

**OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
BOARD MEETING
AUGUST 21, 2014**

ATTENDANCE: Clyde Mount, Chair; Jerry Crowley, David Hollar, John McKenna, Elsa Obuchowski, Jerry Crowley, Paul Cifatte, Joseph Kendy, Ernie DesRochers, David Hollar, Bill Waters

STAFF: Shelly Guyer, Executive Director; Ed Ruiz, Golf Pro; Jim Schnell, Golf Course Superintendent.

ABSENT: None

CALL TO ORDER.

Mr. Mount called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. A quorum was present

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES - JULY 17, 2014.

The following correction was noted:

Page 1, under **ATTENDANCE** and forward: please change “Jerry Crowly” to “Jerry Crowley”

**** MS. OBUCHOWSKI MOVED THE MINUTES OF JULY 17, 2014.**

**** MR. CIFATTE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF JULY 17, 2014 AS CORRECTED PASSED WITH 10 IN FAVOR AND ONE ABSTENTION (DESROCHERS).**

PUBLIC COMMENT.

Mr. Mount requested that all comments be kept to three minutes.

Mr. Paul Cantor of Fallow Street came forward and spoke about the RFP morphing into a Master Plan. Mr. Cantor listed a number of things such as the removal of trees, blasting of rock and general construction that would make the park less accessible. He said that this would have a negative impact on Oak Hills. The Total Driving Range Solution plan lacks vision and not appropriate for Oak Hills Park. He then asked Mr. Mount to respond by stating what commitments have been made to Total Driving Range Solutions. He said that he believed the Authority owed the public an explanation.

Ms. Jane Walters thanked Mr. Guyer for the recent Ladies Club Championship event and said that she felt that she was participating in a very professional event. She said that she had a good time. The course is in great shape and friends are asking to play the course. She said that there was a backup on the course with the 9 minute tee times. She suggested that the tee time be changed to 10 minutes. Rangers are doing a great job, but they are too friendly. Her last comment was about the rate sheet. Ms. Walters said that the rate sheet was confusing in terms of

separating the 9 hole rates and clarify the wording.

Ms. Yvonne Lopaur of Fillow Street came forward and said she had four questions. She wanted to know whether the Authority had gotten Audubon certification because she was concerned about contamination. She wished to know if the public is informed when the chemicals are being applied. Ms. Lopaur said that this should be published in Nancy on Norwalk and The Hour. She wanted to know when the soil remediation would be done. She pointed out it's been on the agenda since January. She also wanted to know when the unsightly mess by the tennis courts would be removed.

Mr. Aaron Carr came forward and said that he appreciates the work that the group is doing. He speaks with numerous people and the consensus is that there needs to be a practice range. He said that he would like to see the improvements move beyond just the greens and some attention to the areas around the greens. He said that he had not heard about the soil remediation before and wanted to know how that happened.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

Mr. Mount said that he would answer some of the questions that had been raised by the public. There had been a lengthy discussion about the chemical use at the last meeting and it was summarized in the minutes of that meeting. All the chemicals can be purchased over the counter except for two of them, which have to be applied by a CT State licensed staff member. Mr. Schnell is licensed to do this. These chemicals are used by every course in the U.S.

Regarding the Audubon certification, the Authority has been working on this. This was also discussed at length by the Authority at the last meeting. The Authority is not convinced they should apply for 100% certification since it would hurt both the golfers, the course, the revenue, the park and the taxpayers. He reminded everyone that this had been stated at the May public hearing when it was announced that the Authority would try to get as close to the Audubon standards as possible. This is already underway.

Regarding the bags at the tennis court, Mr. Mount asked Mr. Cifatte to address the issue as soon as possible.

Mr. Mount said that following last month's meeting, the Authority had been informed that the State was granting them a million and a half dollars for renovations and to get the schools up and running. Mr. DesRochers has been working hard on this and there will be more to do.

Mr. Mount said that the marketing plan needs to be developed further. Last month's positive trend should continue and the course has picked up two new tournaments for 2015.

PRO'S REPORT.

Mr. Ruiz said that sales were down in the golf shop, but it was a nationwide trend.

He listed a number of recent events and the tournaments and gave a brief overview. There were 167 registered junior golfers. This was forty more golfers than last year. This is the last of 9 straight weeks of camp with approximately 130-140 campers attended.

Mr. Ruiz said that the reduced rates were working well.

Mr. Ruiz said that he received a favorable letter from a Stamford resident and passed around a copy of the letter for the Authority members to read.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT.

Mr. Schnell gave his report. The course is holding up well this summer with fair temperatures. It has not rained as much, so the water bill will be higher. Some of the spots on the fairway have been aerated and reseeded because of insect issues. Bids on some of the general maintenance issues around the park continue to arrive.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT.

Mr. Guyer said that the Senior Club Championship Tournament was scheduled for Friday, August 22nd. July rounds are up almost 18% and sales are increasing. Revenue for the month was up 10%. Adult rounds were up 9.3% from last year and senior rounds were up 16.2%.

Mr. DesRochers asked there be a break out for monthly revenue rounds and including seasonality in the report. Mr. Guyer made a note of this and indicated where the information was located in report for the Authority members.

Mr. Guyer said that the Wine and Dine event had gone well. They expected around 30 people, but 70 participated. Mr. Mount said that he had been told the restaurant had served 130 dinners that night. Mr. Guyer said that there had been a bit of a backup at the restaurant when a large group of players arrived there all at the same time. However, the solution for that will be to offer a buffet next time.

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND DISCUSSION.

Tennis/ Restaurant Liaison:

Tennis -- Mr. Cifatte spoke about the tennis courts and said that although they got off to a rough start, the season has been very good -- the best in many years. The Staff will leave after Labor Day, and the courts will remain open until the end of September.

Restaurant – The restaurant is doing well. The rent is up to date and customers are coming to the restaurant and booking events. Mr. Cifatte will be working on the issues regarding morning service.

Operations Committee - Mr. Guyer said that the feedback on the carts remains good. Ms. Walters said that her last round was 4 hours and 15 minutes. This is good, however the next group was on the first tee before she had finished playing the hole. Mr. Guyer said that he would work on enforcing the tee times. He added that he could see exactly where the carts were located. The discussion moved to how to scroll through the commercials and turn the sound down.

Mr. Mount said that there had been a discussion about the Fore Golf system. He wanted to know if the research and discussions regarding replacing the current computer system should be started now. Mr. Guyer said that the Authority would need to replace the entire POS system if a change was made. Mr. Mount said that he would like to look around and see if there was something more interactive for the customers.

Finance Committee - Mr. McKenna then reviewed the Profit and Loss sheet with the Authority members. There hasn't been much rain lately, which is good for golf but bad for the water bill. Mr. Guyer said that the audit was almost completed. The office staff has been very efficient regarding this.

Mr. Mount pointed out that there was a 21% reduction in the chemical use than last year.

Legal Committee - Mr. Kendy said that the report should be given in executive session. This will be included in the next agenda.

Marketing - The DOT has completed their review for limited access signage on the Merritt Parkway. There has also been a meeting with First Publishing company that handles the Westport News, Greenwich News, etc. regarding marketing. The reach of advertising exceeds that of The Hour and runs from Greenwich to Westport. The company can help with promotion on Facebook and designers for the newsletter.

Mr. Mount asked if there had been any thought given to painting the Oak Hills sign and cleaning it up. Mr. Ruiz said that it was on the list of things to be done. Discussion followed.

Human Resources - This will be discussed in executive session next month.

Master Plan/Driving Range - Mr. DesRochers said that he and Mr. Waters had gone to Planning and received unanimous approval for the Master Plan. Parks and Recreation has requested more time due to vacations etc. to consider the Plan. This is only an 8-24 approval for the plan and there has been no request for funding from the City at this time. The plan covers the renovations to the park and the new learning centers. When the funding is requested, there will be a formal approval process to be followed, including requesting approval from the Planning Committee and the Board of Estimate and Taxation. Mr. DesRochers said that he was happy with the Master Plan and that it was no different than Cranbury Park or Veteran's Park. He said that the Planning Committee Chairman was very pleased with the Plan, particularly with the expansion of the uses of the park.

On July 25th, OHPA had received a grant of a million and a half from the State of Connecticut through the State of Connecticut Urban Action Program, which is a program for cities where the funding will go to a variety of public uses, including public parks. Mr. DesRochers reviewed the history of this application with the help of Mr. Cafero. Despite the controversy about this, the State granted the funding to the Oak Hills Park for the tennis center, the nature learning center, and the renovation to the course. The money does not need to be paid back and is considered an equity injection for the park. This should cover almost everything including the bunkers, the cart paths, the nature center, renovating the bathrooms in the tennis center, moving the tees, electrical, plumbing and many other repairs with the single exception of the Golf Learning Center.

DEEP will be administering the grant funding. Mr. DesRochers said that he had already been in contact with Mr. David Steeger about the grant funding. The Park was acquired completed with State and Federal Grant money through a HUD program for Urban Outdoors Recreational and Open Uses. The proviso of the grant is that the Park is dedicated in perpetuity to active and passive recreational use and open space. Because it was acquired with Federal funding, there must be a provision for unfettered out of town access. Non-residents can use the park, but they can not be charged more than twice what the resident fees. Subsequent land acquisitions, such as the area behind the restaurant was acquired with State Open Space funds, which means that the entire park is dedicated for recreation and open space and must be maintained that way. There are numerous examples of the use of Federal and State funding being used for the construction of golf courses as part of the open space programs. As long as the facilities are available to the public for use, it is allowable. Mr. Steeger was very impressed with the expansion of the recreational uses of the land and at the same time, improving the conservation use.

The grant for a million and a half dollars was approved on July 25th to the City of Norwalk with the proviso that the money be used for Oak Hills Park. There will be a number of meetings about the next steps that have to be taken over the next two to three weeks.

There is a plan for the restoration of the park, such as the bunkers and tee boxes. One of the first steps will be to identify which jobs the in-house staff can do and what projects will have to be done by outside contractors. This will include working drawings and a variety of other requirements. This is one of the largest grants that the State has ever issued through this program.

Discussion followed about potential programs.

OLD BUSINESS.

Oil Tank Update - Mr. Mount said that at the last meeting it was stated that the oil tanks would be addressed as the constructions happens. The tanks had been in the ground for over 30 years when the authority was formed. Ms. Obuchowski asked about the boilers in the restaurant. Mr. DesRochers said that there were capital repairs already in the

Mayor's Trophy Update - Mr. Hollar reported that there were almost 70 players registered. There are 10 sponsors so far. The goal is 30 sponsors.

Master Plan/Driving Range CONT'D - Mr. DesRochers said that he had forgotten to mention that any contractor that is hired using the grant funding has to be approved by the State website for Department of Administrator Services. There is a pre-qualification application that must be filed with the State in order to submit a bid.

Mayor's Trophy Update - CONT'D - Mr. Mount said that the City Clerk would be doing a major e-blast for the Authority regarding the sponsorship and the enrollment. Discussion followed about asking various news sources to promote the event.

NEW BUSINESS.

Oak Hills Phase 1 Agreement.

Mr. Mount said that he had just received a revised version of the contract at 6:30 p.m. A discussion followed about the various points. Mr. Mount said that he would send copies to the Authority members for comments.

ADJOURNMENT.

**** MS. OBUCHOWSKI MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. KENDY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services