



**Town of Westport
Parks & Recreation**
WESTPORT PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Longshore Club Park, 260 South Compo Road
Westport, CT 06880

August 19, 2013

The Westport Parks and Recreation Commission and the Golf Advisory Committee held a joint meeting in Town Hall, room #201/201A at 7:30 p.m. Those in attendance were Andy Moss, Chairman; George Franciscovich; and Steve Axthelm Parks and Recreation Commission Members; Fred Hunter, Chairman, Scott Smith, Gary Solomon, Mark Holod, Joanna Nicholson, and Jean Murdoch Golf Advisory Committee members; Stuart McCarthy, Director of Parks and Recreation and sixty(60) members of the general public.

Absent: Stuart Rogan, Parks & Recreation Commission Member

Absent: Gary Solomon, Golf Advisory Committee Member

1. To take such action as the meeting may determine to recommend pursuing an agreement between the Town of Westport and Valley Crest Golf Course Maintenance to provide maintenance services for the Longshore Golf Course.

Mr. Andy Moss - This is a joint meeting of P&R Commission and the Golf Advisory Committee. Tonight we are not here to talk about the current shape and condition and the golf play at Longshore. Tonight we are here to talk about to engage in outside third party expertise in hoping this improves the quality of the course.

This process started 2-1/2 years ago a lot of work has been put into gathering information by Fred Hunter, to educate us on how we would go about bringing in third party expertise and has been instrumental in shaping and guiding the process on how we have gotten here. The Parks Department has been incredibly supportive in helping figure out how to deal with the problem that we all as residents of Westport share.

Mr. Fred Hunter - The process started about 2-1/2 years ago with some discussion between Stuart McCarthy, Andy Moss, Janis Collins and myself. We spent some time with going over the idea with the possibility of bringing in an outsource maintenance company to take care of the course. At that point and time we had some casual interviews with some groups, and then for whatever reason the idea lost some momentum. In the fall of 2012 the idea came up again some of the people that had been involved before we met with the possibility of bringing in an outsource maintenance company. That same group met with Ira Bloom, Town Attorney, and the First Selectman. The consensus of the meeting was we should continue to move forward with this concept and do some curious investigation about what the alternatives were and the options that we might have. Shortly after that we did some surveys of companies and did course visits to evaluate their experiences with various outsource maintenance companies on site. In addition, we did a lot of phone surveys talking to a lot of different courses around the country based upon suggestions and recommendations of the different companies we were talking to.

In the early part of this year we sent out an RFP and that was pretty well publicized in terms of what was going on. The two key points of the RFP process: 1) the candidates must have other operations in the New England area. 2) we are looking for better golf conditions with people or less payment. There was no attempt whatsoever for the RFP to focus on cost reductions. The committee sent out invitations to selected companies that we had talked to before. The RFP was posted on a couple of different websites. We received responses from IGM, Valley Crest and Billy Casper Golf. Billy Casper was excluded from that process because they want to be a total management company. They want to control everything from the top down foods, pro shop, beverage the whole thing.

On June 22nd of this year Valley Crest and IGM came in and each made a two hour presentation to the Committee. We had plenty of opportunity to ask them all different questions. That Committee was Stuart McCarthy, Andy Moss, Janis Collins, Stuart Rogan, Gary Conrad and myself. At the end of the meetings we determined that our recommendation was to go with Valley Crest and selected them as the principal company that we would move forward with and begin serious negotiations in terms of trying to get to a contract to outsource maintenance of the facilities on the golf course. Another thing that was agreed upon between the Committee members was that no matter what company we selected that we had a qualified backup source. We did pick Valley Crest but IGM is a very qualified backup source.

Mr. Moss - It is important to note that tonight we have Valley Crest as a candidate so the question in front of us is are we pursuing developing an agreement with "a" candidate. Whether it is Valley Crest or IGM, not specifically with Valley Crest that is a question for both the Golf Advisory Committee and the Parks & Recreation Commission. Tonight the question is, is this the right path to pursue.

Stuart McCarthy - Both the Golf Advisory Committee and the Parks & Recreation Commission had a detailed presentation before the Golf Advisory Committee a couple of months ago on this issue. What we have is a little bit more information following the process that Fred Hunter outlined including the in-depth interviews.

I am not a golf course superintendent I directly supervise the golf course superintendent. So the advantage of a company that specializes in this is that they bring a depth of experience. They have on staff agronomists they have a series of regional managers, a structure in which all of their regional managers are golf course superintendents. Valley Crest specifically has their Senior Consulting Superintendent, by the name of Ted Horton, Ted was a golf course superintendent at Wing Foot and at Westchester Country Club.

Any of these companies will install full time staff at Longshore. There will be a full time superintendent, full time assistant superintendent and a full time mechanic. Those are full time 12 month a year employees. Most of the companies will have one or two regular employees (9 month) who have particular skills. They bring in seasonal help as all golf courses do. They do have a different model for their seasonal help which is more people less hours per week and working more flexible schedules so they cover longer hours.

We are in negotiations currently with both Valley Crest Golf Company and with our labor organization. Our current labor is represented by a labor union and we need to be able to satisfy those people as we move through this. We have four existing full time employees on the golf course. We have made a commitment to our employees that we will treat them fairly

and we will make every possible effort to make sure that they come out of this in a very good position.

Golf Course Maintenance - the golf contracting companies do have some advantages in the market place that will help them to reduce costs. They will pay less than we do for supplies and materials, pesticides seed and fertilizer which are a substantial portion of any golf course budget. They have national buying power they represent hundreds of golf courses in some cases across the country and have national contracts that they can leverage to our advantage. That is also the case with equipment purchases, where they can purchase equipment lower.

You are not going to hear anything about the finances of this arrangement this evening. That is because we don't have that information we are in negotiations with both the vendor and our labor union, so we are not in a position to have any public discussion. As Fred and Andy stated our goal is to bring this deal about and our hope is that we will spend the same or less money. We don't anticipate this will be any additional costs at this time but there is a lot of work to be done in that regard.

Mr. Moss - Two goals are to maintain our costs and to improve the quality.

Mr. McCarthy - Going back to the advantages of the two distinct advantages of contracting out with any golf maintenance company are the depth of experience that they bring to solving problems, to providing critical analysis of the golf course and critical supervision of the golf course staff is primary. The second is related to costs, not necessarily with regard to reduction of costs but to cost certainty and cost control over a longer period of time, the ability to enter into a longer term contract with cost certainty for the town.

We will eventually negotiate a contract which is a fixed price contract for providing the personnel and the materials used to maintain the golf course. There are exclusions from that so there will be a separate budget, separate and apart from that fixed amount which the town will have the separate budget. The Golf Advisory Committee, the Parks Commission, BOF and RTM will be involved in some of that and those items are capital equipment purchases, tree work any capital improvements to the golf course. The town still has the ability to determine what capital improvements it wants to see on the golf course. The contractor will provide all of the services related to that. Also there would be a separate budget for water.

The final item, we are recommending that we pursue a contract; we tentatively selected Valley Crest to begin negotiating with. Valley Crest provided us with that expertise that we were looking for. The RFP was extremely detailed, including who is involved in the company, resumes of their senior and consulting staff. What is left to determine in the contract is the makeup of the staff. The town does have a role in the selection of the staff so that while Valley Crest will choose and hire the staff the town must concur with those hiring decisions. You will have an on course full time superintendent at Longshore.

Ms. Jean Murdoch - Is there a target date for this all to happen?

Mr. McCarthy - The next steps are: If the Golf Advisory Committee and the Parks & Recreation Commission recommend moving forward our hope is to have our request before the Board of Finance in September (9/11) and in a October meeting before the RTM. The type of requirements is the transfer of funds in accounts in order to pay the contract. If we are able to meet that schedule we would then turn to the Board of Selectmen in mid-October

for contract approval and could have a management company on the grounds by mid-October or early November.

Ms. Joanne Nicholson - What is their accountability to us and who are they accountable to?
Mr. McCarthy - That is something we are looking at now I will be managing the contract with Valley Crest we will put a group together that will include the Parks Commission, Golf Advisory Committee and the golf staff to provide feedback on the day-to-day operations I will be the link between the town and Valley Crest Golf.

Mr. Mark Holod - Considering the timeframe you talked about, what impact can the outsource company have on the condition of the course when it is ready to open in spring 2014?
Mr. McCarthy - We have been in daily conversations with Valley Crest and they have offered their services. Brian Sepot, Acting Superintendent has been in contact with that regional manager and has been able to review what he has been doing on the golf course for their review. To the extent that we have welcomed them to come and involve themselves in areas such as soil testing, etc. they also have access to all of our current records.

Mr. Scott Smith asked what the duration of the contract would be.

Mr. McCarthy - We put out an RFP that had pricing for a 3 year agreement with 3 one year options and we will have some discussions on that. It also includes mutual out clauses for the contract.

Mr. Scott Smith –Will this group come in and use the golf facility?

Mr. McCarthy - Yes they will use the facility. All the vendors that came in did say that we had a good facility and equipment. The facilities are part of the proposal. They will take over the payment of the utilities, including gasoline, diesel fuel, etc. which they will provide excluding the water. This will exclude paying the water. We will give them access to the fueling facility there. We will have to make other arrangements for the Parks Department to fuel vehicles at an alternate location. There are a number of issues to be determined. This contract calls for the maintenance of all landscape grounds in Longshore Park that are not under the control of The Inn at Longshore.

Mr. George Franciscovich - Will the Parks & Recreation Commission get to look at the final contract and the decision before it moves to the Board of Finance, RTM and the Board of Selectmen?

Mr. McCarthy - Our anticipation was that the contract itself was an administrative item for the administration and the Board of Selectmen to make that approval. We could certainly circle back with the final product.

Mr. Steve Axthelm - I am impressed with the due diligence and I think we have the right people involved to make the appropriate decisions.

Mr. Nick Thieman - I have heard nothing here tonight that requires us to hire somebody to come in and do it differently. I have heard that cost is no object which generally means to me that it is going to cost more, although Stuart said we hope it will cost less. With this contract we hire someone and next year the greens burn up, then what do we do? Has this group given serious consideration to attempting to proceed with the present situation, or have you assumed that you are going to hire someone.

Mr. McCarthy - We have a number of options, one is to move Valley Crest. There will be language that will allow for termination of the contract with and without cause. The advantage of the contract is that we are moving down a path that we have not been down before so that it allows us to actually to go down that path and determine at any juncture that we do or don't want to continue. Relative to Valley Crest having the option to terminate it is hard to believe that they would terminate under any conditions other than us not paying our bills. One of the key elements here is making sure that there is competition in this market.

Dick Healy - Money and quality is a big issue and you can do both most of the time. I think the bigger issue that has been raised to me is who is accountable. The same people around this table are the same people that were around this table the last time it happened. So the questions is, who is accountable for the situation. I'm not sure asking the superintendent to leave is the only answer.

Mr. Moss - We have had numerous conversations over numerous hours to try and figure out and learn to manage the situation. This is a town owned piece of property so part of the accountability is all of us. So this is why we are here having a public meeting to try and figure out the right way to change a situation that none of us are particularly happy with. We have been exploring a situation that we don't like. How do we take a valuable asset here in town and approve the quality of it. It is public process because it is a public course. The Golf Advisory Committee talks about this all of the time. Fred Hunter brings the issue to the Parks & Recreation Commission and we have been having that conversation over the year plus. There is no magic wand and it will take a lot of work to get us there. What we are trying to do is bring the right expertise so that we can at least have a higher degree of confidence to change the situation.

Mr. Rich Rayfield - Are there any funds available to have the group come in between mid September and mid November when the course shuts down before next spring.

Mr. McCarthy - we are pursuing those options, we have and will investigate how quickly we can bring those resources in.

Mr. Rich Rayfield - is the expectation that the greens will be back next year, or is it a longer term process.

Mr. Fred Hunter - Brian Sepot, Acting Golf Course Superintendent has the full support of Stuart, and Brian has a speed dial to Valley Crest to get as much information and assistance as he can get over the next couple of months. I would add that last year in September, within 30 days the greens were back. Whether we keep in-house or we outsource it is a process to bring this golf course back to where we all want it to be.

Mr. Dick Gardella - Why are you not pursuing dual contracts with IGM and Valley Crest so that we get competitive proposals so we know that we get the best price? When that contract price comes in as a number how does that compare to hiring a competent superintendent?

Mr. McCarthy - We are involved in those negotiations the RFP we went through did include financial information we have that on the table for both vendors. While we have a recommendation to pursue an agreement with Valley Crest we have not taken IGM off the table at this point. We also have information on what it currently costs us to operate the golf course.

Mr. Dick Gardella - I would suggest instead of putting this on a fast track timetable that we make sure that the timetable is such that the numbers be made public and reviewed by the golfers.

Mr. Don Bergmann - One of the concerns I have, the fixes be done can they be done in the normal way or is it the soil and the structure of the greens? I would suggest that you would raise that question and see if you could get a judgment initially from these firms as to where they think they are going.

Mr. Fred Hunter - We have done that the answer is that they can deal with the soil we have. They have to mend it they have aeration programs, seeding programs those types of things. They are both comfortable with and can deal with what we have.

Mr. Dave Eason - Since we have \$800,000 worth of equipment and a pretty new golf maintenance barn, have you considered going out and getting a superintendent?

Mr. McCarthy - The process that we are investigating now began some time ago. It has been accelerated prior to the issues that arose on the golf course this summer and prior to the retirement of the superintendent. One of our options moving forward is if we investigate this process and determine not to move in the direction then the next thing we would do is a search committee for a new superintendent. What we are talking about now is fundamentally changing the way that we maintain the golf course. If the decision here is not to pursue this contract then we will have a search committee looking for a new superintendent.

Mr. Jeff Allen - Suppose we go forward with the contract, does that do away with the union? Suppose it doesn't work out are we then back into the union?

Mr. McCarthy - Those are subject to current negotiations.

Richard Jaffee - At this meeting you haven't addressed the root problem. Has there been a study done to see whether we need to reorganize everything outside of going to an outside vendor? Going to an outside vendor might be the easy way to catch up, but in reality we should be tackling all of these other outside issues.

Mr. Moss - We do have to fix the golf course. So attacking it sort of incrementally that would put some sort of quality and improvement in place and if the town wants to have that conversation then we should have that conversation. There are a lot of structural conversations that this town can choose to have if they choose to have it. In the meantime we have a golf course business so my approach is lets get the golf course fixed and if we continue the bigger conversations that's great, but if you hold off fixing the golf course while you try to have that bigger conversations there will be a lot more people in this room next year.

Mr. Steve Weinstein - I think you are doing a good job and are on the right track and I think doing anything else would be really foolish.

Mr. Murray Kronick - I'm thinking when I am listening to all of this that there might be something in between. Like if we have someone that can be a good superintendent, are we overstepping with the decision, could we just wait and have an agronomist come in and work with this superintendent and not make this major move not run up against the union issues but

solve the problems that exists on the course with using professional help when needed and not make this giant step that you are thinking about.

Mr. Michael Fox - This proposal seems reasonable to me only because we are guaranteed the money. This seems to be a no brainer to me.

Mr. Ben Steffen - I just wanted to thank you for taking the time and all of the work you have done. This problem has not been happening over the last two years, it has been a problem for 6-7 years. I think the big thing about this is we really need accountability. Will this third party give us the best performance and will they be held accountable compared to bringing in new crews?

Mr. Moss - When you draw up a contract there are terms and conditions that outline their performance obligations and are held accountable if they don't get done.

Mr. Scott Smith - Does Valley Crest work with the USGA and are they members of the Golf Course Superintendents Association? What is the quality of the superintendent?

Mr. McCarthy - The resources that we as an individual golf course seek they have those resources in-house. They don't necessarily consult the USGA because what the USGA does is they send out their consulting agronomist. Valley Crest has an internal agronomist they also have a contract agronomist who is on staff at Michigan State University. They also have consultant superintendents as well as a network of superintendents in the area.

Regarding the Superintendent - The RFP that we have and the contract that we have will be that the superintendent must be a Class A superintendent or making suitable progress toward being a Class A superintendent. The reason for that is you can't be a Class A superintendent unless you are an experienced superintendent.

Ms. Patty Kondub - If we outsource the town will have four less employees that the town is liable for healthcare, pensions so I think there might be some savings on that end.

Ms. Joanna Nicholson - One of the things that was mentioned that would be part of this besides the depths of experience was that more people would be fewer hours with more flexible schedules that would answer some issues with respect to the 1:00 p.m. quitting time.

Golf Advisory Committee Vote

Upon motion by Mr. Fred Hunter, seconded by Ms. Jean Murdoch, Mr. Scott Smith and passed unanimously, it was

RESOLVED: The Golf Advisory Committee recommends pursuing an agreement between the Town of Westport and an outside maintenance company to provide maintenance services for the Longshore Golf Course.

Ms. Joanna Nicholson – I am not really happy, but given some of the issues that were raised tonight about the general organization, about the way we run things not just the maintenance but some other things makes it seem to me that it would be impossible for us to continue the way we were. But I do think that we have some deeper problems that have to do with the way we are organized.

Westport Parks & Recreation Commission Vote

Upon motion by Mr. Andy Moss, seconded by Mr. Steve Axthelm, Mr. George Franciscovich and passed unanimously, it was

RESOLVED: The Parks & Recreation Commission recommends pursuing an agreement between the Town of Westport and an outside maintenance company to provide maintenance services for the Longshore Golf Course.

Mr. Franciscovich - I have to disagree with a little of Andy and Fred's introduction in that this has to do with the condition of the golf course, but it also has to do with the P&R department being under considerable pressure both from a revenue perspective and expense perspective. That has been reflected in a lot of our programs, staff, up keep at the beach and Longshore, this is part of it. We have been at the BOF where they talk about can we outsource. Part of this what it is intended for is to address some of those issues. We brought this to the BOF before. I would suggest when you are talking to your members about voting in November, it's not just for the position of Selectman; it is the Board of Finance because they are the one's who would really control this issue. The Town subsidy for all Parks & Recreation has gone down to single digits. It is all driven by user fees.

Mr. Steve Axthelm - I also agree with George. There is no other town in which the Parks & Recreation department contributes as much to the operating budget as our town. We basically subsidize things in other areas and we do not get the opportunity to support our programs with the money that the funds that we bring in, in the way that other towns might. On the subject of the golf course I would say that in my heart I really want it to be a mom and pop and to be a supervisor that lives in town. I want it to be people who are our friends who are running our golf course, but I cannot argue with the due diligence that has been done and I can't believe that we will not get an additional benefit from the experience that a company that is in the business of doing this and has the resources. I think that it would be foolish for us to miss this opportunity.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully,

Sheila Kavey
Recording Secretary