Nothing like spreading mulch to spruce up the beds when it's the leaky pipes that need fixing.

In what can only be described as a shift from selling steak to selling sizzle, the Cleveland Indians under the direction of president-in-waiting Mark Shapiro have turned their attention from the product on the field to the product around the field and they'd like it very much if you did the same.

Crain's Cleveland Business reported this week that the Indians have solicited bids from various local and national architectural firms to, in the words of Indians' vice president of public relations Bob DiBiasio, "reshape and revive [Progressive Field]."

The intention is to make the ballpark even more fan-friendly, which is code for making the ballpark the destination and not the team.

As a business plan, it's a risky and bizarre endeavor. The Indians are currently last in attendance in the American League, trailing only Toronto. They also possess the second worst record in the entire major leagues and have a roster comprised of overpriced underperformers and middling prospects from questionable trades.

I don't mean to be such a cynic, but my current working theory is that the Indians aren't drawing fans because the team stinks. It would be one thing if they were losing most of their games 13-9. At least there would be some fireworks most nights. But they are losing games in such a mind numbing and tedious fashion that just hanging around for all 9 innings requires a level of endurance that most people just don't have anymore.

Apparently, though, mine is just an unproven working theory. To the Indians' deep thinkers, attendance would be greatly improved if there were a few more diversions to distract the fans from what's actually taking place between the lines.

That's why, according to Crain's, the Indians are close to announcing the hiring of an architectural firm, likely Populous, formerly HOK Sport which built Jacobs Field, to spruce things up a bit. Talk about a solution in search of a problem.

Crain's quotes DiBiasio as saying that the Indians are currently working on a strategic plan that "encompasses…the wants and needs of our fans from a variety of issues that matter most, including sightlines, culinary trends, comfort (and) the audio/visual experience to name a few."

Ah, that's what's missing from Progressive Field, a world class audio/visual experience. Personally, if I were naming a few of the wants and needs of the fans, I'd start with a massive overall of the mix of players in the everyday lineup. But that's just me. Maybe some others would identify a desire to overhaul the ownership and management structure that has convinced themselves that all this franchise needs to attract more fans is a ferris wheel in center field and a better brand of hot dogs in the concession stands.

The article goes on to note that with the Indians struggling to sell suites, they've taken to using some of that space for other needs such as a presidential suite and a "FanCave" that features video games, a billiards table, a wall of HDTVs and "other unique amenities."

Not to rain on the Indians' parade, but as John McEnroe might say, you can't be serious? If a buddy of mine called me up and said "Gary, let's head down to Progressive Field, plop down 10 bucks to park another 20 to get inside so we can play some pool while we watch the game on

television" I'd look at him like I do my wife when she asks me if these pants make her butt look big, dumbfounded.

If you want to play billiards, drink beer and watch the Indians on television, there's about 100,000 places in Lakewood alone where it's infinitely cheaper and more convenient to do that than Progressive Field.

Perhaps the most unintentionally funny quote in the article came from Mark Rosentraub, a professor of sports management that Crains sought out for insight. Rosentraub surmised that the Indians were "looking at their underperforming areas and asking 'How can we restructure?'"

I guess if you're specialty is sports marketing, that might be how you think. But if your job involves actually running the Indians and you are indeed looking at underperforming areas, I'd start with their draft department. The only everyday player in the lineup originally signed by the Indians is Jhonny Peralta.

But why dwell on the tough stuff? It's far easier I suspect to focus on underperforming areas like concession stands and video parlors as if that somehow holds the magic bullet for improving the financial bottom line.

The Indians supposedly are looking at teams like the Washington Nationals for inspiration. Oh boy. In Nationals Park there is a sports bar in left-center field where you can pay $20 for a ticket and free food. If it's a rousing success, you could have fooled me.

Two weeks ago I found myself in the nation's capital with a little free time one night and ventured over to Nationals Park to watch Washington play Colorado. I wouldn't say that the Nationals are struggling with attendance but I would say that on most nights, including this particular weekday, the Chuck-E-Cheese in Decatur, Illinois is more crowded.

I had a great seat, how could I not? After all, I bought my ticket at the box office about 10 minutes before the game started. Around the second inning I ventured up to their food court where they were advertising Italian sausage sandwiches. I tried to order one but was informed

that they were already out. When I asked how that could be possible, the forlorn and completely underworked clerk admitted they hadn't really made any because most of the time they just go to waste. I settled for a lousy hot dog made worse by bad mustard.

When I ventured out toward the vaunted left-center field bar, there were plenty of seats available. The few that were there were watching the Washington Capitals in the NHL playoffs seemingly oblivious that the Nationals were not only playing but, for once, winning. I surmised that they must not have even realized they were in a ballpark, saw what looked like a local sports bar, wandered in and treated the ticket price as a cover charge.

If this is the future the Indians see for themselves, then this franchise is in a far deeper mess than initially imagined.

You can only distract the fans for so long. Indians' management is delusional if they think that attendance is suffering because Progressive Field has grown long in the tooth. If anything, the only thing to like about the team at the moment is that it already plays in a ballpark that is both beautiful and comfortable. About the only thing most people would change about it is the beer prices.

Look, I'm all for improving the "game day experience" and maybe a half dozen more fans per game may show up if a softer brand of toilet paper is installed in the restrooms. But as long as the words "game day" are in that phrase, sustained improvement in attendance will only occur when fans have a reason to watch this team. Until then, it's just mostly worthless window dressing meant to distract the fans from the real problems, kind of like addressing the need for a right-handed hitter by signing the left-handed Russell Branyan.