

**OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
MEETING MINUTES
January 19, 2012
Public Hearing on 2011-12 Fee Increase**

PRESENT: Bob Virgulak, Chairman; Paul Cifatte; Martha Lemmon; Shannon Giandurco; Ralph DePanfilis; Bill Kementzides; and Clyde Mount.

STAFF: Tom Vorio, Interim Director and Superintendent and Adam Schauer, Assistant Superintendent.

ABSENT: Mike Corsello, Vice Chairman

PUBLIC: Walter Englert, CPA.

Mr. Virgulak called the public hearing to order at 6:15 p.m. and advised the public that the reason for the hearing was to discuss the proposed golf rate increases. Mr. Virgulak asked Vorio to announce the first name on the sign-up sheet.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Richard Delallo stated that he has played golf at Oak Hills since it opened in 1967 and has been buying the ID card all this time. He stated that last season was the first time at Oak Hills where people who didn't buy cards but got a deal, an \$18 deal that wasn't advertised to anyone unless the player had given the golf course an email address. He stated that if the Authority raises the fee to \$100 then the Authority should lower the resident greens fee to \$24, instead of increasing it to \$28.

Marianne Cappiello, President of Women's' Oak Hills Golf Association, provided the Authority Members with a proposal to sell a season pass that discounts greens' fee to players in place an ID card that offers no discount and raises resident fees. She stated that by selling a season pass to resident and non-residents the Authority can realize revenue at the start of the season regardless of the weather.

Bob Giolitto stated that he did a study of area golf fees too which included Smith, Yale and Longshore, which offers an \$18 rate for 18 holes after 4:00 p.m. He commented that Oak Hills is doing exactly the opposite of what is taught in marketing; close the store, raise the prices and make it inaccessible, instead he suggested that it promote itself.

Jim Deering commented that the increase in ID cards is significant and players won't come to play.

Barry Berheim asked what good business raises the rates by 81% and thinks that its customers will come back to play.

Rick Wetzal commented that the Authority has to find the sweet spot in pricing and increase marketing. He noted that according to the news, most middle income families have not gotten an increase in income for quite a while.

Tony Kosha inquired why the resident golfers are being penalized with increased ID card rates when the non-resident rates are not. He doesn't believe it will fix the problem. He reported that in the area golf store where he works customers tell him that they won't play at Oak Hills again because of the fees, the conditions, and play is too slow (5.5 hrs.). He stated that he can play some of the best courses in the area for \$48 dollars. He asked that the Authority do something other than raise the resident rates.

Nick Pisano commented that Oak Hills raises the rates almost every year so he is ok with a \$2 increase. He stated that the ID card increase to \$110 makes it expensive for families whose children want to play golf. He noted that the added cost will force people to play less and/or not buy a card and pay non-resident rates.

Jacob Henny, a junior in high school and the reigning Oak Hills club champion, stated that Oak Hills golf course has had a great impact on his life. He objects to the proposed rate increases and stated that the current non-resident rates prevents his friends from playing golf with him at Oak Hills. He noted that he has no trouble booking a tee time anymore and though he's not a financial expert he believes that the number of rounds needs to increase not the rates. He suggested the Authority keep rates on greens fees and the ID card the same, and lower the non-resident rate or allow the non-residents to buy ID cards.

John Sharkey started to comment on the management of the course. Mr. Virgulak advised Mr. Sharkey that the public hearing concerned the fee increase and suggested he attend the Authority meeting that will follow the hearing to make any other comments.

Stephen Bentkov stated that he has played at Oak Hills for about 20 years and he doesn't understand why Oak Hills hasn't focused on positioning the course to the people who want to play the course. He stated that Fairchild Wheeler was a cow pasture long ago and they realized that they had to market it to the people who would play a cow pasture. He stated that in a lot of ways Oak Hills has become a cow pasture. He stated that Oak Hills is not in good shape and this year he has heard many non-residents say that they would not play at Oak Hills again when they can pay the same amount to play at Sterling Farms. He stated that other golf courses give senior discounts to non-residents but Oak Hills doesn't give anyone a break and seems to penalize everyone. He noted that the Authority has nine members that each receive budgets so to say they only discover in June that the money was not there is unacceptable and the Members should resign.

Mr. Englert advised the audience that the financial issues were raised in 2009 with regards to Oak Hills' ability Park to meet its financial obligations to the City. He stated that in June 2010 the Financial Audit flagged the potential inability to pay so the Treasurer and Mr. Grillo approached the City in August 2010 and the City has since modified the terms of the debt which extended and lowered the debt payments. He stated that during the debt negotiations, the City and the Board of Estimate and Taxation requested that the Authority increase the golf fees in order to pay the debt. He stated that golf management was asked to address marketing since 2009 but the fact is that \$132,000 has to be raised or the public has to tell the Authority what services it wants to give up.

Joe Tamburri former chairman of the Authority took issue with statements Ms. Lemmon made regarding the restaurant. He asked her not to blame the restaurant for the bad financial deal the City gave the Authority when it financed the restaurant. Mr. Virgulak asked that comments be kept to the fee increase and suggested he make any other comments at the meeting following the hearing.

Conner O'Brien, a junior golfer, stated that he doesn't agree with the rate increases and commented that the non-resident rates prevent his friends from playing golf at Oak Hills. He liked the suggestion that Oak Hills offer an ID card to residents in towns that don't have a public golf course. He stated that he pays a small fee for an ID card and low greens fees at Tashua Knolls rather than pay the fees at Oak Hills where the course is in poor condition.

Frank Biceglia stated that he attended the last four Oak Hills meetings and the Authority knows it needs to increase the rounds of golf. He states that neither resident nor non-resident players want to play Oak Hills due to the course condition. He stated that there is no way around the fact that Oak Hills has to generate revenue so to that point he suggested Oak Hills use a seasonal card system, maybe with three price levels. He stated that seasonal passes would provide the revenue at the beginning of the season to pay for improvements to the course. He noted that the superintendent was provided with funding to make some drainage repairs and the course is looking better. He advised the Authority that he believes most golfers would pay upfront for golf if it lowers their fees.

Chris Weber stated that he is a CPA and a finance executive so he understands the bind that the Authority is in. He noted that there have been a lot of good ideas brought up that should be considered in place of a rate increase because many Oak Hills golfers are retired senior citizens and working people that struggle to pay to

play the course now. He stated that course conditions do have an impact on the number of rounds played and asked that the Authority consider some of the ideas otherwise he thinks the Authority will price Oak Hills out of the market.

Amy O'Brien stated that Oak Hills is a Town and community golf course and the Authority needs to reach out to the people that are going to play at Oak Hills. She stated that junior golf is important to the future of Oak Hills but Oak Hills doesn't have a junior ID card rate. She asked that the Authority consider creating one as well as decreasing a junior's green fee to play. She agrees that the way to fix the financial problem is to increase the golf rounds and suggested that the Authority look at what the competition is doing, offer non-resident ID card and a family rate.

John Picanzi a ranger at Oak Hills stated that in place of an employee raise they were charged a lower rate to play golf. He stated that the employees were notified that they would have to start paying higher rates. He suggested that anytime Oak Hills needs to raise revenue it should come and offer a special rate to the Norwalk golfers, no need to use Living Social.

Ray Kodel, the head coach at Norwalk High School, stated that the ID card has to be a reasonable cost for families of junior and high school golfers. He stated that it would be a big help and a show of support for the Norwalk community who continues to try to build up youth sports in town.

Joe Madafieri, the head coach at Brian McMahon High School, stated that he was an Authority Member so he respects the Authorities position. He noted that years ago Oak Hills didn't charge for high school students to play at Oak Hills golf course. He too feels that they are the future of the golf course. He asked that the Authority continue to allow the golf team to play for free.

Joe Lazzaro stated that in November he provided the Authority with a written statement proposing ways to raise revenue and market the course: seasonal ID cards, ID cards to non-resident golfers, give credit for greens fee to a player for taking a golf lesson and provided marketing ads from area courses.

Public comment (name unknown) asked if anyone has gone to the common council to renegotiate ownership of the restaurant.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Virgulak adjourned the public hearing at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheila Sullivan

**OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
MEETING MINUTES
January 19, 2012
Finalize Public Hearing Presentation**

PRESENT: Bob Virgulak, Chairman; Paul Cifatte; Martha Lemmon; Shannon Giandurco; Ralph DePanfilis; Bill Kementzides; and Clyde Mount.

STAFF: Tom Vorio, Interim Director and Superintendent and Adam Schauer, Assistant Superintendent.

ABSENT: Mike Corsello, Vice Chairman.

PUBLIC: Shelley Guyer.

Mr. Virgulak called the meeting to order at 5:46 p.m. to finalize the presentation for the public hearing scheduled for 6:00 p.m..

The Authority Members discussed the proposed rate increase. Ms. Lemmon reported that she was unable to locate a capacity analysis in the office at Oak Hills. She stated that the Authority Members and Mr. Barron had asked for it so that the Authority could determine the time of day that residents, non-residents, juniors and employees play and make an informed decision on which fees to increase.

The Authority discussed how to balance the need to raise revenue through fee increases without putting the burden on golfers and potentially decreasing the number of golf rounds at Oak Hills.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheila Sullivan

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PRESENT: Bob Virgulak, Chairman; Paul Cifatte; Martha Lemmon; Shannon Giandurco; Ralph DePanfilis; Bill Kementzides; and Clyde Mount.

STAFF: Tom Vorio, Interim Director and Superintendent and Adam Schauer, Assistant Superintendent.

ABSENT: Mike Corsello, Vice Chairman

PUBLIC: Walter Englert, CPA.

Mr. Virgulak called the meeting to order at 7:55 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tony Buono employee at Oak Hills, stated that he has worked as a golf starter since 2001 and at that time the golf course was packed with golfers playing from 6:27 a.m. until 5:00 pm. He advised the Authority that things have changed between 2001 and 2011. He reported that golf play now stops at 11:30 a.m. except for stragglers. He doesn't blame the current or past grounds keeper but the golf course needs to look good to attract golfers.

Ray Kodel the head coach at Norwalk High School stated that he appreciates everything that Oak Hills has done to help the high school golfers understand the rules and business of golf. He advised the Authority that the team practices are held 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. during the season and he has always given Mr. Grillo a schedule of the matches. He acknowledged that the players pay on the weekends but the cost of a \$110 for an ID card would be a bit rough for their families. He stated that as a coach and a teacher he knows that the students participate in the afterschool program and camps at Oak Hills, the golf players bring their friends and help Mr. Grillo with the camps. He would like the course to continue to run the programs and promote junior golf. Mr. Kodel stated that he realizes how fortunate they are and would like the relationship to continue as it has been and would appreciate the name of a someone he can contact.

Marianne Cappiello President of Women's Oak Hills Golf Association, reviewed the proposal to sell a season pass with a discount on greens' fee that she introduced at the public hearing. She stated that it is a means in which Oak Hills can realize revenue at the start of the season regardless of the weather.

John Sharkey stated it is his understanding that Oak Hills Park Authority is looking to hire an outside management company to run the golf course. He finds it difficult to understand why the Authority would place Mr. Vorio as course manager when he may be partially at fault because he has not been open to suggestions from golfers and fellow employees. He suggested that the Authority receive more than monthly reports about the course because this is too much responsibility for one person to take on and believes that Mr. Vorio needs to be managed and having only one person in the position to report to the Authority might hurt the whole system. He commented that Mrs. Frangenes was qualified to be the administrator director. He recommended that the Authority not use outside services to raise revenue and stop allowing non-residents to reserve weekend tee times before 11:00 a.m. He stated that stronger course management, more involvement from the Authority, and input from the staff and patrons would bring more satisfaction to players and the success to the course. He stated that having to pay higher fees feels like the employees are getting thrown under the bus.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Mr. Virgulak asked the Authority Members to review the minutes of December 15, 2011.

Ms. Lemmon stated that she has some minor changes and asked to submit them directly to the transcribing

secretary at a later date. Mr. Virgulak approved the request.

****MR. CIFATTE MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 15, 2011 WITH PENDING MINOR CHANGES FROM MS. LEMMON.**

****MS. LEMMON SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED. MR. DEPHANFILIS ABSTAINED FROM VOTING.**

INTERIM DIRECTOR REPORT

Mr. Vorio thanked the public for their comments. He noted that the previous rate increases were not based on hard facts and the Authority wants a capacity analysis to base fees on actual time of day that residents, non-residents, juniors and employees play in order to maximize fees and not lose money. He stated that the Authority increased the employee rate because it loses money when it allows employees to take prime golf tee times for a cheap price. He stated that the non-resident ID cards are a great idea and a capacity analysis will determine how much the Authority should charge for it so it doesn't lose money on golf rounds.

Mr. Vorio reported that he takes courses for his pesticide license and management training classes. He stated that the problem isn't going to be fixed by one person and the entire Oak Hills team needs to roll up their sleeves and contribute to fixing the problem. He noted that with the right people in place, properly trained and let them do their jobs then Oak Hills will succeed.

Mr. Vorio reported that he and Ms. Lemmon hired Katherine Schauer to work part time as the new office assistant at a salary more comparable to the position. He stated that she has a major in agricultural economics and a minor in business administration.

Mr. Vorio reported that he and Mr. Guyer went to the Golf Smith store to discuss opening a retail satellite store at Oak Hills. He stated that the manager at the Golf Smith was extremely interested and is seeking corporate approval. He stated that Mr. Guyer explained that Oak Hills Men's Golf Association gives merchandise credit to winners of tournaments and the manager was very receptive to the idea. Mr. Vorio invited a representative from the Women's' Golf Association to attend the meeting with the manager from Golf Smith on Tuesday to discuss their needs. He noted that the Golf Smith marketing specialist will attend the meeting as well.

Mr. Vorio stated that he would like an Authority Member to talk to Mr. Grillo and Mrs. Frangenes about W4's directly. Mr. Virgulak requested that any personnel matters be discussed in executive session.

Mr. Vorio stated that he plans to set up new company emails for the staff to ensure good communication lines. He suggested that the Authority meeting agenda be more specific so that the public has a better idea what the Authority plans to discuss at the meeting. He advised the Authority that the staff should be cross trained so that they are familiar with the various office systems. He stated that Oak Hills should focus on using social media to communicate. He mentioned that he had no idea that people were out getting resumes for golf pros and would have loved to have been involved just to hear what was going on.

Mr. Vorio met with Mr. Foley, the City Purchasing Director, and advised him that based on the low cost to replace the roof on the tennis facility Mr. Vorio would not need to put out an RFP for the roof. Mr. Foley gave him a list of City approved contractors to use to get an estimate. Mr. Vorio reported that he asked the contractors who sent proposals in September to resubmit their proposals for a new roof. He stated that Rick's Main Roofing won the contract at a cost of \$4,470. Mr. Virgulak suggested an Authority Member make a motion to replace the roof under Old Business.

Mr. Vorio reported that Mr. Gocke asked to speak directly to him about his 2012 tennis goals. Mr. Virgulak suggested that Mr. Cifatte also attend the meeting. Mr. Cifatte commented that he had been in contact with Mr. Gocke as recently as last week.

Mr. Vorio reported that Mr. Foley had been very busy this week and couldn't work with him on the golf cart RFP until Tuesday next week. Mr. Englert asked if the Authority is required by Oak Hills By-Laws or City Ordinance to go out to bid on the carts. Mr. Vorio stated that the Authority abides by the City Purchasing requirements. Ms. Lemmon stated that when she was looking into the finances a problem with the previous cart purchase came to light. Mr. Vorio stated that Mr. Foley also plans to help him find someone to take the Oak Hills color copier.

Mr. Vorio asked that as Interim Course Director the Authority give him all the same guidelines that were in Mr. Grillo's job description. He asked to be involved in any discussions or meetings concerning Oak Hills. Mr. Vorio asked that a Human Resource Committee be formed. Mr. Virgulak provided the Authority Members with an updated committee list. Mr. Vorio asked to meet with the Human Resource Committee, the Authority Chairman and Vice chairman to discuss staffing needs for 2012.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Mr. Vorio advised the Authority that the insurance company is looking into the request by the Women's Golf Association to hold a night golf event. He asked that the Women's Golf Association email their tournament requests with dates and details. He reported that the staff is responding to all inquiries or requests sent to OakHills1969@gmail.com or messages left on the office answering machine. He noted that when he has the new emails set up he will post and send the new emails to anyone having an email in the system.

Mr. Schauer reported that the crew has been removing debris, fixing fences, applying a final spray to greens, cleaning ball washers and trash cans, working on the equipment, hauling soil to the 7th hole and has started drainage work on the 13th bunker.

Mr. Shower advised the Authority that Mr. Vorio, himself and Mrs. Shower are utilizing an iPhone "AP" to write and track their progress on the "To Do" list. Also, he has published a blog page (OHPGCM.blogspot.com) to post photos of daily maintenance, information and links to USGA for golfers as well as to give golfers a chance to comment or make suggestions.

Mr. Virgulak inquired on the status of the cart batteries. Mr. Vorio stated that they have enough carts to start the season in March but not for the season.

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND DISCUSSION

Tennis / Restaurant Liaison Committee

Mr. Cifatte reported that Quattro Pazzi is open for dinner during the winter on Friday and Saturday evenings and for private parties.

Mr. Cifatte stated that he knows of three new possible vendors interested in bidding on the new tennis lease in September. He noted that he would update and use the last RFP in September. Mr. Virgulak stated that the Authority would include a rent increase in the new RFP. Mr. Cifatte advised the public that tennis players have to pay for an Oak Hills ID card as well as a season pass to play tennis at Oak Hills.

Greens, Facilities & Water Use Committee

Mr. Kementzides had no new information to report.

Finance Committee

Ms. Lemmon reported that the book keeper Pat Poremba prepared the Profit & Loss budget with actuals, the December 2011 Profit & Loss statement and the Balance Sheet. She noted that according to the budget the net income was targeted at \$53,262 but the actual was approximately \$27,000.

Ms. Lemmon reported that the 5750 Park Maintenance account line is 1,200% over budget. She stated that this has to be fixed because it continues to skew the entire budget and actual balance. Mr. Vorio reported that this issue has come up many times and he would like the problem to be resolved too but in the meantime he and Mr. Shower removed the 5750 account and can confirm that Park Maintenance is \$3,000 under budget in 2011-12. Ms. Lemmon asked that a change in the format be made by the February meeting so the P & L reflects the actual budget balance. Mr. Englert explained how the 5750 account line is formulated. The Authority discussed the information. Mr. Vorio stated that the agricultural suppliers have agreed to invoice on monthly basis for a bulk purchase.

Ms. Lemmon noted that she has contacted Cablevision to get a credit for service after it was canceled. She and Mrs. Giandurco wrote an RFP to get proposals to administer Oak Hills employee payroll. She stated that Wells Fargo won the bid to administer Oak Hills the employee payroll and will track and post the employees benefits on the paystub at a very low cost of \$2,100. She reported that Wells Fargo would like the opportunity to bid on

the credit merchant accounts too. She noted that she and Mr. Englert are still investigating the IRS Federal 941 quarterly returns but it appears that the 2011 returns are overdue.

Ms. Lemmon expressed much confidence in Katherine Schauer ability to learning Quick Books and the Chelsea reservation system with help from Mr. Guyer.

Ms. Lemmon stated that some vendors were given permission to charge the Oak Hills bank account directly which has caused overdrafts. She stated that she has to prepare a letter to terminate this option and these vendors will be paid after Oak Hills receives their invoice. She covered several other office and administrative issues including a CL&P shut off notice, the alarm code and password/combination changes. She suggested that Oak Hills limit access of keys, codes and passwords to very few people. Ms. Lemmon reported finding \$1,700 in the safe but there wasn't a note explaining the purpose or source of the money.

Legal Committee

No report.

Master Plan Committee

Mr. DePanfilis had no information to report.

Marketing Committee

Mrs. Giandurco advised the Authority Members she has been monitoring the email account and website. Mrs. Giandurco noted that they now have a password to the Chelsea Reservation system and will meet with Mr. Guyer to discuss the information he has extracted from the system and learn how it works. She stated that she has agreed to meet with a company called Course Trends to discuss a marketing offer.

Mr. Vorio stated that Golf Smith runs 6 to 7 events a year and he believes the events would be a great opportunity for Oak Hills to market the course and the golf associations to increase membership.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Vorio reported that he and Ms. Lemmon are now the only names on the bank signatory card and all previous names were removed. Ms. Lemmon commented that eventually her name will be removed once Katherine Shower is up to speed.

****MS. LEMMON MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSAL FROM RICKS MAIN ROOFING TO REPLACE THE ROOF ON THE TENNIS BUILDING PENDING LEGAL REVIEW BY MR. CORSELLO.**

****MR. KEMENTIZIDES SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Englert asked that the Authority wait to hear what the City is amenable to regarding debt relief before the Authority determines and votes on a rate increase. Ms. Lemmon noted she wants a capacity analysis before voting on a rate increase. She reiterated that Oak Hills is working on a bare bones budget and doesn't have any funds for an emergency so it still needs \$133,000 to break even on June 30, 2012.

Mr. Mount stated that he wouldn't vote for a fee increase no matter what. He feels that the Authority has to figure out how to increase the number rounds through marketing because the capacity to play at Oak Hills is wide open. Mr. Kementzides noted that non-residents won't play at Oak Hills at the current rate.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair entertained a motion to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:24 p.m and enter into an executive session to discuss personnel matters.

****MR. MOUNT MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE REGULAR MEETING.**

****MS. LEMMON SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The executive session adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheila Dravis