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Hansen's Sunday Notebook: Enke, Silverbell in trouble

Courses could be made into recreation facilities or leased to management firm to end money drain



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Two of Tucson City Golf's five courses, money-draining Silverbell and Fred Enke, are doomed.

That much became ominously clear last week when Doris Pulsifer, chief of resources for Arizona State Parks, outlined how both courses could legally be converted to parks and recreation properties.

At a meeting of the Tucson City Golf Greens Committee, Pulsifer said the golf courses could be

turned into "some form of outdoor public recreation," as permitted via a federal grant partnership that was created when Silverbell opened in 1979 and Fred Enke in 1983.

Both courses are losing money significantly; play on the city's muni golf courses is down almost 38 percent in the last 10 years, carrying a deficit of more than \$6 million.

The only way to save golf at Silverbell and Fred Enke is to lease them to a private buyer. If someone comes forth and is willing, it would have to be approved by the City Council.

That should be a no-brainer; wouldn't leasing the courses for even \$1 a year be better than continuing to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars each year?

Fred Gray, director of Tucson Parks and Recreation, did not make a recommendation last week, but said, "We know we can't do nothing; we have to do something."

The root problem is that a city's Parks and Recreation Department isn't suited to be in the golf business in the 21st century. You need business minds, management groups and marketing people operating golf courses, not golfers.

The competition among the 51 Southern Arizona golf courses is brutal; web entities such as golfnow.com have siphoned off business in an industry already reeling from America's economic struggle.

Greens committee member David Kopec said, "The existing model is going to kill us."

If it's not dead already.