

**CITY OF NORWALK
OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DECEMBER 18, 2025
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

ATTENDEES: Alan Dutton, Denise Brown, Gary Leeds, Geoff Sweitzer, Jennifer McAllister, Richard Dellinger, TJ Trimboli, Robert Stowers.

STAFF: Mark Gartner, Jim Hollyday, John Lloyd.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Dutton called the regular meeting of the Oak Hills Park Authority to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Dutton conducted roll call. All members responded as present, establishing a quorum.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: November 20, 2025

Mr. Gartner noted one correction under his report on page 3, second paragraph, second sentence: fieldwork for the audit was completed at the end of July, not the beginning of October. Mr. Leeds noted one correction under long-term planning on page 2: long-term planning is currently on hold pending discussions with the tennis concessionaire, not selection of the First Tee.

****MR. DELLINGER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 20, 2025 REGULAR MEETING.**

****MR. LEEDS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED AS AMENDED.**

Mr. Dutton thanked the individual responsible for preparing the minutes for their excellent work throughout the year.

No further corrections were offered.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Alex Knopp, 35 Fifth Street, Norwalk, addressed the Authority. He spoke in favor of the proposed 2026 rates and thanked the Authority for discontinuing the practice of small annual residential rate increases. He also requested consideration of a 9-hole cart rate for senior citizens specifically for the back nine, noting that many other courses offer this option to accommodate walkers who may need a cart later in the round due to fatigue or heat, which he believed would increase usage and cart revenue.

No other members of the public requested to speak. Public participation was closed.

V. REPORTS

A. Chair

Mr. Dutton reported that an executive session would be held after new business to discuss the tennis contract recommendation from the tennis committee. He provided an update on the Golf Professional search, stating that the application deadline was the following day, approximately 13 or 14 strong resumes had been received from local and out-of-area candidates, and a committee would be reformed to review applications, narrow the list, and begin interviews.

B. Restaurant: John Lloyd

Mr. Lloyd provided an end-of-year review. He reported strong growth in private party bookings with positive reviews and cash flow. Outings remained a mixed result with some legacy groups preferring self-catering; new terms of engagement for 2026 were discussed with Authority leadership to attract better-financed outings. Non-golfer restaurant traffic improved through word of mouth and targeted marketing, with Sunday brunch and late-afternoon dinners most popular. Takeout via delivery services was disappointing but contributed meaningfully. The halfway house maintained steady business; hours were reduced to encourage restaurant usage, though data showed most regular golfers still preferred course-side concessions. Happy hour, breakfast sales, on-course takeout, and relationships with golfing groups (especially lady golfers) were positive. Initiatives to make the clubhouse more appealing included pool tables, dartboards, specials, local draft beers, live music, and events. Revenue was over 50% ahead of the modest 2023 RFP projection. Mr. Lloyd thanked Authority leadership for support and wished everyone happy holidays.

Mr. Dutton clarified that the discussion regarding halfway house versus restaurant hours remained preliminary and not finalized.

C. Nature Advisory: Mary Verel

Ms. Verel was not present. Mr. Dellinger reported on her behalf, using notes she provided. He first took the opportunity to commend Ms. Verel for the great job she has done with the Nature Committee in getting things rolling, particularly on the nature path. He then presented the following updates: A very successful event was held on November 29th, right after Thanksgiving, called Forest Bathing, led by Bill Wren. About 30 people went through the path and the trail, and there was a lot of tree-hugging going on.

The committee is planning another event on Saturday, December 27th, same time, 11 to 12, again with Bill Wren. It will be Tai Chi on the Great Lawn, and they are going to be advertising that. They are also planning a lunch at Odine's on January 31st, at the end of January. Nisha Oliver, one of the members of the Nature Committee, will be doing a Lunch and Learn around the issue of composting. That will be advertised tentatively.

Ms. Verel is working with Sarah Cruz, Norwalk's arborist, and her community staff to do a BioBlitz in the spring. They are going to try to quantify what's in our forest at Oak Hills and help to preserve the valuable resource that's there. They are also trying to make the entrance to the trails better. They did some work last year on the end of the trail, and now they are going to try

to make it more accessible to all those that want to walk. On the food forest, they are still working on creating a food forest around the Great Lawn.

Mr. Deliinger reported that unfortunately, they did not get the \$35,000 grant from Athletic Brewing for the trails. However, they did get a \$4,000 grant from the Goodman Foundation, and they are actually applying for another grant that Nisha Oliver brought to their attention about fruit tree planting from the Fruit Tree Planting Foundation. They just started writing that grant, which will be done after the holidays.

D. Tennis: Denise Brown

Ms. Brown reported that the tennis courts are now closed for the season with no current activity. She noted that the Friends of Tennis held a good meeting on Monday.

The treasurer's report showed \$26,314 in the supporters account, and Ms. Brown expects the balance to reach around \$27,000 by year-end, with another \$200 donation received (thanked Mr. Dellinger for the related letter) and additional funds anticipated before the end of the year. The group has a nice amount available but has not yet decided on specific uses, with various project suggestions under discussion to be addressed as spring approaches.

The committee reviewed its membership and welcomed a new member, Mr. Chris Halsey, who served on the tennis selection committee. He will become more involved, particularly in fundraising and other projects, where he is expected to contribute effectively.

Ms. Brown highlighted a comprehensive list of 2025 accomplishments compiled by Mr. Dellinger, including: successfully raising and maintaining funds in the account; completion of resurfacing and new fencing on courts 1 through 6; planting of approximately 15 new trees along the perimeter fence where the tennis courts meet the golf course; a successful Arthur Goldblatt First tournament, which will continue; efforts to build a liaison with Grassroots Tennis, including sponsorship support for their Arthur Goldblatt event and planned sponsorship of the Autumn Classic, with hopes to grow the partnership in coming years; and appreciation to Mr. Jim Schell for initiating changes to the trajectory of golf balls on the 11th hole, which should help reduce issues for tennis players.

Looking ahead, the group is planning an event in January (likely the 15th or 16th) where tennis players will gather at Odine's to watch the Australian Open, combined with a trivia night focused on tennis-related questions for a fun evening.

Ms. Brown noted that more discussion will occur in the future regarding the tennis selection committee and expressed optimism for a strong year ahead in the new year.

E. Supporters of Oak Hills Park: Jerry Crowley

Mr. Crowley was present but did not provide a report.

F. Long Term Planning: Gary Leeds

No specific report was given under this item.

G. Golf Professional: No Report

No report.

H. Superintendent: Jim Schell

Mr. Schell reported that he did not have much to share this evening and would keep his remarks brief for the sake of time. He stated that the course looks great, especially now that it is covered with snow, adding that while it might sound a little Grinch-like, the snow provides a nice break. Everything is going well indoors, where the team is currently engaged in "Christmas Elf stuff"—cleaning up course supplies, sanding them down, and preparing to repaint them. Mr. Schell noted that he has ordered turf covers for the worst of the tees, and he believes that once they receive a full winter season of protection, those tees will start the next season almost like new, which should make a big difference.

Leaf season is finally over, which he welcomed with thanks. He specifically thanked Mr. Tom Bifano, the new equipment manager this season, noting that leaf season passed without any major problems: the blowers and leaf collectors were always working, and although there was one breakdown, Mr. Bifano had the equipment repaired and back in service within four hours following a quick weld job. Mr. Schell commented that Mr. Bifano has really been pulling his weight.

Mr. Schell mentioned that once the snow clears, the team may be out on the course doing some brush clearing to open up the understory in certain spots for better airflow and related improvements.

I. Controller: Mark Gartner

Mr. Gartner reported that the audit report from the auditors was finally received last week. He distributed it today to the Oak Hills Park Authority members and to the City of Norwalk. For the month of November, with the off-season underway and activity decreasing, preliminary figures showed revenue from rounds and cart rounds below budget. However, revenue was still slightly above budget overall due to a higher rate per round, and expenses were lower than anticipated—partly from reduced water usage and the absence of a head golf professional, which helped contain salary costs.

On a year-to-date basis through November, rounds and cart rounds remained well above budget, while discount ID card sales were on budget. Preliminary revenues were \$209,000 over budget (almost entirely from green fees), with expenses only \$5,000 over budget, resulting in a net operating position approximately \$204,000 better than budgeted. Net operating income was also \$35,000 higher than the prior year, and the cash balance stood \$194,000 above the previous year.

Mr. Gartner noted that the combined unrestricted and capital reserve bank accounts remained well over \$1 million, although recent large payments for bunker work (which he reviewed with Mr. Jim Schell) had just been issued. He expected the bank balance to fall below \$1 million in the coming week. Despite the drop, the cash position was significantly stronger than the prior year—which itself had been a record—so the Authority continued to set new highs in cash reserves, which he described as a positive development.

In response to a question from Mr. Dutton about whether this would require drawing on the line of credit, Mr. Gartner confirmed that the line of credit had not been touched since 2020. Mr. Dellinger asked about the audit rating, and Mr. Gartner confirmed it was a clean, five-star audit with no questions, pushback, mistakes, or issues regarding practices or procedures. The process simply took time at the end to finalize the report.

Ms. Denise Brown credited the strong audit outcome to Mr. Gartner's work as controller.

J. General Manager: Jim Hollyday

Mr. Hollyday reported that the past month had been largely devoted to the work of the Tennis Selection Committee and the Golf Pro Selection Committee, along with participation in a couple of Nature Advisory Committee meetings. He also addressed ongoing technical issues, specifically with the HVAC system and the waste lines.

Regarding the waste lines, Mr. Hollyday explained that there is a significant dip in the line, leading to frequent backups that are far more common than should occur in a normal system. To date, the approach has been reactive maintenance—clearing the lines as needed—but a more permanent solution is required. The dip is located in the kitchen area, and correcting it would involve jackhammering the kitchen floor to straighten and re-pitch the line so that waste flows properly. This is expected to be a major project requiring full closure of the restaurant, with the affected section potentially spanning 20 to 40 feet (exact length still unquantified). Mr. Hollyday and Mr. Jim Schell attempted to measure it the previous day. A video inspection of the line had been scheduled for that day but the contractor did not arrive in time; it has been rescheduled for Monday. Mr. Hollyday noted that this will represent another significant expense. As an alternative, he is considering a plan centered on consistent preventive maintenance, though the extent of the problem has not yet been fully quantified.

Mr. Hollyday offered an apology to the Authority for not bringing forward a member proposal received last year from an unlimited golf pass holder. The proposal suggested transforming the unlimited golf pass into an "unlimited golf club pass" that would include food and beverage privileges. Under the idea, pass holders would pay an additional amount (e.g., \$400 or \$500) as credit at Odin's restaurant. Mr. Hollyday acknowledged that he should have shared this with the Authority much earlier (ideally in January of the prior year) and apologized for the delay. He stated that the concept needs further development and could potentially be considered for implementation in 2027, as it would involve coordination with Odin's operations. He invited discussion in 2026 if any Authority members found the idea appealing.

In response to a question from Mr. Dellinger about the HVAC schedule, Mr. Hollyday confirmed that the Pro Shop air handler replacement is scheduled for January 8th and 9th. However, the two larger air handlers in the kitchen (servicing the dining room) have not yet been scheduled, as they require complete restaurant closure during installation. He is awaiting proposed dates from Mr. John Lloyd for a period in late January or early February when the restaurant can be closed.

Mr. Dutton clarified that the Pro Shop unit will proceed during the December 22 to January 7 closure period (since it only affects the Pro Shop and ladies' room), but the kitchen units could not be scheduled for that window. Mr. Hollyday agreed that the restaurant closure for the kitchen

HVAC work will need to align with Mr. John Lloyd's slowest two-week period, ideally during the coldest or snowiest time to minimize business impact. The equipment for the kitchen units has already arrived and is on site.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

No old business was discussed.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review and Vote on Proposed 2026 Rates

Mr. Dutton stated that the primary item under New Business was the review and vote on the proposed 2026 rates. He noted that notice of the meeting had been properly published and that the proposed rates were available to the public. He further stated that an initial discussion of the rates had occurred at the previous meeting.

Mr. Gartner reviewed the proposed rates and summarized the key points, including that all Norwalk resident rates, including unlimited passes, would remain unchanged. Non-member daily fees for non-residents would increase by two dollars for eighteen holes and one dollar for nine holes. There would be no increase to daily fees for card members. Non-resident adult and senior ID cards would increase by ten dollars. Annual passes would remain unchanged as initially proposed. Cart fees would increase by one dollar due to increased costs associated with a new five-year cart lease.

Mr. Leeds proposed increasing non-resident annual unlimited passes for both adults and seniors by one hundred dollars. He further proposed increasing non-resident limited passes by fifty dollars, while excluding junior passes from any increase. Mr. Dutton and Mr. Stowers expressed agreement with this approach, citing that non-residents do not contribute through local taxes. Mr. Gartner confirmed the applicable rate lines and agreed with the proposed adjustments. The Authority reached consensus on the amended increases for non-resident annual passes.

Mr. Leeds also raised the issue of limiting the sale of unlimited passes to the end of February. Mr. Gartner explained that this practice had been followed in recent years with limited discretionary exceptions. The Authority agreed to continue this practice.

The Authority then discussed offering a formal option for players to take a cart for the back nine only. Mr. Hollyday explained that staff could manage the logistics, including payment and cart delivery. The Authority agreed that the charge for a back-nine cart would be fourteen dollars.

Following discussion, Mr. Dutton called for a vote to approve the 2026 rates as amended.

****MR. DUTTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2026 RATES AS AMENDED AND PRESENTED.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE 2026 RATES WERE APPROVED AS AMENDED.**

Mr. Dutton stated that New Business was closed and announced that the Authority would enter Executive Session.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

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

****MS. MCALLISTER SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:22 pm.

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