Amenities Have to Earn Their Square Footage

Part 5 of Golf's Reinvestment Era

Golf facilities are being asked to do more than they used to.

They are still places to play. But increasingly, they are also places to practice, gather, eat, learn, entertain, host, celebrate, work, and spend time with people who may or may not identify as traditional golfers. That shift is real. The National Golf Foundation's 2025 participation research highlights a broader golf audience that includes on-course players, off-course participants, beginners, juniors, women, people of color, and a continually expanding pool of non-golfers who say they are very interested in playing. (Source: National Golf Foundation, *Golf Participation in the U.S. – 2025*)

That growth creates opportunity. It also creates pressure.

When more people are engaging with golf in more ways, it is natural for owners, boards, municipalities, and developers to look at the facility differently. The clubhouse becomes more than a check-in point. The patio becomes more than overflow seating. The range becomes more than a warm-up area. Simulator bays, event lawns, lounges, family zones, dining rooms, and social spaces start to look like ways to extend the season, broaden the customer base, and create new revenue.

But this is where discipline matters.

A space does not become strategic because it looks good in a rendering. It becomes strategic when it creates repeat use, supports the operating model, improves the guest experience, and helps the facility become useful across more days, seasons, and customer types.

Empty square footage is not modernization.

The question is not whether golf facilities should add more amenities. Many should. The better question is whether each amenity has a clear job inside the business. Does it bring people back? Does it support year-round relevance? Does it help staff operate more efficiently? Does it create a reason to visit beyond an 18-hole round? Does it fit the facility's actual market, labor model, and financial reality?

That is the utilization discipline golf's reinvestment era now requires.

Facilities are not just spending to look better. The best ones are spending to work better.

The Utilization Test

The modern amenity conversation should start with a simple test:

What job does this space perform?

That question sounds basic, but it changes the conversation. It moves the facility away from "Should we add this?" and toward "What operating outcome are we trying to create?"

A dining room may be intended to increase food and beverage revenue. But is it also supposed to support outings, leagues, weddings, community meetings, member retention, junior programming, or shoulder-season activity?

A patio may improve the atmosphere. But does it create a reason to stay longer after a round? Does it help capture non-golf traffic? Can it be staffed consistently? Does it work during more than one part of the day?

A simulator space may create winter revenue. But is it designed around league play, instruction, fittings, corporate events, social golf, member practice, or new-player development? The answer matters because each use case carries a different staffing model, pricing model, reservation rhythm, marketing plan, and guest expectation.

This is where utilization discipline becomes important.

The industry has plenty of demand signals. But broader interest does not automatically turn into stronger facility performance.

A facility can have a beautiful event room that sits dark most weekdays. It can have a patio that fills on perfect-weather Fridays but does little in March, November, or weekday afternoons. It can have simulator bays that are busy for the first few months and then fade because no one built the programming engine around them.

That is not a design problem only. It is an operating model problem.

Every square foot should be asked to justify its role in the business. Not because facilities should be cold or overly transactional, but because capital is too important to be guided by aesthetics alone. The most valuable spaces are the ones that help the facility serve more people, more often, with a clearer path to revenue, retention, and community relevance.

Amenities should not be judged only by whether people like them.

They should be judged by whether people come back because of them.

The Programming Gap

The best amenities are not just built. They are programmed.

That distinction matters because a space can be physically complete and still operationally unfinished.

A simulator bay is not a winter strategy by itself. A patio is not a social strategy by itself. A renovated dining room is not an event strategy by itself. These spaces only begin to create value when the facility knows how they will be used, who they are for, how often they should be active, how they will be staffed, how they will be priced, and how they connect back to the broader guest experience.

This is where many amenity projects underperform.

The capital project gets completed, the ribbon gets cut, the photos look strong, and the early curiosity is real. But after the opening energy fades, the facility still has to answer the harder operating questions.

What happens on Tuesday night?

What happens in February?

What happens when the outing calendar slows down?

What happens when the same staff is expected to manage golf operations, food and beverage, events, lessons, leagues, and simulator bookings without a clearer workflow?

A space needs a programming plan before it can become a utilization asset.

That does not mean every amenity has to become complicated. In many cases, simple and repeatable programming is the advantage. Weekly leagues. Instruction blocks. Family nights. Corporate rental windows. Beginner clinics. Member practice hours. Community events. Fitting days. Watch parties. Private group packages. Shoulder-season calendars.

The point is not to add activity for the sake of activity. The point is to give the space a rhythm.

That operating discipline is becoming more important as golf facilities evaluate reinvestment through a business lens. The NGCOA's 2025 Golf Business Pulse Report was developed to help golf courses understand emerging trends, critical issues, and insights for optimizing operations. (Source: National Golf Course Owners Association, *2025 Golf Business Pulse Report*)

Before the facility asks, "What should we build?" it should also ask, "What will this space do on a normal week?"

Because the normal week is where modernization either proves itself or starts to fade.

The Operating Reality

Amenities create opportunity, but they also create obligations.

Every new space has to be opened, cleaned, staffed, scheduled, maintained, marketed, supervised, and measured. That does not make amenities a bad investment. It just means the operating model has to be honest before the capital is committed.

A patio may increase dwell time, but only if service can keep up.

A larger dining room may support events, but only if the facility has the staff, calendar, menu discipline, and service standards to make those events profitable.

A simulator space may extend the season, but only if someone owns the booking flow, customer communication, league structure, pricing, tech support, and follow-up.

A family area may broaden the facility's appeal, but only if it fits safely and naturally into the guest journey instead of feeling like an afterthought.

This is why amenities should be evaluated with more than enthusiasm. They should be evaluated against staffing reality, seasonality, margin, maintenance burden, customer mix, and repeat-use potential.

That lens matters because labor remains one of the clearest operating constraints in hospitality and recreation. The National Restaurant Association's 2025 State of the Restaurant Industry report points to continued pressure around recruitment, labor costs, and operating performance, which matters for golf facilities because many amenity strategies depend on food, beverage, events, service, and hospitality execution. (Source: National Restaurant Association, *2025 State of the Restaurant Industry*)

That does not mean facilities should avoid hospitality-driven spaces. In many cases, those spaces are essential to making the property more useful, social, and financially resilient.

But the question has to be practical:

Can we operate this well on a normal day?

Not just during the grand opening. Not just during peak season. Not just when the general manager is personally carrying the plan. On a normal weekday, with the staff the facility actually has, the customer patterns the market actually shows, and the margins the business actually needs.

That is where strong projects separate themselves.

The best amenity investments do not simply add square footage. They add usable capacity. They reduce friction. They give guests more reasons to return. They help staff serve people more consistently. They make the facility easier to understand, easier to schedule, and easier to enjoy.

A space that cannot be operated well will eventually disappoint everyone: the guest, the staff, the board, the owner, and the budget.

A space that earns its square footage does the opposite. It makes the facility work better.

Year-Round Relevance Is Usefulness, Not Excess

Year-round relevance is not about adding more things.

It is about making the facility useful more often.

That distinction is important because the pressure to modernize can easily turn into a long list of disconnected additions. A better patio. A better bar. A simulator room. A social area. A new event space. A refreshed clubhouse. A better range experience. Each idea may have merit on its own, but the facility does not become stronger simply because the list gets longer.

It becomes stronger when those spaces work together.

A well-planned amenity strategy should help answer practical operating questions. How do we keep people engaged when the weather changes? How do we create reasons to visit outside of a tee time? How do we support outings, leagues, instruction, events, families, and casual users without overwhelming the staff? How do we build a facility that feels active across more parts of the week, not just during peak round demand?

That is the real opportunity.

But relevance is not the same as expansion.

A facility can add amenities and still feel fragmented. It can spend capital and still leave guests unsure how to use the property. It can create new spaces that look impressive but do not connect to a calendar, a pricing model, a staffing plan, or a retention strategy.

Modernization should make the facility easier to use, not harder to operate.

This is where we believe the best reinvestment conversations are becoming more disciplined. The question is no longer simply, “What can we add?” The better question is, “What should this facility become easier to do?”

Easier to visit after work.

Easier to practice in the winter.

Easier to bring family.

Easier to host a small group.

Easier to learn the game.

Easier to stay after a round.

Easier to come back next week.

That is how amenities earn their square footage. Not by filling a rendering, but by creating a clearer reason for people to return.

The facilities that get this right will not be the ones with the longest amenity list. They will be the ones that understand the operating role of every space they build. That is where the industry conversation is moving. The NGCOA's 2025 Golf Business Pulse Report frames the year ahead around trends and critical issues affecting golf facility operations, with deeper analysis across operations, agronomy, and marketing. (Source: National Golf Course Owners Association, *2025 Golf Business Pulse Report*)

That matters because amenities sit at the intersection of all three.

They affect operations because they require staffing, scheduling, service standards, and workflow.

They affect agronomy and property planning because they influence how people move through and use the facility.

They affect marketing because they shape the reasons people visit, return, gather, practice, and spend time on-site.

So the standard has to be higher than, "Will people like this?"

The better standard is, "Will this make the facility work better?"

That is the heart of utilization discipline. In this next phase of golf's reinvestment era, square footage has to prove its purpose. Amenities have to support the business, serve the customer, respect the staff, and create repeatable value across more than peak-season demand.

Empty square footage is not modernization.

Useful square footage is.

And the facilities that understand the difference will be the ones that turn reinvestment into lasting operating strength.

Source List

National Golf Foundation, *Golf Participation in the U.S. – 2025*
Used for participation context, including the continued expansion of on-course, off-course, beginner, junior, women, people of color, and latent-demand segments.

National Golf Course Owners Association, *2025 Golf Business Pulse Report*
Used for operating-discipline context, including emerging trends and critical issues affecting golf course operations, with analysis across operations, agronomy, and marketing.

National Restaurant Association, *2025 State of the Restaurant Industry*
Used for hospitality operating context, especially labor, staffing, recruitment, and cost pressures that affect food, beverage, event, and service-heavy amenity strategies.