



## A Putt-Putt Course Will Make You See L.A.'s Housing Crisis in a New Light

Yeah, we never thought we'd write those words in a headline either. Life is crazy.

[September 19, 2017 Zoie Matthew Art, Politics, Urban Development](#)

Ever wondered how Skid Row became a hub for the homeless? Why Koreatown is so dense? Or what the heck got L.A. into its current housing crisis? The answers to these questions are complex—a lot of it has do with zoning, and as we learned from the [hubbub surrounding Measure S](#) earlier this year, even the savviest Angelenos have a hard time sorting out our city's messy planning process. But here's some happy news for amateur urbanists: thanks to a new exhibit at the [Skid Row Museum and Archive](#) (250 S. Broadway), understanding development in L.A. no longer needs to be a tedious chore.

“[The Back 9](#),” which runs through November 12th, is a miniature golf course that takes on some big questions about the L.A. housing crisis. Designed in collaboration with the artist Rosten Woo, it features eight interactive holes that break down topics like density, affordability and policy with colorful dioramas and clever conceptual mechanisms. Take, for instance, hole No. 4, a maze-like map of L.A.'s community plans that asks visitors to navigate their ball from the wealthy, sprawling areas at the fringes of the city to the poorer, denser neighborhoods in the center. Or hole No. 2, which turns the controversial [Costa-Hawkins Act](#) into a windmill that players putt through to achieve “inclusionary zoning.”



Photo by Zoie Matthew

Golf and zoning laws might not seem like the most obvious mash-up, but Los Angeles Poverty Department founder John Malpede says it's an apt metaphor for the way so many planning decisions are made in Los Angeles—on the “back nine” at the golf course and in the back rooms at city hall.

“There’s a lot of assumptions made about the future that are cooked into the plan prior to the public community conversation about it,” says Malpede. With L.A. in the midst of one of the largest zoning code overhauls in city history, he wants to make sure Angelenos understand how and why their neighborhoods are changing—particularly in vulnerable downtown communities like Skid Row.

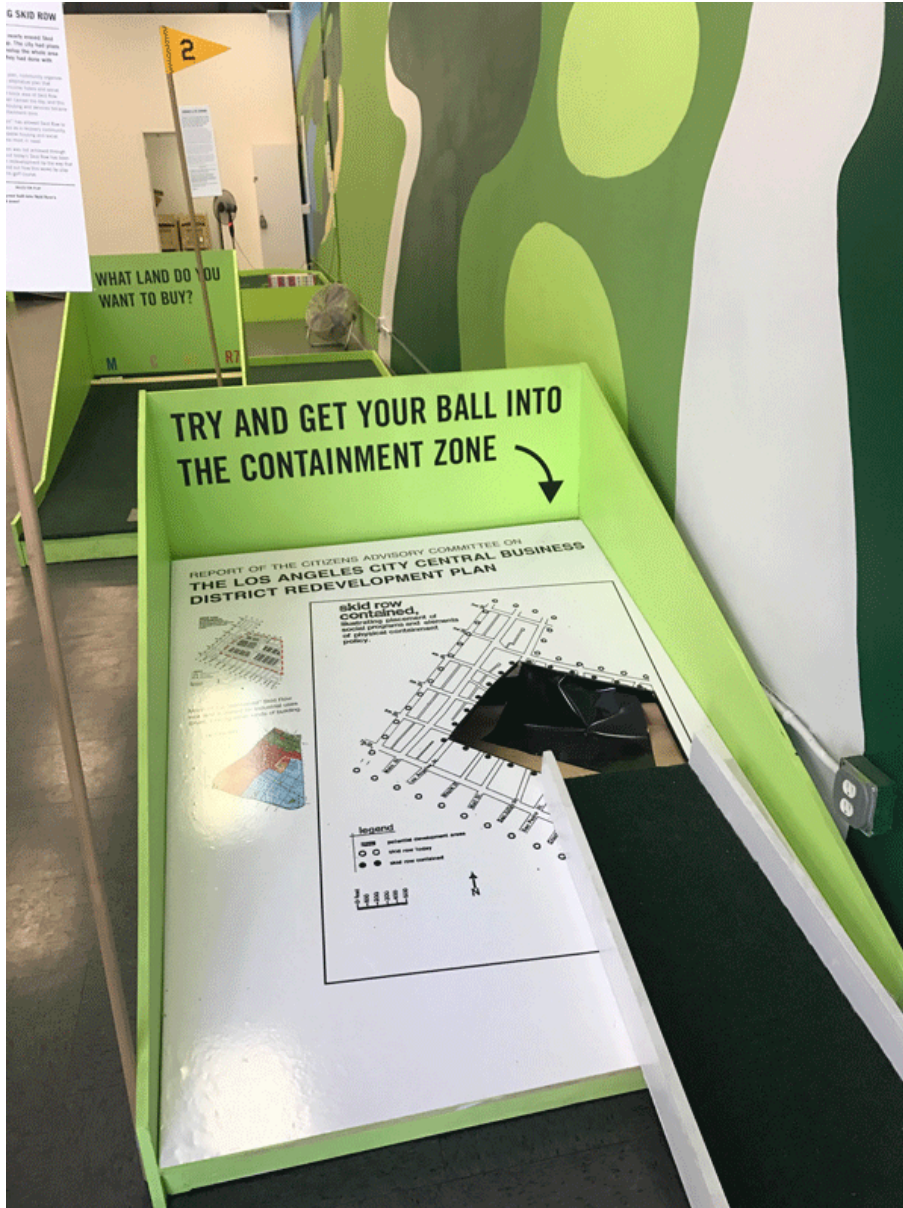


Photo by Zoie Matthew

So do a little putting and learn a little about land use—but don't expect to make par. "It's a very difficult course, it turns out," says Malpede with a laugh. He explains that when Woo designed the exhibit, he thought lack of space in the museum would make the course too easy—so he found ways (like that pesky windmill!) to make each hole extra challenging. "I was happy to read on the score card that it says ten strokes is the maximum at any hole," says Malpede. "Then you've gotta stop."

The [Skid Row Museum and Archive](#) is open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 2-5 pm, or by appointment.

**RELATED:** [How Skid Row Became a Gathering Place for the Homeless](#)

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