

**CITY OF NORWALK  
OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY  
REGULAR MEETING  
MAY,15,2025  
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDANCE: Alan Dutton; Chair, Richard Dellinger, Vice Chair, Denise Brown  
Treasurer, Geoff Sweitzer, T.J. Trimboli, Mary Verel

STAFF: Paul Alexander; Golf Professional, Mark Gartner; Controller, Jim Hollyday;  
General Manager, Jim Schell; Superintendent,

OTHER: Robert Stowers; Director of Recreation and Parks, Mr. Crowley; Supporters  
of Oak Hill Park

**CALL TO ORDER**

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

**ROLL CALL**

Mr. Dutton called the roll as reflected above. A quorum was present.

**ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

A. Regular Meeting: April 17, 2025

**\*\* MR. DELLINGER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES.**

**\*\* MS BROWN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

Ms. Brown noted multiple spelling errors on page three under the tennis paragraph.

Mr. Dutton noted on page four paragraph three it should read, The biggest issue involved a discussion of what could and couldn't be brought to the outings, specifically alcohol.

On page five paragraph 2 the sentence should read ...asked about insurance.

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- \*\* MR. DUTTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no one who wished to address the authority members at this time.

### REPORTS

#### **A. Chair**

Mr. Dutton stated that the 2026 budget will be reviewed under New Business. He indicated members received advance copies for review. He explained that a vote will be taken today; approval is scheduled for the June meeting to allow further review and questions.

Second, a Tennis Committee will be formed to oversee the upcoming RFP for the tennis facility, as the current contract ends in August. The process will follow the model used for the restaurant RFP. Mr. Dutton stated he would lead the committee, which would include members Mr. Dellinger Dinger, Denise Brown, Robert Stowers, and Jim Holliday. The goal is to complete the process by year-end.

Third, Mr. Dutton thanked Mr. Holliday for submitting Oak Hills to a Connecticut Magazine competition, resulting in the course being named Best Municipal Golf Course in Fairfield County. He acknowledged the management team and staff, with special recognition to Mr. Shell for the course's exceptional condition. He added that award presents strong marketing opportunities for the course and restaurant.

#### **B. Restaurant: Mr. Lloyd Lloyd**

Mr. Lloyd reported increased activity at the Oak Hills restaurant, with new staff, private parties, live bands, and higher golfer traffic. He noted improvements are underway for clearer signage, including restaurant and halfway house hours, band schedules, and private event notices. Pub-style signs will be installed on both sides of the clubhouse.

Mr. Lloyd informed the members that The Halfway House will extend hours during private events. He said the concession cart will operate daily until 7:00 p.m. from Memorial Day to Labor Day. He also noted regular breakfast deliveries to Kings Highway Tennis will continue.

Mr. Lloyd reported that outings have begun smoothly, with strong coordination between the restaurant and Oak Hills. He noted weekly live music has resumed; a \$5 cover charge will help offset costs. Promotions will use posters, email, and social media.

Mr. Lloyd discussed the updated menu, saying it has been well-received. He noted new pricing options for private events are in place, generating strong leads from listing sites. Mr. Lloyd stated that 10 private events were held in the past month, with more scheduled. He continued saying the restaurant will continue to reserve porch seating and full service for regular guests during private events. He indicated the Halfway House and cart hours will adjust accordingly.

Mr. Dellinger praised the balance of private events and public service, stressing the importance of clear communication. He asked if business is up from last year; Mr. Lloyd confirmed it is.

Mr. Crowley shared positive feedback from the Darien Men's Association, who pre-ordered sandwiches that were ready and well-received.

The Board thanked Mr. Lloyd and expressed support for continued success.

### **C. Nature Advisory: Mary Vere!**

Ms. Verel reported continued progress on path remediation, with improvements in appearance and new markers installed. She noted that a planned Cub Scout event was rained out, and rescheduling is in progress. She stated increased public involvement and visibility remain priorities.

Ms. Verel asked if there was any update on the submitted grant. Mr. Gartner confirmed no response had been received. Ms. Verel offered to follow up if provided with the submission details.

Ms. Verel noted the alternative lawn project is improving after weather-related setbacks. She noted invasives were recently removed, and flowers are beginning to bloom. She said the meadow is developing, birdhouses are occupied, and grass is growing. She indicated that mugwort removal efforts are ongoing.

Ms. Verel pointed out that the gravel and mulch around the fountain garden need refreshing. She

noted that a natural herbicide made from vinegar and water will be used to control weeds along paths. She stated the committee continues to collaborate with the Norwalk Garden Club.

Despite the rain, Earth Day had a good turnout and strong feedback. Ms. Verel thanked all involved, including Mr. Dutton and Mr. Gartner. She noted the event generated positive publicity.

She indicated that future programming will include bird walks, tree walks, and lunch-and-learns. The committee hopes to coordinate with Sarah Cruz for a fall tree ID walk.

Ms. Verel indicated that the long-term plans include exploring a dedicated nature center, as Norwalk is the only nearby town without one. She also shared plans for a potential food forest featuring berry bushes and fruit trees, in collaboration with a master gardener connected to a Bronx-based plant supplier.

Ms. Verel concluded by noting steady progress.

#### **D. Tennis: Denise Brown**

Ms. Brown reported that the tennis courts opened on Monday but have been affected by rain, making them soft. She asked Mr. Holliday if they should be re-rolled. Mr. Holliday wasn't sure but will follow up. Ms. Brown noted Kings Highway is using the courts and used to having them rolled daily. She noted recently, a handyman has been doing this, but it's unclear if he can operate the roller.

Ms. Brown stated that The Friends of Tennis will meet Sunday, with more updates to follow. Planning continues for the September Art Tournament.

Ms. Brown thanked Mr. Shell for planting three new trees near the courts, intended to provide screening as they mature. Mr. Schell confirmed that three were planted near the pines, expected to serve that purpose in about 20 years.

For now, operations are on hold until the Friends group meets.

Mr. Dellinger added that two new men's teams from the Fairfield County Tennis League have joined Oak Hills. Previously at Long Ridge and Wire Mill, the teams brought about 75 high-level players, including an Open Division and a 50+ team.

#### **E. Supporters of Oak Hills Park: Mr. Crowley.**

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Mr. Crowley stated there was no formal report, but confirmed that the current total in the Supporters account is approximately \$20,900. Ms. Brown clarified that \$6,000 was recently used for tree planting, bringing the balance to roughly \$14,900. An additional \$6,000 remains in other designated funds, including general and tennis-related accounts.

#### **F. Long Term Planning: Gary Leeds**

Mr. Leeds was not present, and no formal report was submitted. Mr. Trimboli provided an update on golf-related long-term planning. He shared that the Golf Long-Range Planning Committee, along with representatives from First Tee and Superintendent Schell, conducted a site visit to begin mapping out potential options for future development. The goal is to present two or three viable options to the city, ensuring alignment with golf, nature, tennis, the restaurant, and overall park improvements.

Mr. Trimboli noted that a presentation to the city would likely be ready in the next four to six weeks. Ms. Verel asked if the Authority would be able to review the plans before they are presented to the city. Mr. Trimboli confirmed that they would, but stressed the need for architects and engineers to validate feasibility. He reassured members that all areas of the park would benefit and no details would be hidden.

Mr. Stowers also expressed interest in reviewing the plans, noting the importance of strategic presentation in city discussions. Mr. Trimboli acknowledged this and welcomed his involvement. He added that a recent meeting with the Mayor had been very positive, with city officials viewing the plan in the same spirit as the grassroots initiative. No resistance has been encountered so far. Mr. Trimboli reiterated that all members will be kept informed before any formal presentation to the city.

#### **G. Golf Professional: Paul Alexander**

Mr. Alexander reported that the golf season is underway. He noted April was slow due to weather, but golfer enthusiasm is high, and a strong season is expected. He stated the golf shop hours are now 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. on weekdays and 5:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. on weekends, extended due to demand.

Mr. Alexander said staffing is nearly complete, with nine in the shop and twenty-two outside. One new hire, Vince Fez, previously worked for Mr. Shell and brings enthusiasm and experience. Mr. Alexander noted slight overall staff reduction is expected.

Mr. Alexander stated that all 50 annual passes have been sold. Since January, 986 memberships have been sold, up from 750 last month. He indicated two outings have occurred: Norwalk Fire Department (118) and Tunnel to Towers (139). He added that twenty-three outings remain, with only one open Monday left due to a cancellation.

Mr. Alexander noted that outing demand is higher than ever. The Men's and Women's Golf Associations and NHole league are active. Nine clinics are running, many with new golfers.

Mr. Alexander stated that the FourUp POS system is nearly fully implemented. Staff are confident with the system, booking is easier, and paperwork has been reduced. Mr. Schell provided key support. The shop is fully stocked with \$200,000–\$225,000 in new merchandise.

Mr. Alexander concluded, noting nationwide golf demand remains high, and a strong summer season is expected.

#### **H. Superintendent: Jim Schell**

Superintendent James Shell reported that the course is in good condition. Progress on spring maintenance has been slow due to weather, but current temperatures align with the typical seasonal timeline. Tree matters were already addressed earlier in the meeting.

Staffing is nearly complete, with one position left to fill. A returning part-time employee, Vinnie, is being considered. He previously worked well and currently splits time with Mr. Alexander.

The spring growth flush has begun, and the rough is growing quickly. Jim noted they are doing their best to keep up with mowing and maintenance.

#### **1. Controller: Mark Gartner**

Mr. Gartner gave a brief report, noting there were no updates beyond what was already provided in his written report available in the agenda packet. He indicated he would reserve further remarks for the upcoming presentation.

He confirmed April was a strong month financially. In response to a question, he acknowledged that the bottom line was approximately \$40,000 over budget.

#### **J. General Manager: Jim Hollyday**

Mr. Hollyday gave a brief report, acknowledging that his written report included two duplicate items from the previous month. He clarified that they were not repeated tasks, just a carryover in the documentation.

Mr. Hollyday noted he had recently returned from a two-week vacation in South Carolina with his wife and daughter, and since his return, has been fully engaged with work. Though the role began as part-time, it has become both demanding and rewarding.

Mr. Hollyday highlighted that his time is split evenly between management meetings and maintenance-related tasks—11 of each noted in his report. He emphasized that his work involves coordinating, planning, and addressing operational issues.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business discussed.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **A. Review Draft FY2026 Budget**

Mr. Dutton presented an overview of the FY2026 golf course budget, which projects a \$456,000 profit after expenses. Of this, \$130,000 will be paid to the city and \$180,000 allocated to lease obligations, with the remaining balance supporting capital needs. Despite a projected \$230,000 deficit, the strong cash position will cover the shortfall.

Mr. Dutton continued, saying revenue projections are conservative, anticipating slight increases in rounds played and cart rentals. A possible \$1 cart fee increase could offset higher lease costs due to tariffs. ID card sales and greens fee revenue are based on actuals, adjusted for seasonal trends. Season pass and cart rental revenues reflect current usage, and tournament fees are tied to confirmed bookings.

Mr. Gartner presented projected revenue for FY2026, using a four-year average of revenue details of which are located in the agenda packet. He discussed the following:

- Wages and Benefits

Adjustments were made to hourly rates, staffing levels, and hours worked to align compensation with market rates. Jim's department had major pay gaps, particularly for the mechanic, who left for a private club at \$105,000 (nearly double his previous pay). The long-tenured foreman also

left due to poor benefits. These exits prompted budgeted compensation increases.

- Payroll Taxes:

FICA is 7.65% of payroll. A 1099 contractor isn't included in withholdings, slightly lowering costs. Overall, payroll tax remains under budget.

- Unemployment:

High during COVID (FY22), now stable. No increase expected unless unemployment rises.

- Health Insurance:

The plan is to move to the City of Norwalk's coverage—cheaper and better benefits. Rates are fixed through April 1; no increase budgeted. Two employees are enrolled, up to seven are eligible. Most decline due to other coverage, but increased enrollment is a possible cost risk.

- Workers' Compensation:

Past claims led to The Hartford dropping coverage and higher premiums. Rates now stabilizing: last year cost \$16,300; this year estimated at \$17,000, budgeted at \$17,500. Unexpected claims may raise costs.

- Retirement Plans:

A 2% employer match is offered for employee 457(b) plans.

Ms. Brown asked Mr. Gartner if the recent injury in Mr. Schell's department work-related and if there would be a Worker's Comp claim? Mr. Schell responded yes, but indicated it was too early to know if there would be a claim.

- Administrative Expenses

- Liability Insurance: Increased \$4,000 due to underreporting.
- Telephone: Slight increase from updated actuals and a 10% projected Optimum rate hike. Professional Fees: Audit and legal costs unchanged.
- Advertising: Reduced by \$10,000 after switching to Forup's POS system. Current \$7,000 supports social media and signage.
- Office Expenses: Slight decrease due to marketing change. Includes software, supplies, employee appreciation, and a \$3,000 Cintas contract.
- Credit Card Fees: Tied to golf revenue; expected to drop 1.2% with reduced usage.

- Training and Dues: Includes management memberships and training. Minimal cost.
- Meals and Entertainment: Included in standard admin expenses.
- Authority Secretary Services: Telesco handles minutes; no change.
- Other Outside Services: Paychex payroll fees are fixed.
- Other Administrative: Covers sewer tax, documentation, property tax, and late fees.

- Utilities

Higher costs due to Eversource’s new congestion charge (FMCC), effective July 2024–April 2025. Rates spiked but may ease by May. A \$66,000 budget reflects current actuals and a 4% expected decrease.

- Liability Insurance

Adjusted for prior reporting error; 8% increase applied for March 1 renewal. Includes pollution and cyber coverage. \$1,800 added to match historical spending. Net income projection reduced by \$4,000–\$5,000.

- Interest

Covers commercial loans. Interest remains high from recent large purchases, but will shift to principal soon, keeping the budget steady.

- Sales and Operations

Golf Genius costs have increased and are now accurately reflected. The board is considering passing some of these costs to the Men’s and Women’s Associations. Golf pro supplies remain at \$4,500, consistent with prior years. Uniforms included.

- Park Maintenance and Equipment

The discussion began with a review of the debt service principal from commercial debt. This figure directly impacts cash flow but is not reflected on the P&L. Reviewing net operational income across fiscal years: FY23 was \$691,000, FY24 forecast is \$546,000, and FY25 budget is \$456,000—a \$100,000 decrease from the FY24 forecast. While conservative, this reflects actual money before any expenditures.

The discussion moved to commercial debt. In FY26, only two new purchases are expected in March. Notably, the cart fleet and GPS units will see a 50% cost increase but only for the last three months of FY26 due to the lease payment schedule. Principal payments for equipment are significant and impact cash flow, though not the P&L.

All equipment—mowers, carts, gym upgrades—are cash expenses. The carts alone are projected to increase significantly in cost. The \$216,000 figure for commercial debt is straight-lined and does not include interest.

The restructured city debt is also a cash item, not shown on the P&L. It's projected at \$130,000 for FY26, driven by increased per-round fees and payment for non-revenue rounds.

Mr. Alexander asked If cart costs rise, is a \$1 increase per round enough?

Mr. Gartner answered yes, based on 25,100 rounds, a \$1 increase generates \$25,100. A \$2 increase would bring in \$50,000, but we don't plan to implement that all at once. He stated it's better to increase gradually. If needed, an additional \$1 could be added in FY27. A \$2 jump in one year may be too much.

Depreciation is estimated at \$415,000 based on past activity and calculated only at fiscal year-end. Capital projects are estimated at \$344,000. The main expense is the bunker project, which is locked in. Cart path repairs remain in the plan but could be postponed if the summer is financially challenging. A \$40,000 water well investment is planned to reduce reliance on the city and save money over time.

Despite capital outlays, a positive net income is projected. In 2017, net income figures were significantly lower. Current operating income is strong at \$450,000.

Mr. Dutton asked, How can we show positive net income when paying \$216,000 in leases, \$130,000 in debt, and \$344,000 in capital? Mr. Gartner responded, These are cash impacts shown for budgeting but not included on the P&L. The only P&L expense here is depreciation.

Mr. Gartner explained that a capital contribution of \$20,000 is projected, representing supporter-paid improvements or grants. The prior year's \$62,000 included tennis fence upgrades. This year's number is a placeholder and may change based on supporter spending or grants.

Mr. Gartner summarized by saying after accounting for the cash effect of \$239,955 (from debt and capital), the projected FY25 year-end cash balance is \$610,000—down from an estimated \$850,000. However, major capital projects (e.g., bunkers and cart paths) will be completed, allowing for a lighter capital year in FY27 and an opportunity to rebuild reserves.

Mr. Dutton asked Mr. Gartner if he was concerned about ending with \$610,000? Mr. Gartner stated no. While it reduces our cash, we are still in a healthy position and have funding flexibility for future years.

Ms. Brown asked makes up the \$610,000? Mr. Gartner said it's a combination of restricted and unrestricted funds. Restricted funds (capital reserve) were required in the 2019 lease restructuring to ensure future self-reliance. These reserves may be used for capital projects if needed, but require a separate discussion.

Mr. Dellinger thanked Mr. Gartner for the detailed overview. He then asked Mr. Schell and Mr. Hollyday if replacing the deteriorated fence at the park entrance was within the budget. It was confirmed that the fence helps prevent unauthorized vehicle access and should remain. The board agreed it's in poor condition but may wait another year due to cost.

Mr. Dutton invited further questions on the budget documents and reminded members they could review and follow up before voting on the final budget at the next meeting.

Mr. Gartner presented the FY2026 capital projects and proposed moving \$30,000 in planned expenses to FY2025, due to a strong financial year (\$100,000 ahead of profit projections). Items include:

- \$13,000 for patio screens
- \$5,000 for flagstone regrouting
- Roof replacement on the halfway house
- Water heater for the rental house

**\*\* MR. DUTTON MOVED TO INCREASE THE FY2025 CAPITAL BUDGET BY \$30,000 TO COMPLETE THESE PROJECTS NOW.**

Mr. Gartner said as a reminder, in FY2023 and FY2024, the course exceeded income targets and spent less than budgeted. This proposal remains within long-term financial expectations.

**\*\* MR. DELINGER SECONDED THE MOTION**

In response to Ms. Brown, Mr. Dutton stated that the \$70,000 planned in FY2026 for cart paths was briefly discussed. He noted if FY2026 underperforms, the scope of cart path work may be reduced or delayed. Bunker work will proceed as planned.

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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- \*\* MS. BROWN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**
- \*\* MR. STOWERS SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted  
China Mayhew  
Telesco Secretarial Services