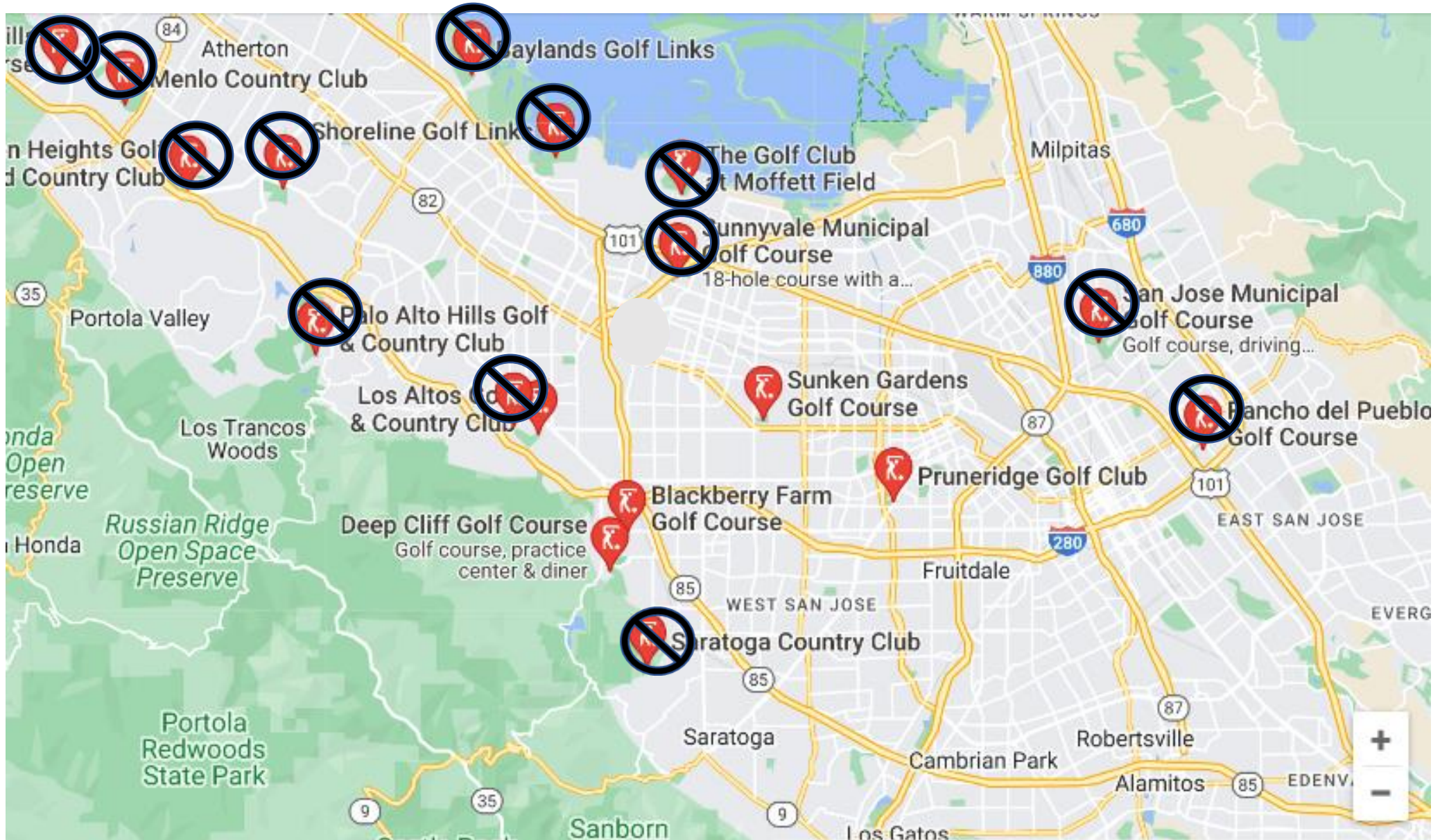
August 30, 2022

## Celebrating 2 Million Youth on Course Rounds!

It took 15 years for Youth on Course members to play their first million...

- Blackberry farm is #13 out of 357 YOC courses in Northern California
- It is the ONLY course that does not have day or time restriction.
- Since 2018, YOC has subsidized more than 7,600 rounds of golf at Blackberry Farm for community youth.
- Those 7,600 rounds equate to tens of thousands of hours of physical activity, lifeskill development, and recreation that would go away if the course was closed.
- Nearly 2,500 of those rounds were in 2021.
- There are few other options available for kids and their families to play golf in and around the local area. Add statistics for BBF by itself

# Availability of short / 9-hole courses





**From:** [EAC Chair](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Bike and Ped Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Sustainability Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [Shani Kleinhaus](#); [director@scvas.org](mailto:director@scvas.org); [Ranif@scvas.org](mailto:Ranif@scvas.org)  
**Subject:** Public Comment – Item 1: BBF Golf Course  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 4:34:46 PM  
**Attachments:** [Cupertino Joint Commissions – BBF Golf Course.pdf](#)

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Chairs and Commissioners of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Bicycle Pedestrian Commission, and Sustainability Commission,

Please see attached for our comments.

Regards,

Annie Yang

Annie Yang  
Environmental Action Committee Chair  
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society  
22221 McClellan Rd  
Cupertino, CA 95014  
[eac@scvas.org](mailto:eac@scvas.org)



September 8, 2022

RE: Item 1 – Consider an update on Fiscal Year 2021-22 City Work Program item regarding the Blackberry Farm Golf Course Needs Assessment

Dear Chairs and Commissioners of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Bicycle Pedestrian Commission, and Sustainability Commission,

The Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society (SCVAS) is one of the largest National Audubon Society chapters in California. We are proud to be based at McClellan Ranch in Cupertino, right next to Blackberry Farm. Our mission is to promote the enjoyment, understanding, and protection of birds and other wildlife, and we have long advocated for increasing and protecting habitat that increases biodiversity. We are writing in support of Option B, conversion of the Blackberry Farm (BBF) Golf Course to natural habitat.

Conversion of the golf course to natural habitat not only saves a valuable resource, water, but will also add habitat value to the Stevens Creek corridor, an important wildlife corridor. Especially in our current extreme drought conditions, choosing an option that uses 90% less water seems wise. Besides the water savings, the increase in wildlife habitat will add to the ability of the City to support biodiversity. In a time when we are seeing massive bird loss and insect declines, every bit of land planted with native plants that supports a healthy ecosystem helps. This is especially important along riparian corridors, such as Stevens Creek, where good quality habitat is often threatened and fragmented in the South Bay. Connecting BBF to the rest of the Stevens Creek Corridor will provide a valuable connection of habitat.

We join the majority of the public survey respondents from Cupertino (57%) in favoring Option B. The amazing number of participants who want to see the site converted to natural habitat shows that bolstering natural ecosystems while providing more equitable enjoyment of the space is a popular choice in a time when we need to actively mitigate human impact on the climate and the environment. BBF and McClellan Ranch Preserve are popular birding areas for both beginner and experienced birders, with Anna's Hummingbirds, Acorn Woodpeckers, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers, California Towhees, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed hawks, and many others easily spotted there. Improving the value of this stretch of riparian and grassland habitat will help these birds and other wildlife, such as the threatened steelhead trout. SCVAS already offers educational opportunities there, and we will be happy to partner with the City and Park Rangers to provide more ways for the public to appreciate and learn about our natural spaces.

The golf course as it stands today provides some habitat value; however, if the City chooses Option A, we strongly recommend adding wildlife habitat as an improvement to the golf course. Native vegetation should be added to the edges of the golf course. The ponds should be restored, and trees added. Complex vegetation structure should be used wherever possible. Additional netting should be avoided. Although we prefer Option B, we urge the City to make maximizing habitat value as a goal in either option. The City of Mountain View recently passed a Citywide Biodiversity Strategy through which it will integrate biodiversity outcomes into all private development and City projects and policies. We encourage Cupertino to do the same.

As stated on the Cupertino Parks and Recreation System Master Plan, “expanding access to nature is a top priority for the community,” and “residents would like to see a decreased emphasis on large lawn areas and more focus on retaining a site’s natural character” (p. 18). We hope that you take this opportunity to choose to rewild an important connection for wildlife and return a small part of land back to nature. The benefits will outlast all of us who are here today.

Regards,

Annie Yang

Cupertino Resident  
Environmental Action Committee Chair  
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society  
22221 McClellan Rd  
Cupertino, CA 95014  
eac@scvas.org

**From:** [Rhoda Fry](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Bike and Ped Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Sustainability Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [City Clerk](#); [City Council](#)  
**Subject:** September 8 2022 Agenda Item #1 Keep Golf Course  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 4:48:54 PM  
**Attachments:** [091113 \(1\).pdf](#)

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Commissions,

The following outlines the reasons to retain the golf course and includes some questions about this agenda item. I am not a golfer and have no intent on becoming a golfer but the golf course fills a unique niche within our City's recreational offerings where people of all ages can exercise, enjoy the great outdoors, and play. Recent data shows that 41,000 people per year have used the golf course and I'm guessing it would be more if tee times were less spread out because the times between tee times has been expanded during covid. I doubt we can say the same for the teen center or the pools at Blackberry Farm. Consider also that people from outside of Cupertino who use the golf course also shop Cupertino while they're in the area and increase our City's tax revenue!

Question 1: Can you explain where the projected \$20K in revenue would come from with the new venue? It does not seem very different from McClellan Ranch where there already is some programming. If there were more programming, it seems that it could happen at McClellan Ranch. By adding programming to McClellan Ranch and retaining the golf course would add revenue and maintain a diversity of recreational options. Please explain what projected programming would be and how it would differ from other programming.

Question 2: In the reconfigured golf course, one of the holes is changed to reduce golf balls in the golf course parking lot. I heard it mentioned on an open-house that the reconfiguration would be for balls within the orange orchard. Can you explain? Also, what would be done to resolve other issues with errant golf balls from the golf course such as those along the entrance driveway to the pool/picnic area?

Question 3: Over the years, a number of trees have died and been removed on the golf course. Many of them were Monterey Pines, whose life expectancy is only about 50 years. Why were the trees not replaced?

Question 4: Does the golf course have a dedicated water meter and pg&e meter? How do we know what the actual utility costs are?

Survey: It seems to me that the survey was leading the respondent in a direction to select "natural habitat." However, the actual proposal looks more like a city park with a parcourse, education area, and a 40-car parking lot that would eat into the existing golf course at the swimming pool area. If I were asked if baseball fields, soccer fields, library field and more were to be converted to natural

habitat and walking trails would I use them? I'd say sure. But it doesn't mean that I think we should get rid of them. I remember a former councilmember saying that surveys were designed to create a desired outcome.

2006 Golf Course Plan: Please ask the Parks and Recreation staff to refer to the 2006 plan pertaining to the golf course. The 2000 vision is mentioned but not the plan. Much of that plan was built out, but not all of it.

A) The 2006 plan replaced the aging irrigation system. My recollection is that the cost was estimated to be \$250K. I searched through the City's public documents, but could not find the cost.

B) The 2006 plan summary intended to refurbish onsite water: "Damaged water storage tank that held well water to irrigate the golf course would be demolished. An existing 35,000 gallon underground cistern would be reconditioned to provide irrigation for the golf course." Around 2012 there was an extensive study to investigate using onsite water vs potable San Jose water at the golf course.

C) The plan was emphatic about retaining the ponds, affectionately referred to by many as lakes. These ponds had become a naturalized wildlife habitat that was teeming with wildlife that included a substantive red-wing blackbird population and a regular green heron among others. The plan mentioned the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's keen interest in retaining these ponds. The 2006 plan summary stated, "No change in side-stream diversion to golf course ponds." Several Parks and Rec Directors assured me these ponds would be restored (along with replanting the 30 or so trees that failed in the new parking lot adjacent to the pools).

Environment: The golf course has been host to quite a bit of wildlife including several coyotes, hawks, woodpeckers and more. As mentioned previously, the ponds were a unique naturalized wildlife habitat. And there are many trees on the golf course and there could be more. Many areas of the golf course are not being watered now and they could be replaced with natural habitat. And there could be more trees – especially to replace the ones that died. Golf courses and natural habitat are not mutually exclusive – we can have both. Another benefit to the adjacent neighborhood is that the wide open areas are less attractive to mountain lions, so having a golf course would be better than natural habitat. In the past, a mountain lion entered the animal enclosure at McClellan Ranch and ate a goat. Another mountain lion hung out in a tree for several days adjacent to McClellan Ranch as well.

Fire Safety: The golf course provides a firebreak for the homes up on Byrne Avenue and beyond. The City's most important job is to protect the safety of its inhabitants and there needs to be a significant amount of irrigated area to protect them. Attached please find one of many articles written on this topic. And we have a record of fire issues within the "Stevens Creek Corridor." In 2022 and possibly 2021, people had been setting a fire in McClellan Ranch in the middle of the night about once a month. You can still see the scorch marks where it happened. One of my neighbors walked by one morning and saw that it was still smoldering and called the authorities. We were lucky. Over at the Stocklmeir property, there had been some sort of calamity that caused the windows to be boarded up. Later, a resident lodged multiple complaints to the City and the Fire Department about the dried brush around the building adjacent to the townhouses. Thankfully, the City cleaned up the area but it is hard to understand how it stayed a safety hazard until a resident complained about it. I am worried that natural plantings could get out of hand as it did at the Stocklmeir house.

Money: It seems that the fees charged for the golf course are very low. An increase of just \$1 or \$2 could make a big difference. When the City runs programs that look like businesses, they are run through Enterprise Funds which provides a Profit and Loss Statement for that business. In the past, pool/picnic and golf shared the same enterprise fund. At some point, pool/picnics were removed and we have no idea as to what that facility is costing us. As to golf course, in my opinion, there have been charges for the enterprise fund that do not belong there and make it look like the golf course is performing worse than it actually is. For example, studies to modify or remove the golf course have been charged to the enterprise fund. Consequently, for people who don't know the details, golf performance look worse than it is. It seems that the golf course has been left in limbo for quite some time – as previously mentioned, we already should have had the new watering system in place, the ponds should have been left intact to support wildlife, and trees should have been replaced. We need to get more transparency for the businesses that are run by the City.

History: In 1844 Elisha Stevens led the first wagon train to cross the Sierra Nevada and from 1848 until 1862 he lived in a small home in Cupertino near Blackberry Farm's playground stands today. At the time, the creek was called Cupertino creek and it has since been renamed to Stevens Creek. Although there is a California Historical Landmark for his final home in Bakersfield, there is none for his first home. In the later 1800s people would arrive by stagecoach and enjoy picnicking at the creek. Later, people arrived by train. The land now occupied by the golf course had been an orchard failed. Recognizing a business opportunity, two brothers purchased the property in the 1950s, built 2 homes along the driveway, and created a picnic business followed by swimming pools, the golf course, and the restaurant/nightclub. It was at this time that access to the picnic area from Stevens Creek blvd ceased. The family had considered purchasing some of the Stockmeir property in order to provide an entrance to the picnic grounds from Stevens Creek blvd because neighbors had been impacted.

In 1990, Cupertino citizens voted to tax themselves the utility tax to purchase the property for open space, save the oak trees, and prevent housing development. Keep in mind that in 1990, the majority of the homes around that property were in unincorporated County. The pool/picnic business would continue to be run by the city for 25 years in order to pay for the property (it ceased operating well before that). Although pool/picnics and golf had been profitable for the family, the pool/picnic business lost money and golf made money for the City. Sometime after the area was renovated, only golf was tracked through an enterprise fund. When you go to the golf course, you will see a sign that says Don Brown on it. I haven't seen the name anywhere else. Don Brown was Cupertino's City manager at the time of the City's purchase of the pool/picnic area, the golf course, and the Blue Pheasant. As you can see, I am into some of the history and was glad to learn that former City architect Terry Greene had interviewed the Nelson family about the history of Blackberry Farm. I hope that his notes are still around. Part of the "Stevens Creek Corridor" project was to have some historical signage and I hope that comes to fruition someday.

Long story short – let's keep the golf course – it is good for the community.

Thanks,  
Rhoda Fry

# Golf Courses on the Fire Line

Golf courses and large turf areas serve a valuable role as firebreaks.

BY PATRICK GROSS



**T**he many benefits of turf have been well documented in scientific literature. Add to that list the fact that golf courses and large turf areas serve a valuable role as firebreaks.

Wildfires occur frequently throughout the Southwest, causing extensive devastation and property damage. It is reported that more than 1,445 structures each year are destroyed by wildfires in California. At the same time, it is important to note that many structures are saved as a result of the firebreaks created by large turf areas and landscaping techniques that minimize the

spread of fires to homes and structures (CAL FIRE, 2005).

Complicating matters is the fact that drought conditions in the Southwest over the past eight years have put pressure on turf managers to reduce water use, either by voluntary or mandatory means. The prevailing opinion by water regulators and politicians is that turf irrigation is wasteful. On the contrary, there are many examples indicating that healthy, well-watered golf courses and large turf areas have played an important role in stopping wildfires and protecting property.

Golf course turf, in addition to the requirement of a fuel modification zone on slopes, helped save dozens of homes in the path of the Yorba Linda fire in 2008.



Golf courses provide large open areas with low fuel volume that create a defensible space in fire-prone areas. In addition, water hazards on golf courses can be used as a source of water to fight fires.

### DEVASTATION CAUSED BY FIRE

Fire-fighting experts refer to three essential components of wildfires, known as “the fire triangle” — fuel, heat, and oxygen. Eliminating one of these components helps slow or stop the fire. Firebreaks remove fuel. Water helps reduce heat. Flame retardants block oxygen from reaching the fuel (Riggs, 2002).

The height, type, and spacing of plants impact the intensity and spread of a fire. In many wildfires, a “ladder effect” is created when fire sweeps through low-growing brush and climbs into the canopy of nearby trees, where flames and embers can be spread greater distances (Nader, 2007). In particular, live embers from a fire have been known to travel up to one mile, landing on brush and structures and accelerating the spread of the fire.

Each wildfire will spread and behave differently depending on wind, terrain, humidity,

weather conditions, and the amount of fuel. The only factor that can be controlled by human activity is the amount of fuel available to sustain a fire. Structures surrounded by dense, dry brush and closely spaced trees are at high risk of fire damage. At lower risk are properties with a defense zone of at least 100 feet that includes well-watered turf and landscape plants.

### BENEFITS OF TURF AND GOLF COURSES IN FIRE-PRONE AREAS

Although fire experts warn that there is no such thing as a plant that will not burn, previous experience in California indicates that well-watered and properly maintained landscapes did not burn as readily as dry plantings (Youngner, 1970). Plants that are low growing, open structured, and less resinous, such as turf, present a lower fire risk (Nader, 2007). Additional benefits



of large turf areas and golf courses in fire-prone areas are noted below:

- Healthy turf is less likely to burn due to the high water content within the plant tissue, which ranges from 75% to 85% by weight (Beard, 1974).
- The low, prostrate growth habit of maintained turf limits the amount of fuel available to sustain a fire (Beard and Green, 1994).
- Golf courses provide large open areas with a low fuel volume that create a defensible space in fire-prone areas. This establishes an effective firebreak, placing more distance between fire and nearby structures. Golf courses are especially helpful in stopping the spread of fire when situated on the side of the prevailing wind (Riggs, 2002).
- Trees growing on golf courses are less likely to ignite because the turf beneath limits the available fuel source, thus stopping the “ladder effect.”
- Wind-blown embers start many house fires. Golf courses and large turf areas create distance between combustible vegetation and homes, creating more area for embers to potentially fade (Anderson, 2009).
- Water hazards on golf courses are sometimes used as a source of water to fight fires.
- For firefighters, the open space provided by golf courses has been used as a staging area for equipment and personnel as well as the fire command center (Liske, 2009).
- Golf courses provide an escape route and safe zone for firefighters should the direction and intensity of the fire change and the firefighters need to evacuate the area (Liske, 2009).

### GOLF COURSES ON THE FIRE LINE

Wildfires have been a common occurrence throughout California for decades, and recent experience indicates that golf courses have served a valuable role by creating firebreaks to stop the spread of fires as noted in the following examples.

#### **Simi/Vale Verde fire, October 2003:**

In October 2003, a wildfire consumed 750,000 acres north of Los Angeles, destroying 3,500 homes and causing 22 deaths. Tierra Rejada Golf Club in Moorpark, California, was in the path of the fire. According to general manager Tom Szwedzinski, the firebreak created by the golf course prevented the flames from crossing Hwy. 22 into a densely populated Moorpark neighborhood (Bailey, 2003).

**Ramona fire, October 2003:** During the same time of the fires north of Los Angeles, flames swept through the chaparral-covered hillsides of Ramona, in north San Diego County. The San Diego Country Estates development on the outskirts of Ramona borders the San Vicente Inn & Golf Club, which helped stop and redirect the fire away from homes in a portion of the development. Only 27 of the 3,000 homes in the subdivision were lost to the fire. According to Captain Dave Hypes of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the green grass didn't allow the fire to spread and the golf

The intense heat generated by wildfires destroys homes and damages property, including this irrigation controller on the border of Black Gold Golf Course in Yorba Linda, California.



course created a very nice firebreak (Bailey, 2003).

**Yorba Linda fire, October 2008:** With the help of strong Santa Ana winds, a brush fire that started in Corona, California, rapidly moved west toward the neighboring city of Yorba Linda. Several homes in the path of the fire were destroyed as it burned through the chaparral-covered hillsides and up to the edge of Black Gold Golf Course. The golf course stopped flames from reaching the housing development on the southern edge of the property. According to Bret Anderson with the Orange County Fire Authority, there were several factors that helped stop the fires and spare the surrounding homes:

- The golf course put more distance between the combustible vegetation and the homes. This provided more area for wind-driven embers to fade.
- The green grass on the golf course was less combustible than the brush on the hillside. Although turf along the edge of the course was scorched, it did not sustain the fire.
- A fuel modification zone around the homes was required during development. These areas were established with fire-resistant plants and also prevented fires from reaching the homes (Anderson, 2009).

**Griffith Park fire, May 2007:** A discarded cigarette started a brush fire in the Aberdeen Canyon area of Griffith Park in Los Angeles. The terrain and heavy winds created very erratic fire conditions that ultimately burned 800 acres and damaged one home. As the fire changed direction and moved southward, it stopped at the edge of the Roosevelt Golf Course and Tregnan Golf Academy. According to senior arson investigator David Liske, the golf courses were great firebreaks that saved dozens of expensive homes south of the golf course (Liske, 2009). Roosevelt Golf Course also served as a landing area for helicopters that were used for aerial observation and to direct firefighters on the ground.

## SUMMARY

Aside from being an aesthetic element of the landscape, turf is a practical environmental tool as a fire barrier in addition to the other benefits of providing erosion control, producing a cooling effect, and trapping pollution particulates. As noted in the previous examples, golf courses served a valuable function as firebreaks due to

the low fuel content of the green, prostrate-growing turf. The green belt created by golf courses was especially important as a buffer for homes and buildings adjacent to extensive woodland and dryland chaparral. In firefighting terms, expansive turf areas and golf courses create a defensible area that not only stops the spread of a fire but also can be used as a staging area and safety zone for fire department personnel.

In times of drought, turfgrass irrigation is often deemed to be wasteful. This often results in political pressure to eliminate golf course irrigation and remove turf from landscapes. Ironically, areas affected by drought tend to be a greater fire risk, and expansive turf areas, such as golf courses, serve a practical role in reducing fire danger. When it comes to reducing fire hazard, it is important to recognize that the benefits of turfgrass far outweigh the water requirement.

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*PAT GROSS is the director of the Southwest Region of the USGA Green Section. As a lifelong resident of California, he has seen the devastation caused by wildfires.*

**From:** [Anne Ezzat](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Sustainability Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [City of Cupertino Bike and Ped Commission](#); [Darcy Paul](#); [Kitty Moore](#)  
**Subject:** Golf Course  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 6:19:05 PM

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear commissioners,

I am writing to urge you to keep the golf course at Blackberry Farm, though I believe golf is a snooze-fest. It is a perfectly sized golf course for a community. And a public golf course. If we can have a swimming pool, tennis courts, baseball fields, and cricket fields, why not a golf course?

Furthermore, the city has not done a really good job of maintaining preserves. Look at the overgrown brush along the Stevens Creek Trail. And the dead trees. Why do we need more of the same? And the additional 40 parking spaces? It seems as if there is a rush to pave over parks, and eliminate parking spaces at residential buildings. Utterly nonsensical.

Please do not turn the golf course into another unkempt nature preserve.

Thank you and best regards,

Brooke Ezzat

**From:** [Connie Cunningham](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#)  
**Subject:** Sep 8, Joint Commission Agenda Item 1  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 8:28:34 PM

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

I am sending this copy of my spoken remarks for the written record of this meeting. Thanks,  
Connie Cunningham

Good Evening, Chairs and Commissioners of the Park and Recreation Commission, Bicycle  
Pedestrian Commission and Sustainability Commission,

My name is Connie Cunningham, Member of Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society and a  
longtime resident of Cupertino.

Thank you for this excellent report. Cupertino's Blackberry Farm and McClellan Ranch are  
environmental jewels in the increasingly urban environment of our County. I prefer Option B,  
Restore Natural Habitat. I share that opinion with 57% of Cupertino residents who answered  
the survey.

The restoration to nature will use less water, it will open the area to more people to enjoy, and  
become a home to increased biodiversity based on using California native plants and trees.

I urge the City to apply for grants from the State and other resources to make the restoration  
financially feasible. Fixing the irrigation system is critical to minimize the use of potable  
water during drought conditions that are getting worse. Putting California native trees, shrubs  
and grasses in the islands of the golf course will enhance biodiversity.

A return to nature is the best for our environment. As the South Bay becomes increasingly  
crowded with development, it is critical that Blackberry Farm and the Stevens Creek riparian  
area be retained as environmental jewels in our City and for the region.

I have heard the comment that golf is good for older people. However, many elderly people  
can no longer golf. They may be able to walk, or to sit in a wheelchair and watch nature  
around them. Teaching their grandchildren about nature will be a marvelous inheritance.

Our City has supported the environment in many ways. The Bird-safe Design and Dark Skies  
Ordinance is a valuable way to preserve wildlife health and human health. Another support is  
in the accomplishments of the Climate Action Plan. By adding this jewel of a property to its  
open space system, the City will strengthen the sustainability of the City.

Wildlife, from fish to birds, to squirrels and rabbits, to bees and butterflies, will thrive, delight,  
and strengthen coming generations of residents. Residents, current and future, will thank the  
City for doing this today.

Thank you for this time to speak.

Connie Cunningham

**From:** [Peggy Griffin](#)  
**To:** [City of Cupertino Parks and Recreation Commission](#); [City of Cupertino Bike and Ped Commission](#)  
**Cc:** [City Clerk](#)  
**Subject:** FW: 2022-09-08 BBF Item #1 Peggy's Slide for Public comments  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 8:31:06 PM  
**Attachments:** [Peggys Comments-Dead Zone.pdf](#)

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**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Commissioners,

This photo is an example of how our city is NOT able to plant and maintain natural habitat. It's a dead zone! The creek trail from McClellan Ranch has been closed for a long time. Additional trails are closed because of invasive plants.

Keep the golf course!

Sincerely,  
Peggy Griffin

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**From:** Peggy Griffin <[griffin@compuserve.com](mailto:griffin@compuserve.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 7:13 PM  
**To:** [parcsandrecreationcommission@cupertino.org](mailto:parcsandrecreationcommission@cupertino.org)  
**Cc:** 'City Clerk' <[CityClerk@cupertino.org](mailto:CityClerk@cupertino.org)>  
**Subject:** 2022-09-08 BBF Item #1 Peggy's Slide for Public comments

Dear City Clerk,

Please display this PDF when I speak on Item #1 during this meeting.

Thank you,  
Peggy Griffin

