

**OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
MEETING MINUTES
March 20, 2014**

PRESENT: Clyde Mount, Vice Chairman; Elsa Obuchowski; Paul Cifatte; Bill Waters; John McKenna; Joe Candy and David Hollar.

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

ABSENT: Pam Works and Ernie DesRochers .

INTERESTED PARTIES: Walter Englert, CPA.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Mount called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Mr. Mount asked the Authority Members to review the minutes the February 19, 2014 meeting.

Page 1, Correction: OHPA held a special meeting on February 19, 2014 because it could not meet on its regularly scheduled meeting date of February 20, 2014.

Page 1, Correct Spelling: Interested Parties.

Page 3, Operations Ad Hoc Committee, Correct spelling: Publicly.

Page 4, Marketing Committee, 5th paragraph, "Mr. Waters noted that he read Mrs. Obuchowski's critique of the website..."

****MR. CIFATTE MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 19, 2014, SPECIAL MEETING AS AMENDED.**

****MR. MCKENNA SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED. MR. CANDY ABSTAINED.**

Mr. Mount asked the Authority Members to review the minutes the March 4, 2014 special meeting.

Page 1, Correction: Mr. Downing did not attend the special meeting on March 4, 2014

****MR. CIFATTE MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MARCH 4, 2014, SPECIAL MEETING AS AMENDED.**

****MR. WATERS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED. MR. CANDY ABSTAINED.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Mount asked that public comment be kept to three minutes.

Mr. Paul Cantor stated that after he read the OHPA strategic plan he had one key question: Does the OHPA sees itself as employees of Total Driving Range Solution or as a public body charged with promoting the interest of the Norwalk taxpayers? He stated that he believes OHPA relied on the input of TDRS not the public when it developed its strategic plan so he is not surprised that the solution to the financial problems OHP is to build a driving range as promoted by TDRS. He noted that he is surprised however that the plan has so quickly redefined the OHPA mission to become the new high quality golf market leader in the area. He reiterated that the actual mission is to manage the park so that the greens fees support the cost of the Park.

He stated that rather than OHPA admit that due to the lack of demand for 18 hole golf rounds there is little likelihood that that greens fees can cover the cost of golf course, OHPA wants to redefine its mission by working with TDRS to market the golf course outside the region in an effort to generate revenue to cover the cost to TDRS to build a driving range. He noted that OHPA does not have the right to redefine the mission or to ignore that the demand by Norwalk residents to play 18 holes of golf is not sufficient to justify an 18 hole golf course. He asked that OHPA consider what the best use for land at Oak Hills Park is because he feels that from the point of view of the Norwalk taxpayers, it is clearly not to play golf. Mr. Candy asked for the written copy of the statement.

Yvonne Lopaur read the balance of Mr. Cantor's statement. (SEE ATTACHED STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY MR. CANTOR UPON REQUEST OF MR. CANDY)

Mrs. Obuchowski reported that Diane Cece sent her a copy of her statement to be read out loud because she is sick and couldn't attend the meeting. The OHPA noted that someone else could read it but the three minute rule was still in place.

Mrs. Obuchowski read the statement which addresses Mrs. Cece's concerns with "doing due diligence on the process of park master planning as it relates to the document recently presented to the public as the "Oak Hills Park Strategic Plan" in which she states "it would be helpful for the public to be apprised of who exactly comprises the Master Plan Committee", when and where they meet? Did the Master Plan Committee take minutes? Mrs. Cece's statement noted that according to her research, there is no City Code requiring a specific process for developing master plans, but that the Purchasing and Recreation and Parks Department established a process "to ensure bidders provide full information and receive unbiased consideration of their bids". In Mrs. Cece's statement, she discusses how the City has prepared other City park master plans in the past and her interpretation of the process used by OHPA to prepare strategic plan and a master plan. (SEE ATTACHED STATEMENT)

Mr. Wren read the balance of Mrs. Cece statement.

Nick Pizano began by saying that the OHP receives approximately \$143,000 which means about 1,800 Norwalk residents play golf which he would estimate is more than the total number of residents that play softball or use the beach. Mr. Pizano stated that 1,800 is a substantial number to support an 18 hole golf course and wants the OHPA to go forward with the driving range proposal and not listen to the hand full of naysayers who want to stop any development. Mr. Pizano asked OHPA that the driving range be built first and to do a good job building it.

Mrs. Obuchowski asked if someone could read a written statement from Sharon Collet who couldn't attend the meeting. Mr. Mount advised Mrs. Obuchowski that she could read statement of her own but it would be inappropriate for her to read another person's statement who did not attend the meeting and sign up to speak.

Mr. McKenna stated that it is a resident's responsibility to attend the meeting and give their own public comment or find an alternate to attend the meeting in their place, but not ask a board member to read it just because the member will be attending the meeting. Mrs. Obuchowski apologized but she did not know the procedure and when she asked the Mayor, he advised her to do it this way.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr. Mount thanked everyone for their hard work on the new marketing campaign and preparing for opening day. He stated that he appreciates the active efforts of the Members and staff to make the Park a success. The OHPA briefly discussed the WEBE radio campaign.

PRO'S REPORT

Mr. Ruiz noted that he is tagging the merchandise he received recently and continues to get preseason golf sales from the golfers.

Mr. Ruiz reported that they continue to book tournament events, is in talks with Pepperidge Farm to arrange Tuesday night golf league, and is finalizing his instruction schedule including clinics and camps and will post it and email the registration notice on or before April 1, 2014.

Mr. Ruiz stated that in anticipation of the season start, he and Mr. Guyer have updated the software on the touchscreen terminals and put a second register online to speed up the process to pay greens fees. The OHPA and staff discussed the schedule of mini outings and tournament, sponsorship link and a key note speaker for opening day, and the preparation of a promotional handout for his golf pro services and the golf course in general.

SUPERINTENDANT'S REPORT

Mr. Schell advised the Authority that the golf course survived the winter weather and is in good shape, other than the ordinary animal tracks/footprints across greens and tees. He stated that he planned to roll the greens tomorrow and reported that the golf course would be open on Saturday, March 22, 2014.

He stated that he would level off the area over the oil tank during the season.

Mr. Schell advised the OHPA that he has checked most of the irrigation boxes and found two with minimal damage and one with catastrophic damage.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Mr. Guyer noted that the tees and greens would be open Saturday, March 22, 2014 but carts will not be available.

He reported that he will hold a meeting with the cashiers tomorrow and the outside operations personnel as well but, he isn't planning to one big employees meeting this year.

He distributed the February sales reported and commented that due to the snow the majority of the sales were for I.D. cards and sales of ID cards were much higher than last year. He stated that they had registered approximately 1,200 new emails, making the total email list about 6,400.

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND DISCUSSION

Tennis / Restaurant Liaison Committee

Mr. Cifatte advised the OHPA that the Mr. Gocke will start preparing the tennis courts in April and open to the public on May 1. Mr. Cifatte reported that Mr. Gocke attended the March 4, 2014 special meeting, giving him a better understanding of issues at Oak Hills. He noted that he and Mr. Gocke will meet soon and plan to schedule a luncheon in April with Mr. Gocke and the tennis staff. He noted Mr. Gocke told him he would plan more promotions at the tennis facility this year.

Mr. Cifatte reported that the restaurant will extend their hours in April and have a lot of specials planned in April. He asked Mr. Guyer if the restaurant has committed to opening early for breakfast for the golfers. Mr. Guyer stated that the restaurant owners have promised to serve breakfast in the restaurant and he would speak to them about opening earlier than April 15, 2014 but he feels that they should open no later than April 15, 2014. Mr. Guyer stated that the restaurant was very receptive to offering a special lunch on opening day. Mr. Mount advised Mr. Cifatte he wants to meet with him and restaurateur tomorrow.

Mr. Mount noted that comments were made at the March special meeting about the poor condition of the woman's bathroom at the tennis facility and asked Mr. Schell to inspect the facility and any necessary repairs so to ensure that the bathroom door(s) are secured for use.

Operations Ad Hoc Committee

Mr. Mount inquired on the changes to starter schedule or the addition of an outside operational supervisor. Mr. Guyer noted that the speed in which they can put the overall plan into effect will be determined by cash flow. He stated that they would like to start to stage the golf carts near the bag drop which will require a second cart staff person to take a golfers bag to a cart while the golfer parks, and bring the cart back from the cart barn for the golfer to drive to the golf shop which will place the golfer near the restaurant. Mr. Guyer noted that he doesn't think that they can afford to do this except on the weekend.

He reported that they are still reviewing the ranger schedule to find a way to cut back without hurting the pace of play. The OHPA members and staff discussed the information. Mr. Ruiz stated that none of the current employees are interested in the position of outside starter/operational supervisor.

Mr. Ruiz stated that the staff shouldn't have to explain to the golfers why the restaurant isn't open in the morning to serve the golfers. He is concerned because he expects it to be very busy on Saturday. Mr. Mount agreed that the restaurant has to understand that it is expected to be open. Mr. Guyer noted that the first tee time is 8:03 am.

Finance Committee

Mr. Guyer distributed and reviewed the February balance sheet. Mr. Guyer reported the cash position is behind last year primarily due to the restaurant's past due rent. Mr. Guyer reviewed the P & L sheet and reported the year to date numbers are higher than last year, the expenses are slightly higher and the net ordinary income is up \$34,000 to last year.

Mr. Mount noted that Mr. McKenna will give the Finance report next month. The OHPA, Mr. Englert and Mr. Guyer further discussed the financials and how to increase the February revenue.

Legal Committee

Mr. Mount noted that Attorney Avery is the Authority's legal counsel and has been with the Authority since its inception. Mr. Candy noted that he spoke to Attorney Corsello and will contact Attorney Avery for an update.

Marketing Committee

Mr. Waters reported that the WEBE multi-course golf course campaign kicked off and will continue through March 31, 2014. He stated that the 13 week promo in the Norwalk Hour will begin in April and he needs to send the Hour the ad to put on the "insert" golf ball. He stated that he and Mr. Mount hadn't gotten a chance to meet this month.

Mr. Waters reported that the newsletter was a great success. He thanked everyone for their contribution to newsletter #2 which he plans to send out April 1st with a call out to the Facebook link and forward to the friend link.

OHPA discussed opening day promotions: \$45 for new ID cards to the first 145 buyers, special golf rates and restaurant special of \$4.50. Mr. Guyer discussed the success of Group On.

Human Resource & Policy Committee

Mrs. Obuchowski reported that she hadn't a chance to read and begin reviewing the employee manual.

Master Plan Committee

Mr. Mount noted that the chairman of the Master Plan Committee, Mr. DesRochers, couldn't attend tonight's meeting. Mr. Mount distributed a copy of the Strategic Plan: A Roadmap to the Authority Members and noted that he emailed the report as well and has received some comments on it.

Mr. Mount stated that it represents how the chairman wants to move forward and includes Total Driving Range Solutions qualifications and references. He stated that OHPA was the one to initiate a conversation about writing a master plan and requested TDRS develop the OHP master plan. He noted that the committee is not doing anything illegal, it has made several inquiry's to determine whether the City had a standard procedure to develop a master plan but having found no standard procedure the OHPA determined it would follow the guidelines set forth in the Norwalk Master Plan. He stated that OHPA hasn't provided the opportunity for public comment is incorrect because the OHPA meetings provide a public comment period and a special meeting to present the strategic plan was held on March 4, 2014. He noted that the risk document displays the process the OHPA will take to develop the master plan, including two public hearings.

Mrs. Obuchowski noted that she made some inquiries and agrees that there is no formal process in the City for developing a master plan. She noted that the City's master plan is for the city as a whole and it doesn't necessarily apply to any park. She noted that various people have told her that the OHPA should interface with the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Redevelopment Agency. Mr. Mount reported that Corporation Counsel advised him that there is no process. He noted that OHPA has been accused of doing something illegal which it hasn't. Mrs. Obuchowski noted that Mrs. Cece has accused OHPA of acting unethically by hiring TDRS to write a master plan when they stand to gain from executing the same master plan, even though there isn't a law or statute that prevents OHPA from hiring TDRS.

Mrs. Obuchowski asked if OHPA feel it's a conflict of interest because OHPA didn't engage an advisory committee. Mr. Guyer replied that isn't a conflict of interest because TDRS was selected as the driving range vendor before a master plan has been written. Mr. Mount interjected that TDRS has drafted and revised the strategic plan several times and it has not cost OHPA and TDRS hasn't charged the OHPA for the changes. He noted that the OHPA only wants to develop or update the first master plan since it entered into a lease with the City in 1997 and it is trying to move forward in a transparent level to get it approved.

Mrs. Obuchowski inquired whether Attorney Avery advised OHPA about the legalities of this. Mr. Candy stated that he would contact Attorney Avery. Mr. McKenna agreed that OHPA wants to be transparent, wants the document to be iron clad and legal counsel can help to refute any interpretations and personal opinions by the public that are false and misleading.

Mrs. Obuchowski questioned where the \$3.9 million dollars budget stated in the strategic plan would come from. Mr. Mount replied that a master plan is only concerned with providing a road map to develop the park. He stated that the projects are completed when and if the financial sources to fund projects are found. Mrs. Obuchowski asked whether TDRS is responsible for the total the cost of constructing the driving range. Mr. Mount replied that the current plan is for TDRS to pay for and build the driving range, then sign a land lease with the OHPA at which time the lease ends the driving range would revert back to OHPA. Mr. Mount says the financial deal has not been negotiated.

Mr. Mount asked Mr. Candy to speak to Attorney Avery. He stated that once legal counsel gives its approval the OHPA would hold a public hearing, preferably in April. Mr. Mount noted that a walking tour is planned for Saturday, March 29, 2014. Mr. Guyer noted that if more than five members attend he must notice the meeting but if less than five attend no business can be voted on.

OLD BUSINESS

Oil Tank Update

Mr. Mount advised Mr. Schell that he spoke with the Mayor who told him to schedule a meeting next week with the Mayor, Enviro Shield, Mr. Barron, DPW and Purchasing to discuss the oil tank.

Mayor's Trophy Tournament

Mr. Hollar inquired about tournament pricing to add to the newsletter, social media and a price list. The OHPA and Mr. Guyer discussed tournament registration form, and details including pricing from the restaurant, the tournament and sponsorship fees, and items to be auction.

Boy Scout Project Update

Mr. Mount asked Mrs. Obuchowski about the proposal. Mr. Perano, Bradley's father, advised the OHPA that Bradley had a conflict couldn't attend but provided the Members with the Eagle Scout project and explained the details and timeline. Mr. Englert suggested the Eagle Scout might want to attend opening day to market the project. Mr. Waters noted that he would add the project to the newsletter.

****MRS. OBUCHOWSKI MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT PROPOSAL AND START THE PROJECT.**

****MR. WATERS SECONDED THE MOTION**

****THE MOTION PASSED. MR. CANDY ABSTAINED.**

NEW BUSINESS

No new business was discussed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Mount called the OHPA meeting into executive session at 8:35 p.m.

The OHPA returned from executive session at 8:53 p.m. Mr. Mount stated that no action was taken under executive session.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

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

****MR. MCKENNA SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted, Sheila Dravis