

**CITY OF NORWALK
OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 16, 2025**

BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING

ATTENDANCE: Alan Dutton, Chair; Richard Dellinger, Vice Chair; Denise Brown, Treasurer; Gary Leeds, Geoff Sweitzer, TJ Trimboli; Mary Verel, Robert Stowers, Recreation and Parks Department Director (7:23 p.m.)

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

OTHERS: Jerry Crowley, Elsa Obuchowski

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

Mr. Dutton called the roll. A quorum was present. [00:30]

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. December 19, 2024

**** MR. LEEDS MOVED THE MINUTES OF DECEMBER 19, 2024.**

**** MR. DELLINGER SECONDED.**

Mr. Dutton said that they had 11 pages of minutes for the meeting. He said that there were important omissions and he reviewed the YouTube video. [2:18]

The final rate increase proposal was presented on the screen. He would like this to be recorded in the minutes. [3:12]

Oak Hills Park Golf Course Rates for 2025 Season						
Rates with Discount Cards	1/1/25	Peak Weekday	Off Peak Weekday	Peak Weekend/ Fri	Off Peak Weekend/ Fri	9 Holes
Resident Adult Park Permit	\$140.00	\$42.00	\$32	\$45	\$34	\$27
Resident Senior Discount Card (62+)	\$130.00	\$30.00	\$23	\$45	\$34	\$23
Any Junior (Under 18)	\$65.00	\$24.00	\$18	\$30	\$23	\$20
Non-Resident Adult Discount Card	\$260.00	\$42.00	\$34	\$45	\$36	\$27
Non-Resident Senior Discount Card (62+)	\$250.00	\$30.00	\$23	\$45	\$34	\$23

Daily Fee Rates (No Membership)						
Adults		\$56.00	\$42	\$66	\$50	\$32
Seniors (62+)		\$43.00	\$32	\$66	\$50	\$30
Juniors (Under 18)		\$30.00	\$23	\$36	\$27	\$21
Cart Fees						
18 Hole Cart per person	\$20.00					
9 Hole Cart per person	\$13.00					
Off Peak Cart	\$15.00					
2025 Annual Pass - Expires 12/31/2025						
Unlimited Annual Pass 7 Days	Resident	Non-Resident				
Adult	\$2,675	\$3,000				
Senior (62+)	\$2,150	\$2,500				
Junior (age 12-17)	\$650	\$850				
Limited Annual Pass Mon-Fri	Resident	Non-Resident				
Adult	\$1,950	\$2,250				
Senior (62+)	\$1,650	\$1,850				
Junior (age 12-17)	\$500	\$700				

Mr. Dutton said he would like the following motion:

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE RATE CHANGES, THE POLICY CHANGES AND THE DISCOUNT CARDS FOR 2025 AS DISCUSSED.**

To:

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE RATE CHANGES, ALONG WITH A PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE BOOKING WINDOW FROM NINE DAYS TO EIGHT DAYS FOR THE UNLIMITED PACKAGE HOLDERS FOR 2025 AS DISCUSSED.**

**** THE MINUTES WERE UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED AS AMENDED. [4:57]**

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no one present who wished to address the Authority at this time. [5:24]

REPORTS

A. Chair

Mr. Dutton introduced Mr. Sweitzer. [6:16]

Mr. Sweitzer greeted the Board members and said he had lived in Rowayton for about 20 years. He gave a brief overview of his curriculum vitae. He said that he had been playing at Oak Hills for a number of years. [6:32]

Mr. Dutton said that Mr. Schell had informed him that one of the staff would be leaving the Course. Mr. Dutton will be meeting with Mr. Schell and Mr. Hollyday to discuss the situation. [8:55]

Mr. Hollyday is in the final stages of developing outing guidelines for the restaurant. [9:40]

B. Restaurant: John Lloyd

Mr. Lloyd greeted the Board members and gave a brief overview of the activity at the restaurant. [10:31]

- There were a number of private parties held during the holidays. [11:01]
- Two weddings have been held at the restaurant. [11:07]
- Booking for baby showers and birthday parties are being made for the 1st quarter of 2025. [11:24]
- The new menu and brunch have been established. [11:55]
- A winter season of light music such as jazz on Sundays and other bands on Saturday will be starting. [12:06]

Discussion followed about the details for interested bands. [12:44]

Mr. Leeds asked about the restaurant events being listed on the Oak Hills website. [13:49]
It was suggested that a link be put on the Oak Hills website to Odeen's website. [14:28]

C. Nature Advisory: Mary Verel

Ms. Verel greeted the Commissioners and said that the Advisory was moving ahead. [15:02]

- The alternative lawn mixture has been spread. [15:35]
- Tulip Tree Design, Mike Mushak and David Westmoreland, will be coming in to work on the dangerously steep path area by the end of the path free of charge. [16:09]
- Ms. Verel added that the Nature Advisory are hoping to get some volunteer groups to do some path rejuvenation and new signage. [16:59]
- Mr. Stowers had some suggestions about applying for grants [17:13]
- The Norwalk Garden Club will continue to help with the Fountain Garden. [17:44]
- Ms. Verel said she would like to work on some of the natural areas by the tees. [17:58]
- Mr. Gartner said that he would be willing to help with the paths since he knows the paths very well. [19:30]
- Ms. Verel asked if the Nature Advisory could meet at Oak Hills property during the day. [19:41] Mr. Gartner suggested the old Pro Shop area.

- The group will try to focus in on the long term plan in February. [20:58]
- Ms. Verel would like to speak to the Forester to work on the Nature Area Master Plan [21:22]

Discussion followed. [21:41]

Mr. Stowers joined the meeting at 7:23 p.m.

D. Tennis: Denise Brown

Ms. Brown greeted the Commissioners. [22:25]

- The first long range planning committee met a few weeks ago. [22:43]
- They are looking to complete some projects for the Tennis Center for 2026. [22:50]
- The short term goal involves the changes with the end of the Kings Highway contract. In August of 2025. [23:27]
- The Friends of Tennis have kept the courts active and have provided a great deal of Support. [23:49]
- There had been discussions about holding an Arthur Goldblatt Tournament possibly in September through the USTA website, which will reach out to everyone in Fairfield County. [24:44]
- Ms. Brown said that she has been concerned about the delays about installing the Fencing and the USTA April 5th deadline for the installation. [26:15]

Discussion followed about possibly having the restaurant provide food at the September event. [27:17]

E. Supporters of Oak Hills Park: Jerry Crowley

Mr. Gartner said that Mr. Crowley was watching as a guest, but there was no report. [28:26] Mr. Gartner went on to say that he and Mr. Crowley meet in January. Even though the Supporters of Oak Hills are on a fiscal year like Oak Hills, the thank you tax letters are sent out in January. Mr. Gartner and Mr. Crowley review the donations for the year and then Mr. Crowley sends the letters out.

F. Long Term Planning: Gary Leeds

Mr. Leeds said that he did not have much to report. [29:10] There was very little activity during the holidays and Mr. Leeds informed the other Board members he would be away for the remaining month of January.

G. Golf Professional: Paul Alexander

Mr. Alexander said it was very cold and very slow at the course. [29:46] The carts were put away in late December. It costs \$20.00 to walk and the course is open 10 to 3.

There are six people working one day a piece at the pro shop. He said that the upgrade for foreUP has been completed and they have been doing training on the new software. Steve Shepard had been a great help to the staff. It will help both the staff and the golfers.

42 annual passes and 150 memberships have been sold already. [31:04] There were 21 outings booked for 2025. The new golf interest since COVID has been helping the last few years. Mr. Alexander will be attending the PGA show, which is where he first encountered foreUP, which has 23 courses under their management.

2024 was a great year for Oak Hills and they have a great staff. Everyone is looking forward to returning. He said he expected that 100% of the staff would be returning next year. [32:05]

Mr. Hollyday then announced that there was one correction to Mr. Alexander's report. [32:17] Mr. Hollyday said that foreUP actually has 2,300 golf courses under management. Mr. Alexander agreed that 2,300 was the correct number.

H. Superintendent: Jim Schell

Mr. Schell said that everything was going well other than freeze/thaw in the springtime.[32:44] Invasive trees have been removed from the course along with some storm damaged trees and others that needed to be removed. Mr. Schell said that he would like to put in some plantings by the tennis courts and gave the details for that planting.

There are some staffing issues, which Mr. Schell will be discussing tomorrow. [34:29]

Ms. Brown asked for the species of the tree that will be planted by the tennis course. [34:40] Mr. Schell said that it will be listed on the quote, which he will send to everyone.

Mr. Dellinger said that Mr. Gartner had verified that the funding was there for the purchase of the trees for planting. [35:05] He asked when Mr. Schell expected the spring freeze/thaw cycle. Mr. Schell said it usually happens in March or April.

Mr. Leeds asked Mr. Stowers if the City could help out with the tree removal. [35:38] Mr. Stower said that the City had gotten a million dollar grant for the tree canopy for the entire City. He said that he would check into what the City could do for the course. He gave an brief summary of the different areas that the grant funding addressed. However, the City has been focused on planting trees, not removing them.

Ms. Brown asked how tall the replacements by the tennis courts would be. [37:45] Mr. Schell said that the replacements would be between 6 to 8 feet. They can grow up to 60 feet.

Mr. Alexander asked when the first tee would be ready to play and the bunker surrounds. [39:00] Mr. Schell said that the ground was too frozen to tell at this time.

The discussion moved to the growth of the trees and the location of those new plantings. [39:28]

I. Controller: Mark Gartner

Mr. Gartner greeted the Board members. [40:52] He said that last year for the entire month of January, they had sold 102 discount ID cards. This year, they had already sold 157 discount passes (ID cards) halfway through the month. Many people are doing things on line.

Preliminary updates were sent out to the members for October 1st, through December 31st. [41:47] He gave the various figures and will be sending the final numbers to the members. Preliminary net income for December was down. He said that there was a typo in his report in the third paragraph where it says they were \$120,000 over budget. It should say they were \$20,000 over budget. The year to day net operating income of \$120,000 over budget and \$60,000 over prior year. He made a quick summary of the income for the past year and noted that December, January and February would be the period when income would be under budget.

Mr. Gartner said that he now had heat in his office. [44:00] He thanked Mr. Hollyday for working on this issue.

Ms. Brown asked if they would need to tap the line of credit. [44:30] Mr. Gartner said that they did not need to do this at this time. He is watching the balance sheet carefully and gave the details.

J. General Manager: Jim Hollyday

Mr. Hollyday greeted the Board members and said that he had spent his time on reviewing the heating systems. [46:17] There are five heating systems on the property. There were two repairs required for Mr. Gartner's office. A new system was installed in the maintenance building where Mr. Schell works. He gave the details on these projects along with the time spent on various departments, such as Operations, Tennis and Maintenance.

Mr. Hollyday then spoke about Steve Shepard who has been training the staff on the new foreUP system. [47:50] Mr. Shepard was the project manager for the foreUP implementation and is a volunteer who is not interested in compensation. He had contributed greatly to the golf operations.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Leeds asked about Pace of Play and asked Mr. Alexander to come up with some statistics for the March meeting. [50:15] Mr. Alexander said that it was more active than many people thought. He also reminded everyone that Oak Hills was a public course. He added that he would be happy to share the pace of play. Discussion followed about increasing the Pace of Play and having a four hour and 34 minutes pace.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Gartner asked the Authority to vote on including Ms. Brown in her capacity as Treasurer to oversee and sign any paperwork needed for the renewal of Oak Hills Park Authority's line of credit with Norwalk Bank and Trust. [54:25] He said that he had spoken with the bank's VP about this issues. It needs to be approved and included in the minutes.

**** MR. LEEDS MOVED TO AUTHORIZE MS. DENISE BROWN IN HER CAPACITY AS TREASURER TO OVERSEE AND SIGN ANY PAPERWORK NEEDED FOR THE RENEWAL OF OAK HILLS PARK AUTHORITY'S LINE OF CREDIT WITH NORWALK BANK AND TRUST.**

**** MR. STOWERS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. [55:13]**

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. DELLINGER MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MS. BROWN SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services