

**Golf Commission Meeting
July 26, 2021
Minutes**

Members Present: Don Espach (Chairman); Joe Gaudiano (Vice-Chairman); Tony Ciccaglione; Tom Cerulli; Angelo Cordone; Shelly Dowling; Owen Evans

Also Attending: Bobby Brown, Director of Golf; Paul Lupo, Assistant Golf Course Superintendent

Members Absent: Frank Squicciarro; Diane Wheeler

Mr. Espach called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Review and Approval of Prior Minutes:

Review and approval of the Minutes of June 28, 2021 . . . A Motion was made by Mrs. Dowling, seconded by Mr. Cordone to approve the minutes as is. Motion carried unanimously.
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Audience Participation:

- None

Assistant Golf Course Superintendent (Paul Lupo):

Brush Clearing/Course Improvements:

- Work on Glen #4 and 5 has stopped temporarily as the focus shifted to equipment repairs and adding sand to bunkers. Over 100 tons of sand has been added to Knolls bunkers #5, 6, 7, 16, and 17. Priority is on the worst bunkers followed by as many additional bunkers as the current budget allows.
- Native plants continue to be added to the beds around the clubhouse, # 1/10 tee and the Miklus Center in a continued effort to provide food for pollinators as part of the Trumbull Pollinator Pathway and the Audubon Certification process.
- Stump grindings have been cleaned up, filled with soil and seeded on # 5, 15. The holes behind #9 green will be filled and we will attempt to dig up the partial stumps remaining between #9 green and the Knolls practice green when the excavator is repaired.

Equipment Maintenance/Irrigation System:

- Full-time mechanic continues to be out on workers' compensation.
- Unfortunately, we continue to struggle with mechanical failure on our equipment but are doing our best to keep up with repairs.
- The irrigation system hasn't gotten much use in July, however frequent lightning storms have wreaked havoc on the irrigation satellites. Lightning struck the main surge board at the maintenance shop and has blown several surge boards, modems, and satellite components on the course costing thousands of dollars. All damaged parts have been repaired or replaced and the system is up and running at full capacity.
- Despite the equipment and irrigation issues, we are doing everything we can to provide the public with an enjoyable golf course every day.

General Updates:

- Careful what you wish for. In June we were praying for some rain and now we are praying it stops. It has been a very challenging year for turf health. Too much water during the summer heat will kill turf faster than any herbicide and we have had record setting rainfall this month. Turf in poor drainage areas of the course have literally drowned from consistent rain. With all the rain and humidity, grass has been growing like crazy and we have been challenged with trying to mow in soft conditions without causing more damage.
- All in all, the course has done pretty well and it looks like we will begin to dry out a bit. We will aerify and seed water damaged areas when the schedule permits.
- Mr. Cordone asked if the ball washers were being returned to the course. Mr. Lupo responded that they were removed during COVID restrictions including the cemented bases. If the Commission decided to return them it would be fairly involved as they would have to be re-cemented. Mr. Espach responded that the issue is low on our present priority list.
- Mr. Gaudio asked about the possible replacement of the irrigation system. Mr. Lupo responded that we are at year 23 of a 30-year life expectancy and that its replacement would be very expensive and invasive for Tashua Knolls. Mr. Espach responded that the project is on the 5-year plan.
- Mr. Cerulli said he noticed some rebar sticking out of the ground on the left side of #16 up the hill. Mr. Lupo responded that he will have it removed.

Green Committee (Shelly Dowling):

An update on the operation of the maintenance department, and current challenges, was given by Mr. Lupo. A lively discussion ensued.

The pandemic has given our customers the opportunity to get outside and play more golf. We have seen an increase in the number of new golfers as well as an increase in the number of rounds played. Over the past 12 months, play on the Knolls is up 21% and play on the Glen is up 44%. While this resurgence has been a great thing for golf and Tashua Knolls, the downside is that it has occurred while we are facing a number of challenges. These include:

Reduced staffing:

- We are operating with three full-time employees rather than our more normal five or six. Most significantly, our mechanic has been out on workers' compensation since last October and we have not been able to temporarily fill that position. The mechanic is a key role which requires certain training and skills. Our staff is teaching themselves to perform necessary tasks, but this is a time-consuming activity which further takes them away from being available to perform on-course tasks.
- It has also been difficult for us to hire our normal level of experienced seasonal workers. We are having the same problem as are many businesses in finding experienced help. Fortunately, this problem has been tempered by applications from young workers however their ages can limit the types of tasks they are allowed to perform. Despite the fact that we have increased our pay rate and have been advertising all year on social media and job search companies, we have not received enough applications from experienced workers to meet our needs.

Equipment:

- The pandemic has caused long delays in the availability of both new equipment and replacement parts for existing equipment. Just one example: replacement cutting reels on our mowers have been unavailable since last November (we are hoping they become available over the winter). These delays make maintenance of existing equipment even more important yet again, we are currently without an experienced mechanic to expedite maintenance.

Weather:

- Weather conditions this year have been particularly challenging. We have experienced prolonged heat waves followed by extended and record-breaking rainy periods. As can be expected, this results in increased vigilance and practices in managing course conditions including proper soil moisture levels and avoiding fungus growth and insect infestations.

With the new fiscal year beginning July 1, we are actively working with the Golf Commission and Trumbull Town management to hire additional personnel, obtain additional equipment and supplies (including bunker sand) so that we can drive the courses to an even higher level of excellence.

Mrs. Dowling added that with all of the challenges listed above, Mr. Lupo and the maintenance crew are constantly in a state of fixing something on all 27-holes of the courses. Once we get through the season, the Green Committee will be discussing Mr. Lupo's vision for the course and work with the Commission to come up with a plan forward for Tashua Knolls. Mrs. Dowling also added that the feedback received on the course conditions at Tashua has been overwhelming positive. This feedback is from the various clubs who held their tournaments as well as the various outings that have returned to Tashua after a year-long break due to COVID.

Director of Golf Operations (Bobby Brown):

- Mr. Brown began by seconding Mrs. Dowling's comments that the feedback on course conditions has been very positive.
- Special Olympics held their tournament today for 56 players. Beginning with the First Selectman's tournament on August 16th, Mondays are booked with tournaments for nine consecutive weeks (except for Labor Day and Columbus Day). Many tournaments switched their tournaments to the fall this year due to COVID concerns. The busy fall schedule presents a challenge to the maintenance crew in scheduling much needed course aeration as the first available day for aeration is October 18th which is several weeks later than normal. Potential frost conditions at that time of year will affect which aeration method to use as well as the time needed for grounds to heal.
- Mr. Brown advised the Commission that high school golf team tryouts begin in three weeks. This will require blocking off times on both the Knolls and Glen courses for two-hour timeframes.
- Issues surrounding credit card charges between ForeUp and WorldPay were discussed. A problem with our internet wiring was discovered and corrected, but the problem has persisted. Mr. Brown will contact ForeUp to try to resolve the issue.

House Committee (Tony Ciccaglione):

- Safety Projects:
 - The gutter over the front entrance and a chimney cap must be replaced to prevent further leaking. Estimated cost is \$10,000.
 - A water leak in the basement has been detected. A professional cleaning crew will be called in followed by general contractors to determine the problem. Mold remediation may be required in the basement. Estimated cost \$10,000.
- Priority Project:
 - Back clubhouse entrance: new ceiling, new lighting and cement resurfacing. Front clubhouse entrance: new railing, minor siding issues and cement resurfacing. Bids have been received and are being compared.
 - The paving and drainage project scope is being combined and bid specifications will be submitted to the Town.

- Other Projects:
 - A painting and wood replacement work list for the east side of the clubhouse, lightning shed on the course and at the cart barn is being compiled. Once complete, general contractors will be contacted for quotes.
 - The UI has been contacted for input on LED lamp change out and availability of solar energy incentives.
 - The clubhouse men's locker room bathroom was repaired. The clubhouse fountain could not be repaired. A new fountain is ordered but shipment has been delayed.
 - Mr. Ciccaglione has been working with Mr. Faustini to correct ladies' room issues brought to our attention. The issues are 75% completed. The floor still need to be polished and the walls need to be painted. Complaints were received by customers that the benches around the restaurant outside service window were broken and in terrible condition. Mr. Faustini had them replaced. On Monday, July 26th, Mr. Faustini was contacted regarding the awful conditions at the dumpsters which were overflowing and surrounded by piles of garbage on the surrounding area. Improvements were made immediately with more to follow. It was suggested that Mr. Faustini consider either adding an additional dumpster or an additional trash pickup at particularly busy times. The deteriorated condition of the fencing surround the dumpsters was also noted.
 - An electrician was called in to install a 240 volt receptacle at the maintenance barn for an air compressor.
 - Mr. Espach informed the Commission that talks are being conducted with Mr. Faustini and the Town regarding the clubhouse roof issue.

Concessionaire (Domenick Faustini):

- No report given.

Finance (Joe Gaudiano):

- Income for June was above-average but the excessive amount of rain is affecting July numbers.
- Expenses are expected to be in-line for the end of the current fiscal year.
- An initial estimate of retained earnings was made despite the fact that exact numbers will not be available until the Town's December audit. We are hoping to see an overall gain in the order of \$450K.
- Given the positive outlook for the fiscal year, Mr. Gaudiano and Mr. Espach worked with the Green and House Committees to develop a list of potential projects and issues that were postponed and/or in need of attention and which were not included in the original 2022 budget process. Four motions totaling \$168,000 were made which will be well below the gains from the past fiscal year. All motions were made with the understanding that the total dollar amounts requested may change slightly if more accurate quotes are received prior to the request going before the Board of Finance in August.

A motion was made by Mr. Gaudiano, seconded by Mr. Cerulli to transfer \$45,000 from retained earnings to GL Account #21100000578801, Maintenance Repair, for paving on the Knolls and Glen cart paths, paving around the clubhouse, and a draining issue behind the cart barn. Motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Gaudiano, seconded by Mr. Cerulli to transfer \$30,000 from retained earnings to GL Account #21100000581888, Capital, for upgrades to the lightning detection system. Motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Gaudiano, seconded by Mr. Cerulli to transfer \$41,000 from retained earnings to GL Account #21100000578802, Maintenance Repair Supplies, for repairs to the front and back entrances to the clubhouse including ceiling replacement, handrail replacement, lighting replacement, cement resurfacing, gutter replacement and a chimney cap addition. Motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Gaudiano, seconded by Mr. Cerulli to transfer \$52,000 from retained earnings to GL Account #21100000501101, Salaries Full Time, to fund the open Greenskeeper position. Motion carried unanimously.

Correspondence:

- A letter was received from Mrs. Susan Pfannkuch, president of the ladies 9-holers, regarding the lack of or inappropriate seating surrounding the outside eating areas. The matter was brought to Mr. Faustini's attention and the broken benches were replaced. In addition, Mr. Faustini made the decision not to offer food and beverage service under the tent area this season.
- An email received from a concerned customer who is a member of one of our clubs regarding the attention being paid to the food service and the restrooms. Concerns in the email include:
 1. Poor quality food. A recent cobb salad was inedible due to a funky smell from the turkey. The menu that is not reflective of today's eating habits.
 2. Seemingly no interest in making improvements
 3. Reputation that there is no interest in hearing feedback and defensiveness
 4. A "chef" who is less than a short order cook
 5. Lack of interest in providing satisfactory seating environment or service options to customers.

The customer wanted it made clear that the issue is not about the pro shop and staff nor the very hard working staff in the restaurant. The customer also felt the food service is only getting worse as courses like Smith have upped their game and Longshore has a new restaurant. Both Oak Hills and Sterling Farms do a significantly better job than Tashua as well.

Old Business:

- No additional feedback was received from Mr. Faustini regarding a proposal for beverage cart service at Tashua Knolls.

New Business:

- None

Adjournment:

A motion was made by Mr. Ciccaglione at 8:45 PM; seconded by Mr. Cordone to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine A. Plumeau
Golf Course Commission Clerk