

Oak Hills Park Authority
MINUTES
FOR MEETING On
Thursday, January 15, 2015

The regular meeting will begin at 7:00pm in Room 101
Norwalk City Hall

1. Call to Order 7:05 PM

Present: Mr. Bill Waters, Mr. Jerry Crowley, Mr. Paul Cifatte, Ms. Elsa Obuchowski, Mr. Clyde Mount, Mr. John McKenna

Staff: Mr. Shelly Guyer, Mr. Ed Ruiz, Mr. Jim Schell, Wally Englert

Absent: Ernie DesRochers, Joe Kendy, David Hollar

Others: Anthony Carrano, West Norwalk Assn. President and member of Oak Hills Park Nature Advisory Committee; Jeff Gocke, principal in Kings Hwy Partnership (tennis program)

2. Acceptance of Minutes - December 18, 2014

Corrections: see Ms. Obuchowski's corrections in track Mr. Ruiz changes on Word document

p. 4 Operations Committee, 4th line s/b "it would have to barter 2 tee times" (Mr. Crowley)

**** MR. WATERS MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 18, 2014 MEETING AS CORRECTED .**

**** MR. CIFATTE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 18, 2014 MEETING AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. Public Comment (3 minutes per person)

Frank Bisceglia: For 3-5 weeks I have been going up the chain of command. We (the golf course) needs to borrow \$26K, I want to put a dent in that with 5-packs. Sell me 16 or 20 or 25 5-packs, I could give you my cred card and you'd have \$2K right now. We're always borrowing, why not delete some of this? 16 is 80 rounds, 4 months, April-May-June-July, M-F only, I save. I pay \$29 weekends. I played the most rounds played of anybody in CT last year. July-Nov are 4 more months, that's 80 more rounds, and I will be playing them at the rate agreed upon. How many rounds does the average person in a year play? It's a win-win-win, everybody wins, I save, you get money up front. I don't want to go to Fairchild Wheeler. \$2,680 and I'm paying you near \$6,000 of your new rates. All I'm asking is let me give you money. I thought we were going to have the season pass, that's what I was told.

Yvonne Lopaur: Environmental concerns and importance of preserving trees. Unnecessary and harmful changes in preparation for driving range. Superintendent marked healthy trees to be cut down because "nuisance." Healthy trees should not be cut down just because it makes playing a given hole a bit less tricky. In the interest of all the residents, superintendent should not cut down any trees unless they are dead. Trees should not be cut down to make room for driving range. It is not just the trees in the nature area, people care about all the trees in the park. You cannot justify cutting down trees by saying you are not cutting trees somewhere else. Cart barn is to be

taken down to make room for driving range. Should not waste money on tearing them down and reconstructing in another location.

Aaron Karp: Avid golfer, ~130 rounds last year. Team is doing an excellent job. I want to represent those taxpayers who want the golf course improved. We are getting bogged down by a bunch of little things. We would like to see a golf course worthy of the experience. I don't go to Cranbury, I don't go to the beach, my taxes went up 20%, I want to enjoy what I like. We should all get together. Some of these incidental issues are trying to block what needs to be done, there will be another year when nothing happens. I want the authority to improve the golf experience.

4. Chairman's Report

Mr. Mount: Oak Hills has been in the news. OHPA members have gone before the BET and Finance Committee. (passed out Statement of Revenues and Expenditures) this shows depreciation as a non-cash expense. Our income before depreciation is \$229,000. If we paid our interest, we still made \$120,000. All the rhetoric of how we're running a deficit, I beg to differ. No knock on Parks & Rec, but if they were operating like us, they'd be \$3 mil in the hole. They take in \$1mil & spend \$4mil. I'm not saying that's wrong, we like the beach, we like Vets Park. But there's no park in this town that 80% of the people use. The parks probably all get 10-15% of the people using them. We've been beat up really badly on this point and it's an unfair point. We are covering our expenses without interest and without depreciation, which is how businesses are measured.

We have done a lot. 3 years ago we had failing boilers, sewer system, lightning detection, the condition of the course was horrendous. They had stopped paying the debt, all the reserves were gone. We've built back \$120K of the \$220K reserve we're supposed to have according to the city.

In our 2012, 2013 2014 audited statements, revenues are up, rounds are up, golf revenue is up. This year we have a \$2 increase in our rates, it's going to go up. We had golf carts you couldn't drive. We made the conscious decision to get new carts, hire a new superintendent, hire a new pro, give them benefits.

I need to come out and say that because what happens to us in the media is not fair, you guys work way too hard.

Last week we were out meeting with various departments in the city. Bruce Kimmel said we're probably one of the hardest working authorities in the city. It has been my commitment since I started, what's right for Oak Hills and what's right for the city. Look at Nathan Hale School, 2 ball fields for 3.5 million. Look at the lights they put over there.

I don't feel that the \$107K deficit that was jumped on was fair. Last year we took a \$150K loan, this year we didn't. We generated \$300K toward operations. Companies would kill for that, 20% margin. Be proud.

5. Pro's Report

Mr. Ruiz: Will be attending PGA merchandise show next week.

6. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Waters and I have been working on decals for our roads signs, \$35 per item, white sticker that will go on signs. I can see if I find anything cheaper. We're going to put bigger arrows on the signs, work with Public Works. Bigger sign at CT Ave & Richards Ave by KFC. As sign by the intersection of West Cedar by NCC?

Started tree work. Ken, Supt of Parks, will come over and scoop up hardwood to use for the city's firewood program. Reporting to the state (water usage, pesticide use) is filed. The truck is not here yet.

Westchester Country Club supt is giving us almost a full set of tee markers, easily refurbished. What we have now is easily bent out of shape. We can change the color of the forward tee. They are called ground markers, upside-down baskets.

7. Executive Director's Report

(Calendar schedules passed out Sales Analysis Calendar December 2014)

Selling early ID cards gift cards & stocking stuffers was highly successful. We generated \$60K when we only expected ~\$15K

Rounds for calendar year (true season) 36,783 which is up 8% from 2013. Golf revenue up 6.5%. Cart revenue only up 1.6%, has a lot to do with wet conditions on the course, could not get carts out.

On April 5 45-yr special we sold 189 nonresident cards and 43 resident cards.

Revenue per round was down to \$26.81 versus \$27.17 in 2013.

Resident rounds flat, senior down slightly, 9-hole up 52%. Golf Now we made over \$20K, shows that the program generates extra business, these are people who probably would not come here. Positive solid calendar year results.

8. Committee Reports and Discussion

A. Tennis/Restaurant Liaison Committee

Mr. Cifatte: We have a visitor, Jeff Gocke, principal in Kings Hwy Partnership which maintains our tennis program.

Jeff Gocke: Will start season around May 1, weather dependent in preparing the courts. 3 ladies teams. Men's team in Fairfield County league. Lesson programs.

Mr. Cifatte: Specials, attract new people?

Jeff: We do this in our 3 indoor clubs. Paddle tennis has been a tough competitor so we are doing a lot of marketing, Facebook \$500 investment got many people to sign up for cardio indoor tennis.

Mr. Schell: Last month Mr. Ruiz asked about having info in the pro shop about tennis because they are selling stuff blind.

Jeff: We'd be happy to cross-promote.

Mr. Ruiz: Our inside sales people are busy and if there was a flyer, it would make it much easier. People ask if tennis is even part of Oak Hills, or where to get info. We try to give golfers a welcome packet. We hand them a variety of information.

Mr. Mount: Feel welcome and come to us when you need things. We're going to a Chamber event next Thursday, you could come with us. Frustration is Mr. Ruiz doesn't know what to do, needs a sell sheet. It impacts our image because they're coming to the admin building and we don't know what we're doing.

Mr. Ruiz: Sometimes the tennis customers get frustrated with us.

Mr. Mount: We're going to make a big opening day splash, you should come whether the courts are open or not. Mayor's trophy

Nine and dine, doubles and dine (Mixed doubles, mixed drinks)

Mr. Guyer: Resident card covers golf; separate tennis card covers tennis.

Ms. Obuchowski: Restaurant hours are no longer false online. The Oak Hills site gives winter hours by reservation only. Restaurant site gives no hours at all now, which is certainly better than giving false hours.

Mr. Guyer: Lights in parking lot are controlled from restaurant machine room. Unit had been taken apart and unwired so it couldn't work. We brought an electrician in to fix it but he arrived and it was all fixed. I told them the lights needed to be on from sunset to about 11 PM, especially when they have event, because if someone trips and falls, we're going to get sued.

Mr. Schell: It was pitch dark during an event, I texted Amar, he texted "we are closed." There were about 15 cars in the lot.

Mr. Mount: Do we have keys to that building?

Mr. Guyer: We've asked for them.

Mr. Mount: We're the landlord. At least Mr. Schell should have them. If the fire department comes, they'll be breaking in windows & doors.

Mr. Guyer: Vince has been saying he wants to do more for the golfers this year, set them up in advance. Amar about breakfast, needs to be in the restaurant, if you don't want to cook then have fresh bagels, fresh muffins, hot coffee.

Mr. Waters: We're pulling 40,000 people a year past his front door, it's up to him to pull them in.

Mr. Guyer: I'm not going to promote breakfast at the halfway house anymore, it's dangerous.

B. Operations Committee

Mr. Crowley (passed out Search for Upgraded Tee Sheet and Admin Software) searching for software to replace Chelsea system, which is dated and no longer meets customer service requirements. Mr. Guyer, Mr. Ruiz, Mr. Schell, & Mr. Crowley reviewed what is out there.

Options:

- Stay with Chelsea
- Golf Now
- EZLinks
- Chronogolf

Chelsea not good, need to be replaced.

GolfNow is not comprehensive enough. Help desk (enables customer to book a tee time) doesn't work well enough.

EZLinks handles everything we need, we only get a phone call if it's a question/issue they can't answer. This will relieve a lot of phone pressure on Oak Hills staff and raise the level of customer service.

Cost: Barter, we give them 2 tee times per day and they provide the services. Ends up about \$20-28K/year. What we've seen from GolfNow we put out \$20K so if EZLinks is anything like what we're hearing from actual users, we don't have to worry.

Recommend continue GolfNow booking tee times only, and adopt EZLinks as our tee sheet operational database software. (see handout for table comparing key features)

Mr. Ruiz: We'll be getting free hardware.

Mr. Crowley: About \$8K worth of hardware.

Mr. Guyer: Can the tennis get incorporated? We have to figure that out. Tennis relies on us to generate photo ID cards for them. EZLinks can't print a photo ID.

Mr. Ruiz: They'll get an ID card with a bar code.

Mr. Crowley: And we'll take their picture so we can verify that someone else isn't using their card.

Mr. Ruiz: Tennis center doesn't have a POS center.

Mr. Guyer: They have some way of taking the hourly fees.

Mr. Ruiz: We should be able to sell an ID card for them, it's just another twist in the system. They could have a reference manual with the person's picture.

Mr. Mount: Maybe the technology that instantly prints out a photo ID card.

Mr. Ruiz: This company also hosts website and email marketing. Richter Park has the whole deal. I called and asked. They're sort of going out of their way to include more hardware for us.

Mr. Mount: EZLinks has many more muni users than anyone.

Mr. Crowley: Glowing recommendations from Richter (Danbury) and Rockland County Golf Course, EZLinks customers for over 5 years, extremely happy and would not switch. If we do it in the next 7 days it can be up and running by March 1. They will provide somebody on site 4-5 days that knows the operation. They have a dedicated person for us to call if something's wrong.

Mr. Ruiz: They have a support group and an inside rep for us.

Mr. Guyer: Their emergency support is like a help desk, 1-day turnaround if your hardware goes down.

Mr. Crowley: If anything's wrong they'll overnight a replacement.

**** MR. CIFATTE MOVED TO APPROVE SIGNING A CONTRACT WITH EZLINKS.**

**** MR. MCKENNA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

C. Finance Committee -
Approval of 2016 Fiscal Year Budget

Balance sheet:

Mr. McKenna: (Mr. Guyer passed out the financial reports) burn rate off the \$93K plus \$2K escrow, burn rate about \$25K of short-term loan required to make it through March.

Mr. Mount: Then we should be able to pay it right back.

Mr. McKenna: December sales strong due to cards, gift certs \$45K incremental. If you back that out, \$48K total income is driven by gift card acceleration, so year over year for Dec we're spot on.

Mr. Mount: We're \$34K behind in cash and \$30K better in accts payable? So \$4K number to number over last year.

Mr. Guyer: But did I factor enough in for Feb & Mar, time will tell. I frontloaded it, took out more revenue in Jan & Feb than in Apr & May.

Mr. McKenna: But we also have ongoing

Mr. Mount: We're hoping to get to 2500 this year.

Mr. Waters: Still renewals coming up in spring which had no incentive to buy in Dec.

Mr. McKenna: We didn't want to rob Peter to pay Mr. Cifatte, so we didn't discount the cards.

\$17K drain on our restaurant income year over year.

Without the \$45K we're pretty much flat on year over year YTD basis.

Budget:

Mr. Guyer sent out 3 scenarios, 2 of them unlikely (1%, 3%, 5% increase in rounds). The 5% would generate \$68K net income after all our debt and capital projects. We would make about \$419K operational net income, more than we've made in a long time. 5% increase would get us ~49,000 revenue rounds. Mr. Guyer recommended the 5% increase budget. It's the most optimistic, but it's not crazy optimistic.

Mr. McKenna: Concerns on revenue rounds with any construction, but it's in the lighter months.

Mr. Mount: We had a talk with Gerald Foley and I'll be highly surprised if we are doing much [construction] until Nov-Dec.

Mr. McKenna: Yes, that's a small amount of revenue rounds, but

Mr. Guyer: We pretty much stop letting carts out in November, so that decreases the number of golfers coming.

Mr. Schell: At Stanwich, we did a year-round project spring to winter. People were coming out to see what was going on, \$4 million project, it piqued people's interest, we had more rounds. Negative impact, only to the people looking for the cheap round with no interference.

Mr. Ruiz: I saw a \$2 million bunker project go right through the summer. They only disrupt 1 hole at a time, 2 holes.

Mr. McKenna: Cart paths, we can't accelerate because if we're changing some of the holes, you don't want to put in the paths.

Mr. Schell: Not really, there's not much reconfiguration.

Mr. Mount: Because it's state money, there's a lot of making sure everything's in place before we get the money because we don't want to be stuck needing money that the state won't pay. The city has to deal with the state to get the money.

Mr. McKenna: My recommendation was 3% so that we over deliver.

Mr. Cifatte: The difference between the 3% and 5%?

Mr. Guyer: 750 higher.

**** MS. OBUCHOWSKI MOV ED TO APPROVE THE 2016 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET WITH A 3% INCREASE .**

**** MR. WATERS SECOND ED.**

**** THE MOTION PASS ED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Guyer will submit to the city.

D. Legal Committee

No report.

E. Marketing Committee

Mr. Waters: Last night sent email thanking the 54 who responded to December promotion & asked them to tell friends & family & neighbors. Their friends would get the same deal and get entered into a raffle for ½ hr lesson with Mr. Ruiz. Would like to get more new residents without spending money, ads in paper.

Mr. Mount: Mr. Ruiz should do some programs at the schools. Get ahold of the PTOs, go local in town, try to get kids into summer camp.

Mr. Ruiz: Coach at Norwalk High might help.

Mr. Mount: How about we give \$5 to PTO for every card sold through PTO? 800 kids from Norwalk are going to another course for Metropolitan First Tee program.

Mr. Ruiz: They have a separate education center at Fairchild Wheeler, classrooms, driving range, 15-20 stations. I've worked with First Tee on individual day events, that would be a great way to start. Have member volunteers come to give tips to the kids.

Mr. Guyer: I'm reaching out David Polk of First Tee of CT in Cromwell, they have a driving range.

Mr. Mount: It's nice to see the kids coming back, I'm talking about going to the local schools.

Mr. Ruiz: First Tee has an outreach program, they go to schools. Kids come home, "Mom, I want to play golf." You hear a lot of residents complaining about our 1-day promo for nonresidents.

Mr. Guyer: But it was for everyone, any new card, not just nonresidents.

Mr. Mount: If we could sell the cards online, it would be much better, but we have the ID issue.

Mr. Waters: Chamber of Commerce newsletter has an ad giving them an opportunity to sponsor portions of the park, tees, walking trails. \$1K per hole, \$2K per practice green, \$2K one of the shacks, \$500 walking trail. (Showed sign examples and cost of signs.)

Mr. Crowley: Why not \$1200 first year, then cost less for renewal.
Mr. Waters: If everything sold that's being offered it would be \$32,500.

F. Human Resources/Policy Committee

Ms. Obuchowski: Joe and I have gone over the and have a few questions

G. Master Plan Committee/Adhoc Driving Range Committee

Ms. Obuchowski: Oak Hills Park Nature Advisory Committee (OHPNAC) met Tuesday for the first time.

Anthony Carrano: Very productive.

Mr. Mount: I heard it was very good, a highly committed group of people. The 2 pcs of property are not currently part of the park, so can we grab those and make them part of the park.

Mr. Schell: The problem is access.

Ms. Obuchowski: The animals live there.

Mr. Mount: Open space. The nature area is one of the first that we can move forward with.

9. Old Business:

a. Oil Tank Update

Mr. Mount: State grant scope of work will cover this.

10. New Business:

Ms. Obuchowski: Can Telesco take the minutes of OHPNAC?

Mr. Guyer: It's not in the budget. Are they free on the 2nd Tuesday. We can check with them on availability. A meeting every month, \$1400 - \$1500 year.

[[Mr. Guyer to find out availability, cost]]

Mr. Cifatte: Status of state grant?

Mr. Mount: Finance committee in Feb, then Common Council. Language is pretty much approved. City saw the grant before we did, it said they had to have matching funds. That was removed. The scope of work had to be tightened. Now hopefully Finance approves it, then it goes before Council and gets executed. Then RFP start, architecture - golf course architect and landscape/golf course architect, and if someone wanted to bid both then they could. Design phase, once design approved, then state approves the design. It's all managed in the city finance dept. It's for Oak Hills, but it's a grant to the city, not to Oak Hills. We don't know if there are signs we need, Gerald is going to help us, he's been through it before.

Mr. Ruiz: How long does an RFP take? Prospective bidders how long?

Mr. Cifatte: 2 months, 3 months.

Mr. Mount: It could be dictated by the state. When we did the carts, it was only 2 weeks. But he's not certain if we have to put it together and then the state tells us how long to let it sit (receiving proposals). We're trying to get ahead of putting out the RFPs so that once it's approved, we can go.

Mr. Crowley: Set up a legal entity to accept donations?

Mr. Mount: Form a 501(c)3, Ridgefield has one.

Mr. Schell: They do a 5K run around the course.

Mr. Mount: I started looking at how to set up a 501(c)3, Oak Hills Preservation Fund or Oak Hills Conservancy. My real thought was, how could we raise enough money to build the range / school / teaching facility. I don't know if the city will ever give us that money, but there may be people who want to donate. Like a brick program, you buy a

brick for \$20, pretty soon you have the beach paved.

11. Adjournment
9:02 PM

**NEXT AUTHORITY MEETING -February 19 , 2015, 7:00PM ROOM 101 CITY
HALL**