Suggested headline:

*There are worse ways to spend tax dollars*

It’s been about 40 years since a couple of friends dragged me to Beloit’s Krueger Haskell Municipal Golf Course for the silly purpose of whacking a stupid ball and then chasing it.

Little did I know. The hook was set. I know – mixed metaphor, about fishing, not golf, but it works.

I was pretty bad then. Not much has changed with time.

But scoring well was not our purpose. It was all about spending time together with close friends, in a beautiful space beneath blue skies – yes, even in Wisconsin, the sun shines occasionally. I confess, beer was usually involved. After a round, after settling bets, after some food and more beer, a little liar’s poker marked a satisfying end to the evening.

Perfection.

This reminiscing comes to mind as the City of Beloit – which owns Krueger Haskell – once again has decided to take a look at farming out the venerable course to private management. I get it. The course, like most munis, usually loses money and sniffing around for a better deal amounts to due diligence for taxpayers.

Or so it seems.

There’s a reason Beloit has kept the track in-house despite repeated studies for privatizing course management. The existing arrangement seems to work in every way except turning a profit. Generations of golfers have loved the course. Regulars pony up for season passes and golf almost every day, then idle away time in the clubhouse. It’s hard to find out-of-town golfers within driving distance who have not yet played Krueger, and usually have good things to say about upkeep at the course.

Still, it loses money. Not as much as it used to; the subsidy is around $50,000 a year, sometimes less.

Here’s my thought – So what?

A good community subsidizes lots of amenities. Parks, pools, playgrounds, even cemeteries. What’s wrong with kicking in a little to bridge the gap between revenues and expenses for a people’s golf course?

Maybe it’s just me, but I have a theory. A lot of taxpayers don’t play golf, and golf often is stereotyped as a rich man’s game. There’s truth in that. Private golf clubs can be eye-poppingly expensive, allowing the well-heeled to avoid rubbing polo shirts with the common folks. Hackers like me won’t be playing the kind of courses shown on television during professional tournaments.

Most cities, though, offer public golf that meets an egalitarian need, allowing everyday adults and youth to play for modest fees. Extending relatively small subsidies to accommodate play for the working class seems worth the money.

That’s not to say City Hall is out of bounds – this one’s a golf metaphor – by taking a look. Taxpayers should expect occasional studies. But I’ll be surprised if the process results in a strong case for change.

I don’t play golf at Krueger very often anymore. That has nothing to do with the course. When I do play there the course is well maintained and it’s a fun day. As my sons grew up and settled within an hour of home, it made more sense to travel for golf. Because it’s still not about scores, it’s about hanging with them. Golf, at its best, is a game that brings people together.

I still think of Krueger as the “home” course, though, filled with memories of good friends – some of whom have gone on to the big course in the sky – and the place where I taught, sort of, my boys how to hit the ball.

I suppose generations of Beloiters – like muni lovers everywhere -- feel the same way.

**Another thought**

To keep the peace and avoid picking a fight I’d probably lose, the names and places shall remain anonymous.

Here are three yard signs I’ve seen recently: (1) Let’s Go Brandon; (2) We the People are P----- Off; and (3) the worst of all, F— Joe Biden.

Forget for the moment, please, the partisan element. I’m writing about decency.

All these banners are in plain sight. For children. Grandmothers. Everybody.

Growing up on the farm years ago, working every day around men, I heard all the words. Dad tried to give me perspective. He said, “Being around men all day I know all the words, and so will you. Some of these guys couldn’t talk if they couldn’t cuss. But what you hear shouldn’t be repeated, especially around women and kids.”

How did we go from that to all these banners in plain sight? Or, for that matter, to people wearing shirts – or tattoos – with the kind of language I heard in the barn lot?

No wonder too many kids are unmoored. We can’t expect them to display decency if their role models refuse.

*Bill Barth is the former Editor of the Beloit Daily News, and a member of the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame. Write to him at bbarth@beloitdailynews.com.*