

**Golf Commission Meeting
June 22, 2020
Minutes**

Members Present: Don Espach (Chairman) Richard DeLibro; Tom Cerulli; Angelo Cordone; Shelly Dowling; Joe Gaudiano; Frank Squiccimarro

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

Members Absent: Diane Wheeler

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

Mr. Espach began the meeting by thanking Mr. Bobby Brown, Mr. Doug Snyder and the entire staff at Tashua Knolls for their hard work, dedication and actions in enabling the course to open so successfully during the coronavirus pandemic. The opening required the attendance (remotely) of many meetings, many discussions, and out-of-the box thinking to accomplish the goal. The Commissioners joined in a round of applause.

Review and Approval of Prior Minutes:

Review and approval of the Minutes of January 27, 2020 . . . A Motion was made by Mr. DeLibro, seconded by Mr. Cordone to approve the minutes as is. Motion carried unanimously.
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Audience Participation:

- Mr. Kevin Dyrek, President of the Men’s Club, echoed Mr. Espach’s comments for the great job done to reopen the course. He took the opportunity to ask for consideration for tee time accommodations for the Men’s club members on weekends just as the Ladies and Sr. Men’s club receive during the week.

Director of Golf Course Properties (Doug Snyder):

- Greens are in great health with some Athracnose and annual bluegrass weevil damage which are under control.
- Covid19 PGA rules are in effect throughout the course.
- The tees are showing signs of wear/tear and insect damage and are being treated.
- Fairways have some dry spots and watering has increased.
- The Roughs are showing summer heat.
- The elimination of cart traffic to the driving range has contributed to better grass growth.
- The bunkers are edged and raked routinely. A new “Aussie” method of raking the bunkers for improved golfing is being tested.
- We have recently switched to organic pond management to help us with the Audubon Certification process. We are hoping to see the results shortly.
- Native fescue areas are doing great and have reduced labor hours and increased areas for native wildlife and pollinators around the course.

- We continue with our Audubon work with a monarch habitat, bluebird house path, native plants, organic pond management and an increased number of wildlife sightings.
- The irrigation system remains problematic and it continues to show its age and its need for constant repairs.
- The Kaulbach Foundation has donated the funds for a third aerator which has been received. The Golf Commission thanks the Kaulbach Trust for the continued support of Tashua Knolls.
- The lack of rain and summer heat are taking its toll and watering has increased dramatically around the course. Some areas in Connecticut have already seen watering restrictions, but fortunately not yet in Trumbull.

Mr. Snyder then introduced Mr. Paul Lupo who was hired as the Assistant Golf Course Superintendent on April 1st. Mr. Lupo informed the Commission that he grew up in Orange, CT and began playing golf at age 10. He was the captain of his high school golf team and played at many area courses. He worked at Racebrook Country Club for 15 years as an Assistant Superintendent. He holds an Associate's degree in turf management and horticulture. Mr. Lupo is happy to be at Tashua where he hopes to bring some of his golf course knowledge. Mr. Snyder added that Mr. Lupo has already been an invaluable resource in helping out with the irrigation system

Green Committee (Frank Squicciarro):

- Mr. Squicciarro added that it was impressive to see the vision of the fescue areas coming into reality. There have been many positive customer comments.
- The split rail fence on #16 was rotted and broken and fixed in a very timely manner by the maintenance staff.
- A fence will be installed around the trash containers at the maintenance barn to block them from view of the adjoining neighbors.
- Mr. Squicciarro welcomed Mr. Cordone and Mrs. Dowling as the newest members of the Green Committee and looks forward to reinstating socially distant green meetings.

Director of Golf Operations (Bobby Brown):

- Mr. Brown gave the Commission a timeline of the events surrounding the Covid19 pandemic and the closing and subsequent re-opening of Tashua Knolls Golf course. Mr. Brown and Mr. Snyder are keeping a log of all of the activities.
- Both the golf course and pro shop activities are following all Covid19 State and Town recommendations which have resulted in some challenges.
- The tee time reservation system and in particular the 10-day advanced booking has been the most problematic aspect of the re-opening. Much of this is due to the lower number of tee times, restrictions on carts and the social distancing requirements. Unfortunately, this has led to numerous complaints from customers – some of them quite verbally abusive.
- The programs and private and group lessons are in full swing and are following current PGA rules.
- Both the ladies 9 and 18 hole Invitational's have been cancelled for the 2020 season
- All of our tournaments schedule for spring originally moved to the fall. Recently, three tournaments (Special Olympics, Mary's Fund, and the First Selectman's Cup) have cancelled.
- The remaining three tournaments (Trumbull Father's Club, Trumbull Rotary and HBRA are closely monitoring the situation)
- ATK is operating at full 19-employee capacity with working hours increased dramatically due to adherence to Covid19 restrictions. The lack of access to the pro shop has been detrimental to ATK's business.

- Mr. Cordone asked Mr. Brown about going down to 9-minute tee times. Mr. Brown and Mr. Espach responded that we originally started out at 15 minute tee times and went down to 12-minute tee times. The CSGA now allows for 10-minute tee times. However, the restrictions on the number of carts for single riders, the additional labor needed to sanitize the carts and the current improved pace of play prohibit Tashua from changing our tee times at the present time. The situation will continue to be monitored.

House Committee (Dick DeLibro):

- There has not be a lot of house activity other than the normal operating inspections to the alarm and fire systems. All have passed inspection. It has been a good fiscal year with no costly house repairs.
- The new AC/Heat units in the ladies rooms are finally working well for both heating and cooling.
- There were some early issues with lack of garbage pick up at the clubhouse which was resolved by Mr. Brown and Mr. Faustini.
- Mr. Faustini was a big help in locating some sanitizing supplies at the start of the pandemic.

Concessionaire (Domenick Faustini):

- None

Finance

- The 2021 fiscal budget was passed by the Town. The only change to our original request was the removal of all raises to all permanent golf course employees. The Town eliminated the raises for all of its employees as well.
- An overview of expenses to date show us in good shape with the exception of OT salary which as a result of Covid 19 is \$17,000 over at this point but it is hoped that this expenditure will be covered under the State's relief program. The second exception is the heat and electricity accounts which are high due to the lack of payment from Gralor, Inc. (to be discussed further)
- The income numbers were reviewed. The course originally opened in early March but was closed by the Town on March 15th. We reopened on May 5th. This resulted in a loss of income of approximately \$175,000 against the average. However, since reopening for a myriad of reasons, including great weather, people home from work and school and no other recreational activities open, play has been high and we have made up some income.
- Mr. Gaudio then gave a recap of some of the positives and negatives in both income and expenses during the pandemic and the issues we need to be aware of for the coming months.
- The issue of Gralor's past due rent and utility payments was then discussed. In March we were contacted by Mr. Faustini who requested an extension of his May rent until July 1st. As the rent is split 50/50 with the Town his request was forwarded to the Town. Although no official word was received back from the Town, the Commission understood the situation and did not press Mr. Faustini for rent or utilities. In addition, Mr. Faustini has not paid any utilities for the clubhouse since December. All of the utility income goes directly to the golf course. Mr. Gaudio reached out to Mr. Faustini and asked if he would be able to pay May's rent and the back utility payments and reminding him that rent was due again on July 1st. Mr. Faustini said he would not be able to pay either and it was requested that he come up with a payment plan. On July 1st, Mr. Faustini will owe \$21,649.54 in rent and utility payments. Mr. Gaudio will follow up Mr. Faustini.

Correspondence:

- Mr. Espach presented an email from Ms. Janine Salvey, Trumbull Resident, questioning the elimination of the "Glen Special" rate. Ms. Salvey felt that the increased rate for play on the Glen

was too high without the special. Mr. Espach responded in an email that the Glen Special was introduced on the Glen in 2019 as just that – a special – to encourage play on the Glen during slow times as a way to increase income. With the loss of income from the pandemic and increased play on the Glen, it was decided not to run the special at this time. In addition if a Trumbull resident purchases an ID, the rate to play the Glen would only be \$4 more (\$2 for seniors) than if the special were implemented.

- Mr. Espach presented approximately nine responses received from customers regarding the 10-day Advanced Tee Time Reservation policy which will be covered under Old Business.

Old Business:

- **Golf Cart Bid Update (Bobby Brown):** The golf course went out to bid on a new golf cart lease at the beginning of the year. Although we were in year four of a five-year lease, the batteries on the carts were starting to fail at a high rate. Due to the cost of the replacement batteries and the initial estimate from our cart provider that a new lease would be approximately \$20,000 higher than present, it made sense to go out to bid to get a new fleet. However, when the bids came in at approximately \$50,000 higher than present lease, the financial implications were re-evaluated. The decision was made to keep the present carts for the final year. EZ-Go came out and evaluated the carts and replaced numerous batteries under the final months of the warranty. We were able to purchase approximately \$11,000 of batteries under the present fiscal year to get us through this season. Fortunately, the carts are running well at the present time and we will continue to monitor the situation. We will go out to bid again in the fall of this year.
- **Starter/ranger Reporting (Don Espach):** At the January meeting, a motion was made to authorize the transfer \$150,000 representing the salary and benefits of the seasonal starter/rangers to the ATK line item. This was due to an issue uncovered by the Town's internal audit of the golf course. The auditor believed that the Town-employed starters/rangers should not report to a contract employee, Bobby Brown. However, it was later determined by Commission members Mrs. Wheeler and Mr. Espach that the existing Senior Starter employee directly supervised the staff, was involved in hiring decisions and set the working schedules. As a result the decision was made that since the Senior Starter was in fact a supervisor, the reporting issue could be resolved by having him report to the Golf Commission and the transfer of funds would not be necessary.

Mrs. Dowling made a motion seconded by Mr. DeLibro to allow the Senior Starter to report directly to the Chairman of the Golf Commission or his designee. Motion carried 7 -0 (Abstain Squicciarino).

- **Jim Steidlemeyer Memorial Update (Don Espach):** The memorial to long-time Tashua golfer and former Golf Commissioner, Jim Steidlemeyer, was installed on the right side of the 5th Fairway near two trees. Several family members and friends attended a brief ceremony marking the installation. The memorial is a fitting testament to a wonderful man.
- **Seasonal Employee Wage Increases Update (Don Espach):** When the 2021 fiscal budget was approved in December, it contained a \$20,000 increase in the seasonal salary line item to cover the state mandated minimum wage increase that goes into effect on September 1st. The intention at that time was to increase the salaries of the seasonal staff on July 1 to cover the minimum wage increase and provide for the usual employee seniority and loyalty increases. Unfortunately a great deal has changed between December and now. Mr. Gaudiano presented some figures on the cost of the increases to the golf course. Mr. Espach reported that the Town has instituted both a hiring and wage freeze due to the pandemic. The Golf Commission asked for permission to go ahead with the scheduled increases for July 1 but has not received a response from the Town. The

decision was made to table any further discussion regarding the implementation of the wage increases until the Town makes a decision.

- Advanced Tee Time Reservation Policy Update (Tom Cerulli): A review of the existing 10-day tee time reservation policy as well as the changes to the policy that were necessitated by the social distancing restrictions was given. It was acknowledged that due to the lack of tee times, the social distancing restrictions and the limitations of our phone and reservation systems, the current Covid19 policy is very frustrating and is very lacking. A discussion was held regarding possible solutions. These included a return to the old in-person system, potentially limiting reservations to Trumbull residents, and an upgraded computer or phone system method. Pros and cons of all three situations were discussed. The correspondence and on-line comments from the meeting audience were also read and discussed. Unfortunately there is no easy immediate solution. Mrs. Dowling agreed to join the Committee with Mr. Cerulli who will continue to work with the other Commissioners, employees, customers and the Town to try to find a solution that is equitable and transparent to all.
- Prior to ending the discussion on the Tee Time Policy, Mr. Squicciarro brought up the topic of the abuse suffered by the ATK staff by a few customers who are very frustrated with the process. Unfortunately the staff has been the recipient of accusations of favoring customers and lying , among others. While the Commission understands the frustration, there is no excuse whatsoever for abusing staff members who are simply doing their jobs. While the Commission said it is difficult to define exactly what constitutes abuse, they did acknowledge certain circumstances are pretty clear cut.

Mr. Squicciarro made a motion seconded by Mr. Gaudio to allow Mr. Brown to give his staff permission to hang up the phone on any customers who are displaying rude and harassing behavior. Motion carried unanimously.

New Business:

- None

Executive Session:

Mr. DeLibro made a motion seconded by Mr. Squicciarro at 9:35 PM to move into Executive Session to discuss a policy matter. Mr. Brown was invited to join the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

A motion to exit Executive Session was made by Mr. Cordero at 9:50 PM and seconded by Mr. Gaudio. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment:

A motion was made by Mr. Cerulli at 9:55 PM; seconded by Mrs. Dowling to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine A. Plumeau
Golf Course Commission Clerk