

The Rusty Putter: Why Is a \$3.5 Million Renovation Moving Forward

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By Michael Gordon, Del Webb Ave Maria Homeowner

After attending the June 30th Board meeting on the proposed rebranding and renovation of the Rusty Putter, I left with more questions than when I walked in the door. What I expected would be a transparent discussion about the future of our community restaurant instead felt more like a presentation of a decision already made. I'm sharing the following not as criticism, but as a concerned resident seeking clarity — and hoping to start a thoughtful conversation among neighbors.

A Costly Proposal with a Troubling History

At the meeting, the Developer-controlled HOA Board noted that **it's not uncommon for community restaurants to operate at a loss.**

That statement alone should give any homeowner pause — especially as the Board is now promoting a **\$3.5 million rebranding and renovation** of our community's restaurant, **The Rusty Putter.**

Since opening in 2016, the Rusty Putter has **never once broken even**, let alone turned a profit. According to the HOA's provided Profit & Loss statements, the association reported a cumulative **net operating deficit of \$1,889,834** for the period of 2020 through 2024. Despite this consistent track record of financial failure, the Developer now wants residents to pay **\$2.5 million of the renovation cost**, while contributing only **\$1 million themselves.**

A Project Without Resident Vision — But With Resident Dollars

What's most concerning is that this plan is being presented as something the community "asked for" — yet no surveys, focus groups, or open design sessions were held prior to the proposal being unveiled. Residents weren't asked:

- What type of restaurant or amenity they truly want
- Whether a full-service restaurant is even the best use of the space
- What kind of concept would keep them coming back — or attract new interest
- Whether they support another large investment into a historically unprofitable operation

Instead, residents were shown a **polished flipbook**, complete with professional renderings, branding, and multiple floor plan options — all fully developed **before** any community feedback was invited.

What Was Done *Before* Homeowners Were Involved?

Let's be clear: this wasn't a rough idea seeking community input. This was a **fully crafted, internally developed vision** handed to homeowners after the creative and strategic decisions were made.

Here's what the Developer appears to have done prior to even presenting the idea to the community:

Commissioned Architectural Renderings & Floor Plans

Multiple floor plan options (bar/lounge, booth seating, etc.) with room dimensions and layouts — likely created by professionals.

Estimated cost: \$25,000–\$50,000

Developed a Complete Branding Package

New name, logo, taglines like “The Best of Then & Now” and “New Energy, Same Heart,” and stylized messaging.

Estimated cost: \$5,000–\$15,000

Produced a Professionally Designed Flipbook

A multi-page marketing document with conceptual visuals, design themes, and promotional language.

Estimated cost: \$3,000–\$7,000

Crafted Marketing Copy and Messaging

Content clearly designed to evoke emotion and pre-sell the concept to residents.

Estimated cost: Up to \$5,000

Prepared Construction Cost Estimates

To arrive at a \$3.5 million proposal, internal costing or feasibility planning had to occur — though no formal operating projections or break-even models have been shared with the community.

In total, it's likely that \$45,000 to \$100,000+ was spent before a single homeowner vote — all without homeowner involvement in the creative or strategic process.

Why Does This Matter?

Because when a Developer says they're delivering "what the community wants," but did **not involve the community** in shaping the vision — that's not partnership. That's marketing.

If it's generally accepted that community restaurants often lose money, then why build another one using a similar model, with the same lack of financial accountability, and ask homeowners to shoulder the majority of the cost?

Why invest millions in a restaurant that has never been profitable — without presenting a new operating model, accountability plan, or strategy to prevent further losses?

What Do Residents Deserve?

This isn't about opposing improvement. It's about demanding **responsible, inclusive, and transparent decision-making**.

Residents deserve:

- A genuine seat at the table before big decisions are made
- A chance to shape the concept — not just pick between prepackaged floor plans
- Full transparency on long-term operational costs, projected losses, and risk
- A plan that supports sustainability, not just aesthetics

Final Thought

If the Developer wishes to propose a new vision for this amenity, they should do it **with the community, not for the community** — and certainly not at the community's expense without full transparency and participation.

Before spending \$2.5 million of homeowner funds on a rebranded version of a restaurant that has never succeeded, let's ask the hard questions — and insist on honest answers.