

**CITY OF NORWALK
OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - OCTOBER 16, 2025, 7:00 PM
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

ATTENDEES: Alan Dutton (Chair), Denise Brown (Treasurer), Gary Leeds, Geoff Sweitzer, Mary Verel, Richard Dellinger (Vice Chair), Jennifer McAllister, TJ Trimboli.

STAFF: Jim Hollyday (General Manager), Mark Gartner (Controller).

OTHERS: Jim Schell, John Lloyd, Jerry Crowley.

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Dutton conducted the roll call as noted above.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: Sept. 15, 2025

****MR. DELLINGER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 15, 2025 REGULAR MEETING.
**MS. BROWN SECONDED THE MOTION
**THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY WITH THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENTS: CORRECT "AUDREY COURTESAN" TO "AUDREY COZZARIN"; ADD "MS. BROWN, TREASURER" AND "MR. RICHARD DELLINGER, VICE CHAIR" TO THE ATTENDANCE SECTION.
THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS AMENDED.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No public participation.

V. REPORTS

A. Chair

Mr. Dutton reported on recent activities at Oak Hills Park. He noted the receipt of seven responses to the Request for Proposals for tennis court resurfacing and indicated Ms. Brown would provide details during her report. He announced the first meeting of the Oak Hills Golf

Pro Search Committee, comprising himself, Mr. TJ Trimboli, Mr. Leeds, two members from the Men's Golf Association, two from the Women's Golf Association, Mr. Jim Hollyday, and Mr. Mark Gartner.

The committee introduced themselves, conducted focus groups to identify desired characteristics for the new golf professional, and planned to develop a job description and specifications at the next meeting. Mr. Dutton stated the committee would partner with organizations such as the Metropolitan Golf Association, Connecticut Golf Association, and PGA for recruitment support and post the position locally.

Ms. Brown inquired about the timeline, and Mr. Dutton responded that while there was no strict deadline, the process would ideally conclude before the next season, taking advantage of the current slow period.

Mr. Dutton announced the Staff Appreciation evening and dinner on October 27 at Odeen's, inviting all Authority members and noting the course would close that day to allow staff time to play golf. Authority members interested in attending were asked to notify Mr. Hollyday.

Mr. Dutton reminded members that the November meeting would include initial discussions on setting 2026 golf rates, with a draft to be reviewed in advance. Mr. Dellinger confirmed the November meeting date as the 20th.

B. Restaurant: John Lloyd

Mr. Lloyd reported that the golf season's end necessitated reduced restaurant hours starting in November, with amenity coverage shared with the halfway house, which would remain open when the restaurant closed. He stated the concession cart would cease operations on weekends unless exceptional weather warranted otherwise. Mr. Lloyd noted a refocus on brunches, live music programs, evening meals, and private parties, including upcoming events such as a Halloween party and New Year's Eve all-inclusive party.

Mr. Dutton commented on anticipated business from political events at Odeen's and requested Mr. Lloyd share the updated weekend schedule for publication. Mr. Lloyd agreed to advertise the schedule clearly.

Ms. Brown inquired about the process for outing groups utilizing the restaurant, referencing Mr. Lloyd's previous report on limited support. Mr. Lloyd explained the process involves initial emails in January with menus and policies on donated alcohol and concessions, followed by follow-up contacts. He noted that while most outings have been positive, approximately 60% engage the restaurant in some capacity, with the remainder often bypassing due to organization or budget issues, representing a missed opportunity especially since the course closes on outing days.

Mr. Lloyd expressed interest in discussions to integrate food and beverage as a fixed part of outing packages for next year without disrupting established relationships.

C. Nature Advisory: Mary Verel

Ms. Verel reported a successful "Walk and Talk" event rescheduled to Wednesday due to weather, attended by 20 people and led by Ms. Sarah Cruz and her interns, who provided instructional content and expressed interest in assisting with publicity, creating a dedicated webpage, and inventorying coastal forests. She stated the food forest process has begun, including work on invasives through cutting and smothering with leaves and wood chips, with assistance from a landscaper associated with the Norwalk Land Trust. Ms. Verel noted plans to redo the alternative lawn area, which experienced invasive weed overgrowth due to water retention from a metal strip edging, and announced an upcoming meeting to discuss future plans, offering to provide more details to Mr. Leeds afterward.

D. Tennis: Denise Brown

Ms. Brown reported that the tennis courts remain open to the public, weather permitting, and would close upon the occurrence of a hard frost that causes the lines to pop up. She noted current usage is primarily on weekends with spotty participation during the week. Ms. Brown stated that while she typically runs a fall youth program, she did not organize one this year; however, several returning students expressed interest in playing, leading her to form a small group that meets on Wednesdays, which has been a fun experience with enthusiastic participation from the children, though it will conclude next week. She reported hosting two events this fall, the first being the inaugural Arthur Goldblatt adult tournament with approximately 45 players, directed by Mr. David Kamani, Associate Director for Grassroots, over two days, raising about \$5,200 for Grassroots through donations and player fees, and receiving positive feedback that supports its continuation next year with planned improvements to expand the program. The second event was the Grassroots Autumn Classic youth tournament, during which Oak Hills hosted 20 high school girls aged 15 to 18 as one of four facilities, generating approximately \$50,000 for Grassroots primarily from donations and player fees, which was a successful and enjoyable occasion. Ms. Brown added that volunteers from the Tennis Friends group provided significant assistance during the two-day Off the Global Out tournament, making their support invaluable to the event's success. Regarding the Request for Proposals for the Tennis Center, Ms. Brown confirmed receipt of seven applications, reflecting strong interest in Oak Hills, with the submission period closing on September 30; the committee reviewed the submissions at a meeting last week and narrowed the field to four diverse applicants, including corporations, LLCs, and sole proprietors, with interviews scheduled for the second week of November, after which further updates would be provided.

E. Supporters of Oak Hills Park: Jerry Crowley

No report presented.

F. Long Term Planning: Gary Leeds

Mr. Leeds reported that he toured the course this week with Mr. Schell, Ms. Verel, and Mr. Dutton to review potential sites for a driving range and other initiatives that the First Tee program is considering, describing the discussion as very interesting. He stated that the group will begin meetings with the city to explore possibilities and determine next steps, with efforts expected to accelerate in full once Mr. Dutton returns from his trip.

Mr. Leeds noted that he has requested from Mr. Schell a long-range plan spanning five, ten, and twenty years. He added that Mr. Jim Hollyday is conducting an infrastructure assessment of the eleven buildings at Oak Hills, a number Mr. Leeds had not previously realized was so extensive, to inform the long-range planning needs. Mr. Leeds indicated that he will now engage Ms. Brown and Ms. Verel, given recent progress on other matters, to compile initial thoughts for presentation to the Authority in the coming one to two months.

G. Golf Professional: Paul Alexander

No report presented.

H. Superintendent: Jim Schell

Mr. Schell reported that the course is performing well, with significant recovery from the preceding hot, dry summer conditions. He stated that he met with the bunker contractor yesterday to discuss the action plan, noting that the start location will depend on course wetness to minimize equipment transport damage; the contractor will begin work next week, having already delivered some equipment, and bunker sand testing confirmed suitability for this year's version, with only a minor, inconsequential increase in susceptibility to fried egg lies. Mr. Schell explained that greens aeration was postponed due to weather forecasts, with decisions typically made five days in advance; the original plan shifted to this week, where Monday appears unfeasible but Tuesday and Wednesday now look viable, allowing completion without significant frost impact to hinder grass recovery, expected within a couple of weeks. He praised the staff's excellent performance and acknowledged the approaching leaf season as his least favorite maintenance task, as it coincides with slowing grass growth, requires targeted course movement, and causes some wear, though necessary; overall, conditions remain status quo on the golf course.

I. Controller: Mark Gartner

Mr. Gartner reported on financial matters, noting revenue exceeded budget by 4% through September, driven by strong green fees up 11%, cart rentals up 8%, and range fees up 5%, though trail fees were down 3%. He attributed the overall positive performance to favorable weather extending the season. Mr. Gartner stated expenses were 2% under budget, with payroll up 3% due to additional outings but offset by vacancies and efficiencies. He highlighted a 12% increase in water usage over the last two months due to high temperatures, even with pumping efforts. Mr. Dutton acknowledged the water cost as a trade-off for the beneficial weather.

J. General Manager: Jim Hollyday

Mr. Hollyday noted a positive vibe at Oak Hills due to the tennis RFP interest and golf pro search. He referenced his written report covering maintenance, meetings, two tennis tournaments, and several outings in September. Mr. Hollyday announced a new offering starting October 20 of the 9-hole rate Monday through Friday through season's end, as a response to changing weather, shortening days, and a thank-you to customers to boost green fees. He reported on social media progress: Facebook views at 18,800 (up 146%), interactions at 411 (up 291%), and visits at 2,500 (up 56%); Instagram views at 18,200 (up 2,700%), interactions at 243 (up 100%), and visits at 550 (up 111%). Mr. Hollyday stated the initiative began early with a small budget for a consultant and expressed optimism for continuation. He informed the Authority of necessary HVAC replacements for the two dining room systems due to refrigerant

leaks and deferred maintenance, in addition to the previously approved pro shop system replacement, with costs to be discussed with Mr. Gartner and the Finance Committee for November. Mr. Gartner suggested TikTok videos of Mr. Hollyday dancing at holes to attract customers, to which Mr. Hollyday humorously agreed with Mr. Gartner's participation in filming. Mr. Leeds inquired about the new cart contract cost compared to the prior one, and Mr. Hollyday noted it was approximately 13% higher, influenced by doubled interest rates, though below the budgeted 50% increase; Mr. Gartner confirmed GPS fees remained nearly unchanged, with both contracts aligning at five years, and agreed to provide a cart cost analysis. Ms. Brown praised consultant Ms. Kat for quick, effective design work on a tournament banner. Mr. Leeds asked about outcomes from the Richards Avenue/West Cedar public information meeting on a potential roundabout. Mr. Hollyday described it as well-presented, noting the intersection's suitability due to traffic volume, especially from the college, and the roundabout's traffic-slowing benefits, though common in Mr. Dutton's experience abroad. Mr. Dutton endorsed roundabouts for efficient flow but highlighted the need to address pedestrian crossings for students. Mr. Leeds inquired about the West Cedar Street Bridge completion, with Ms. Brown noting a November projection but uncertainty on timeline adherence.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

No old business was raised.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Brown proposed creating magnetic car signs featuring the Oak Hills logo for free advertising, to be distributed to golfers, staff, and Board members, and suggested potentially updating the logo, possibly through a design competition. Mr. Dutton supported the idea, noting it might be time to revisit the logo, and recommended forming an ad hoc committee for the next meeting. Mr. Leeds cautioned about vehicle materials affecting magnetic adhesion. Ms. Brown confirmed her experience with adhesion on plastic surfaces. Mr. Sweitzer endorsed the concept based on family use of similar items.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

****MR. DELLINGER MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****MS. LEEDS SECONDED THE MOTION**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for November 20, 2025.

**Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin,
Recording Secretary**