

**OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
AD HOC DRIVING COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
JANUARY 15, 2013**

ATTENDANCE: Ernest DesRochers, Chair; Paul Cifatte, Vasilios Kementzidis, Clyde Mount, Robert Virgulak

STAFF: Shelly Guyer, Executive Director

CALL TO ORDER.

Mr. DesRochers called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. A quorum was present.

**DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE
DRIVING RANGE RFP**

Mr. DesRochers said that the group was meeting to review an RFP that had been drafted by the Authority with the help of the City staff.

Mr. Cantor asked for a Point of Order and said that he objected to the entire process. He stated that he was a member of the West Norwalk Association, the Oak Hills Neighborhood Association, a resident and a taxpayer. Mr. Cantor had a statement to read into the record objecting to this process that had been drafted by a group. Mr. Cantor stated that this process was out of order.

Mr. DesRochers said that he was attempting to explain what the Committee was attempting to do. He said that Committee had been requested by the Authority to have a working session for crafting the RFP. He likened this committee to the sub groups of the Planning Commission and the Zoning Commission. The Committee would be reviewing the document and making recommendations to the full Authority. At that point, the document will be open for public comment.

Mr. Cantor said that this was putting the cart before the horse and that the Committee should listen to his statement and to the public. Mr. Cantor then began to read the statement over the objections of the Chair.

RECESS

Mr. DesRochers called for a five minute recess. He called the meeting back to order.

**DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE
DRIVING RANGE RFP CONT'D.**

Mr. DesRochers announced that this meeting was a working session and not a public forum. He told Mr. Cantor he was out of order and pointed out that when the item went

to the full Authority, everyone would have their chance to speak. He reminded everyone the process that the City subcommittee followed when a working session was underway. He said that there would be an opportunity for the public input at the appropriate time. Mr. DesRochers said that none of the Committee was interested in being bullied but would like to have a dialog with the neighborhood. This has been stated thorough out the process. The Committee is interested in City and seeing the Park exist as an economically sound entity. He said that the Committee was intending to make the process open. However, the process still has many steps because after the RFP is completed, the bids have to be submitted and there were be discussion about the project.

Ms. Cece asked what the intention of the Committee to send the document as it was to the full Authority. Mr. DesRochers said that the Committee had wanted to start working on the document when the meeting was called to order, but had not been able to due to the objections from the public. He said that it would be nice to move the document along quickly. Ms. Cece asked if the document might be on the agenda for Thursday night. Mr. DesRochers said that he was not sure, but the plan was to move the process along as quickly as possible.

Many people have worked hard on this and a strong effort had been made to incorporate the public's comments from the last meeting on this item. He reminded everyone that there was an application process, a planning stage and that the Committee was trying to create the global vision. He said that it was clear that Mr. Cantor was against the driving range. However, the Committee is also interested in hearing what the other members of the public who may want to hear what the project concept is. It is also important to draft this document.

Ms. Cece replied that with respect, what Mr. DesRochers was describing was a feasibility study in any other environment. However, this type of study would not require an RFP, which is what the objections are about. Discussion followed.

Mr. Virgulak then read the following excerpt from the 1997 lease between Oak Hills Park and the City of Norwalk.

Article 3, Section 3.01

The Authority shall be entitled to use the demised premises solely for the construction, operation, management and maintenance of the park as a public park and public recreational facility. The existing improvements will be utilized and/or demolished and reconstructed in accordance with the Master Plan approved by the City according to the terms of this lease.

The driving was approved under the Master Plan dated March 3, 1999 and therefore this is what the Committee is operating under. He concluded by saying these were public documents and that he was not interested in taking any public comment on them at this time. Ms. Cece objected and stated that it was not on the Master Plan from 2008.

Mr. DesRochers reiterated that this was a working session and when the document was given to the full Authority, there would be an opportunity for public input. Mr. Cantor reiterated that the process was wrong and that the Committee should not be working on an RFP at this time. Mr. DesRochers said that Mr. Cantor's objection was noted and that when it went to the full Authority, he would have the chance to make his statement.

Ms. Cece asked if the document would be online and available to the public. Mr. DesRochers said that it would be available to the public on the City website. It will also go to public hearing. Ms. Cece reiterated that there was no feasibility study or public comment and that the public was concerned about the fact that an RFP was being proposed. Mr. DesRochers said that Ms. Cece's disagreement was so noted.

Mr. Mount then described the process that had already been taken in order to present a driving range to the public. Mr. Foley located another driving range's RFP and that is being used as a template and starting point. Since a location has not been determined, doing a feasibility study would be premature in his opinion. There have been meetings with the West Norwalk Association.

A member of the audience state that the Association had not shared the information with the rest of the residents in the area. She said that saying a meeting had been held with the West Norwalk Association was misleading because of this.

Mr. Mount said that at this point the Committee has public comments from that meeting and from the last meeting. He said that there is now a scope of what needs to be done. He said that the Committee wants to review the RFP to insure that it is not a blanket document and includes walking trails, more trees and hours of operation. Mr. DesRochers said that this was the first step of many in order to get started.

Mr. Mount that he felt that the Committee should review the section about the responsibilities of the successful bidder. He said that it lists the requirements for the construction company, but does not address the issues of the bidder being a partner in this project. The issues regarding no lighting, layout, costs, protection, trees and trails are not addressed. The Tree Warden informed the Committee that for every tree that is cut down, a new one must be planted.

The discussion moved to Section 1.4. Mr. DesRochers said that the application process would be the same for anyone proposing a project in the City. There will need to be meetings with Wetlands and Conservation about the project.

Mr. Mount said that he was not sure where a requirement for walking trails would be included. It was pointed out that Section 1.5 includes Public Access.

Discussion followed about the various details of the RFP and the requirements of the Authority from Section 1.2 forward. It was pointed out that there is a movement in the golf world to create courses that more environmental friendly and have accessory uses.

The discussion moved to the tree replacement requirements regarding the width of any healthy tree that is removed.

The Committee then reviewed the details whether the driving range would be permitted to sell food or beverages or provide golf clinics.

A member of the audience asked if there was a "Plan B". Mr. DesRochers said that the Authority did not have one at this time. 90% of all the rounds played in the United States were played on public golf courses. A well run, well maintained public golf course in any town has a positive influence and increases the surrounding property values. He added that Oak Hills was a tremendous tennis and golf facility and the Authority was working on a way to round out the existing facility by adding a practice facility.

Mr. DesRochers said that golf was a wonderful sport for young people because it teaches them respect and honor. The Authority is trying to give the youth an opportunity to learn to play the game, along with adults who want to improve their own game. The Committee is trying to find a location back in the park where it will be the least obtrusive in order to round out everything. The Committee will also be considering integrating some off season uses of the park in order to get greater utilization of the park.

The section on Site Visitation was the next item discussed along with the process involved with having the bidder meet with the affected neighbors. Then the requirement for having a performance bond was considered.

The Committee then discussed the requirements for experience and whether it would depend on their company's past performance.

Following the review of the template, the Committee reviewed their compiled changes to the document. It was decided to give the changes to Mr. Foley for posting on the website. After all the Committee members have a chance to read the document, the item will be forwarded to the Authority for comment. Following this, an open forum will be held and then the Committee will consider the public comments before sending the final RFP document to the Authority. Discussion followed about scheduling the various meetings.

Mr. DesRochers said that while Mr. Cantor was welcomed to submit as many letters as he would like for review in advance, the discussion should be limited to 3 minutes per speaker in order to get as much input as possible.

ADJOURNMENT.

**** MR. MOUNT MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. VIRGULAK SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Oak Hills Park Authority
Ad Hoc Driving Range Committee
Special Meeting
January 15, 2013

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services