

**OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
MEETING MINUTES
June 20, 2013**

PRESENT: Bob Virgulak, Chairman; Clyde Mount; Shannon Giandurco; Ernie DesRoches; and Stephanie McLaughlin.

STAFF: Shelly Guyer, Executive Director; Ed Ruiz, Golf Pro and Jim Schell, Superintendent.

ABSENT: Mike Corsello, Vice Chairman; Paul Cifatte and Bill Kementzides.

INTERESTED PARTIES: Walter Englert

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Virgulak called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Mr. Virgulak asked the Authority Members to review the minutes of the May 16, 2013 meeting.

****MRS. GIANDURCO MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 16, 2013 MEETING.**

****MRS. MCLAUGHLIN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED. MR. MOUNT ABSTAINED.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Virgulak asked that the public to keep their comments to three minutes.

Elsa Peterson Obuchowski submitted a petition with approximately 300 signatures, "A petition calling for the Mayor of Norwalk, the Common Council and Oak Hills Park Authority to reject any driving range plan that would destroy the woodlands and nature trails at Oak Hills Park" She read some of the comments on the petition.

Tom Abron stated that he works for the radio station WEBE 108/WICC proposed that WEBE hold a golf outing at Oak Hills Park as well as agree a plan to increase their publicity and golf rounds via a barter proposition whereby Oak Hills receives free publicity in return for offering half price greens fee rate to a listener for a one time only deal. He provided the Authority a publicity packet for their review and suggested Mr. Guyer request the sales team make a formal media presentation to the Authority.

Paul Cantor asked that Oak Hills to respond to the questions about the driving range RFP that he has presented to the Authority in the past, namely, "What is the agreed upon rent OHPA expects to receive?", "What is the share of driving range gross revenue expected?", and "What financial guarantees is Oak Hills Park Authority demanding from the bidder?"

Yvonne Lopaur complained that the due date for the RFP was extended 3 times but received only one bid, and the Ad Hoc committee canceled their meeting in May. She suggested that the Oak Hills Park Authority spend time and energy demonstrating that it can cover the cost of running a fine municipal golf course instead of showing how it doesn't care that the tax payers of Norwalk Authority don't want a driving range built in the Park.

Diane CeCe advised the Park Authority that despite what the OHPA believes to be their best efforts, the RFP process hasn't been entirely transparent or inclusive of the public. She wanted the Authority to know that the service at the restaurant is poor and appears to be understaffed.

Scott Kimmick, West Norwalk Association, discussed the background of the two construction contractors that bid on the driving range RFP and the difference in their proposed driving range sites.

Kate Tepper commented that historically laws and ordinances were put in place to meet the common good of all. She stated that she doesn't object to the driving range but she does object to the proposed site of the range because it will destroy 8-9 acres in a woodland, animal habitat and nature trail area. She asked that Oak Hills Park Authority "first do no harm" by seriously considering whether the project has a chance to succeed.

Michelle Winthrop stated that her family's house sits at the top of the proposed driving range and overlooks the restaurant. She noted that her family would have a clear view of the driving range in the winter should it be constructed and that is not why they bought the house 15 years ago. She stated that due to the financial issues of the golf course at Oak Hills Park, and no fault of she or her neighbors, the Authority may remove the woodlands that buffers her house and provides recreational and natural habitat to build a driving range for which the Oak Hills Park Authority cannot ensure success. She recommended that Oak Hills Park Authority be required to present a petition of support for the driving range with signatures to the neighborhood.

Diane Loricello thanked Oak Hills for having a public comment period since many City entities do not. She stated that she is not in favor of the proposed location of the range and would prefer the alternative location. She noted that she feels that the mechanisms of the City Norwalk committee government have fallen short to protect open space and help to resolve issues and/or find alternatives to this project.

Peggy Holton stated that Oak Hills is the only area in the city that has 10 acres of mature trees and she is concerned about the wildlife and wetlands that live in that woodland.

Sharon Tamor has followed the discussions in the media and asked that the Oak Hills Park Authority consider the alternative on the table.

Peter Win stated that as a past Member of Common Council he opposed the building of the golf course and believes the woodland should be preserved as is.

Betsy Wren discussed the various open space areas which have been preserved by Norwalk residents who fought to keep the land and trees from being destroyed.

Missy Conrad spoke in the memory of Francis and Philip Raimer who volunteered and worked hard to preserve the environment in Norwalk. She stated she opposes the proposed site for the driving range.

PRO'S REPORT

Mr. Ruiz reported that the golf clientele have expressed intense enthusiasm regarding the course improvements and this will help to preserve the course regardless of the outcome of the proposed driving range.

Mr. Mount stated that 600 rounds were played over the period of last Saturday and Sunday. Mr. Ruiz contributed the increase to the 12-15 hrs a week of marketing efforts put forth by Mr. Guyer, himself and the staff with little or no money via social media.

SUPERINTENDANT'S REPORT

Mr. Schell reported that the new Assistant Superintendent started this month. He noted that he lost four staff on Memorial Day weekend but has since replaced 3 out of the 4 with people who have better skills sets.

He stated that there has been over 17.5" of rain between May and June. He noted that the annual average is 45" and so far it has rained 44.5". He reported that the course is saturated which makes it obvious where drainage improvements are necessary on the course. He stated that continued work on the drainage is a must.

He stated that the installation of the boiler in the rental house is complete. He advised the Authority that the plumbers made him aware that the water supply line to the house was old and suggested that OH get a maintenance contract for the boilers.

He reported the arborist has written a letter to notify the homeowner at the 14 green of the dead elm hanging over the fence.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Mr. Guyer reported that the rounds in May 2013 were up 4% compared to 2012, the golf revenue are up 6.5%; the cart sales are up 15%; the ID cards up over last year but resident adult rounds remained down and non-resident rounds were down this month. The Authority Members discussed this information and Mr. Guyer noted that the buzz about Oak Hills is nothing but positive.

Mr. Guyer stated that they had 101 golfers (87 seniors) play in a recent Monday shotgun tournament organized in conjunction with the restaurant. Mr. Mount noted that Oak Hills tournament schedule has only one more opening for the season. Mr. Guyer reported that Child Guidance Center has returned to play their tournament at Oak Hills.

Mr. Guyer stated that they are still entering final numbers for May financials with some assistance from Mr. Englert. He noted that the new temp office worker is doing well and all the bills are up to date.

Mr. Guyer reported that he plans to run a senior golf special in July on three different days over a three week period. Mr. Guyer reported that between 11:00 – 12:00 pm and 2:00-3:00 pm are when bookings for tee times slow down. The Authority discussed the increase in afternoon play.

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND DISCUSSION

Tennis / Restaurant Liaison Committee

Mr. Guyer read aloud Mr. Cifatte's report: Kings Highway Partners have made all scheduled payments to date and the new office staff friendly and efficient; the tennis courts are good condition, and appears that the rain has improved the court conditions however it has also resulted in courts to wet to use; the Men's 60+ tennis teams are undefeated.

As for the restaurant: Mr. Cifatte wrote that the restaurant is now fully operational and cooperation between the golf course and the restaurant owners is the best it's ever been and patron response has been very good.

Greens, Facilities & Water Use Committee

Mr. Schell reported that he has not had to buy any water recently.

Finance Committee

Mr. Virgulak noted that the Authority currently doesn't have a finance committee chairman. He noted that OHPA will make a of \$14,474.23 payment on the \$150,000 loan at a 1.90% rate to pay for operating earlier this year and capital cost of the oil tank removal.

Mr. Virgulak stated that the soil was tested after the oil tanks were removed and the test show that the soil will have to be remediated. He stated that as chairman he will not support spending golf revenue to remediate the soil and contends that the soil remediation is in the hands of Mayor and the City Common Council. He is fed up with borrowing money on the backs of the golfers to fix the deteriorating infrastructure at the Park. He stated that as far as he's concern any future capital project money that OHPA spends will be to enhance the golf course and not repair the infrastructure. The Oak Hills Park Authority discussed the removal of the last oil tank removal next to the golf shop.

Legal Committee

Mrs. McLaughlin had no information to report.

Marketing Committee

Mrs. Giandurco noted that Mr. Guyer now has the ability to change/alter golf rates as needed in Golf Now. She noted that she and Mr. Ruiz continue to update the Facebook and Twitter.

She stated that the Mayor's Tournament will be held on September 9, 2013 and the committee plans to try to get sponsorship for everything so that the tournament pays for itself and the money left over can go toward golf improvements.

Mrs. Giandurco noted that the proposal WEBE spoke of during the public comment period tonight was not presented when she and Mr. Guyer met with him. She will contact them because the proposal that includes a golf outing sounds good.

The Authority Members discussed ideas for different marketing and golf special rates.

Human Resource & Policy Committee

Mr. Mount noted that Mr. Ruiz is now a full time employee of Oak Hills Park Authority and a member of the management team.

Master Plan Committee

Mr. Mount advised the Authority Members that the committee has a lot of ideas but so much focus is on running the course they haven't been able to find time to schedule a meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. DesRoches reported that two bids for driving ranges on two different locations were received from King Golf International and Total Driving Range Solutions. Mr. DesRoches noted that there are pros and cons to both bids but that he and Mr. Mount will work with Gerald Foley to review the bids and interview the bidders. He stated that the outcome depend on the best fits for Oak Hills Park. He stated that the City financial officers Bob Barron or Tom Hamilton assist with the determining the bidders project financing.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The nominating committee Mr. DesRoches, Mrs. McLaughlin, and Mr. Cifatte made the following motion.

****MRS. MCLAUGHLIN MADE A MOTION TO NOMINATE MR. VIRGULAK AS CHAIRMAN, MR. MOUNT AS VICE CHAIRMAN AND THE TREASURER TBD.**

****MRS. GIANDURCO SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

NEW BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

****MR. DESROCHES MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****MR. MOUNT SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted,
Sheila Dravis