

Town of Westport  
Golf Advisory Committee  
Minutes  
March 2, 2015

The Golf Advisory Committee of the Town of Westport met in Town Hall in Room #309 on Monday, March 2, 2015. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Fred Hunter at 7:30pm.

Members present: Fred Hunter, Jean Murdoch, Gary Solomon, Jim Harman, John Ehli and Lura Paschal. Mark Holod was absent.

Chairman Hunter announced that Mark Holod has resigned from the GAC effective immediately. Chairman Hunter added that Mark had been considering his resignation for some time and knowing that he would be missing tonight's meeting and the April meeting confirmed his need to resign.

Chairman Hunter also announced that Valley Crest has hired a new superintendent for the golf course. His name is Mike Golden and he was previously employed at Stanwich Country Club in Greenwich, CT. Mike has been at Stanwich for the last 3-4 years where he worked together with Ryan Segroe, the previous superintendent. Ryan has been very helpful in the transition. Vic Gilmartin from Valley Crest will be coming to help as well. Valley Crest is looking at a date of mid-April to have another meeting open to the town to introduce Mike and discuss their progress, one year into their contract.

**1. Approval of Minutes**

The Minutes of the December 8, 2014 meeting were approved as stated with no changes.

**2. Rounds Report**

Chairman Hunter reviewed the year-end Rounds Report for 2014. He made several observations. Given the previous discussion in prior meetings about senior play it was interesting to note senior rounds were up 25% on weekdays and 29% on weekends. It appears that seniors are playing more rounds or could simply be a demographic change. Adult guests were up 24% during the week and 45% during the weekends. Juniors were down 18% on weekends but up 23% on weekdays. Twilight rounds were up 10% to the highest level ever. Although 2014 rounds were up 12% overall it was still the 2<sup>nd</sup> worst performing year in history of Longshore with 2013 being the worst.

John Ehli asked Chairman Hunter about revenue/expenses for the golf carts and the pro shop and Hunter responded that he has asked for numbers but they have not been provided as those areas are under the control of John

Cooper and Cooper is not obligated to provide that information. The golf cart and pro shop accounts can be audited per the contract with John Cooper but an audit has not been done. John Ehli added that he only asked to see if there was some type of correlation between rounds and golf cart and/or pro shop activity. There was then a general discussion about round pricing and Chairman Hunter confirmed that there has been no change in round pricing for 3 years. The only major fee change made was in 2010 when Friday was designated a weekend versus a weekday. Chairman Hunter reiterated that for the last 2 years the town of Westport has underwritten the golf course for a total of nearly \$1MM to cover the courses' operating deficit. John Ehli also mentioned that thankfully the trend is up with 2014 ending strong. Chairman Hunter answered further questions from John Ehli about the budget stating that the total golf budget needed to break even is \$900,000 per year with fixed overhead of \$210,000. Lee Feldman, meeting attendee, asked if there are any recreational facilities in Westport that break even financially. Chairman Hunter said no and further explained that there are 2 major revenue streams for Westport Parks & Recreation and they are the golf course and Compo Beach. Lee F. asked if the golf course has ever broken even. Chairman Hunter said yes, in 1990's. He added that the course actually generated a surplus over time of \$300,000, which went directly to the town and was subsequently spent on assets in town other than the golf course. Sean Doyle, meeting attendee, asked if golf is revenue neutral. Chairman Hunter said no and spoke about the optimal number of rounds to maintain the golf course in the best condition and maximize revenues. Gary Solomon added that 36,000 rounds per year is estimated to be the optimal number. There was further discussion between John Ehli and Chairman Hunter about the details of the long-term debt obligations of the golf course and the timing of those obligations. Lee F. asked who is responsible for marketing the golf course and Chairman Hunter said no one. Jean Murdoch asked about John Cooper doing some marketing. Hunter said John Cooper has 7,000 contacts and is willing to send blast emails to promote the course at a fee of \$200 per message. Hunter also added that there has never been a big emphasis to market Longshore as the course is here to benefit the residents of Westport and maintaining that balance between keeping residents happy and inviting guests in has always been a major consideration. John Ehli mentioned there should be more of an emphasis on resident business development trying to raise consciousness with current handpass holders. Lee F. added that his question was meant to focus on marketing to residents and that junior play particularly needs to be promoted.

### **3. Golf Association Presidents' Report**

Ellen Ehli-Co-President LLNHGA announced that the season opening coffee will be held on Thursday, March 26. New for this season the LLNHGA will be

welcoming members from outside of Westport and also the LLNHGA will be implementing online tee time taking, both measures following the lead of the LWGA.

Regina Masterson- President LWGA announced that the season opening meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 7.

Michael Fox – President of LMGA announced that the season opening meeting will be held on Saturday, April 25. He also mentioned that the LMGA would like to be involved in any discussion of a clubhouse for Longshore.

#### **4. Discussion – Short Term Improvements**

Chairman Hunter distributed a list of short term improvements compiled by Gary Solomon and John Ehli.

##### Proposed Short Term Improvements for Longshore Golf Course

1. Installing a protective screen along #15 tee box to protect the players.
2. Add signage to #7 tee box, “Yell fore on errant shots”.
3. Hole signage. Cost of project is approximately \$11,900.
4. Repair the screen behind the practice green. Bring screen in 10-15 ft. to allow space for hitting cages (driving nets).
5. Hitting Cage(s). Cost: \$1,000/cage + installation mats additional
6. A large clock mounted on the back of the clubhouse.
7. Club wash and shoe cleaner.
8. Upgrade driving range balls and mats
9. New tee markers. Current proposal: 200 handmade tee markers (\$3,500 estimate), includes 56 extra markers. Alternatives: \$7.50/marker and up.
10. Improve drainage and enlarge the practice bunker on #17.
11. Signage directing players to 9<sup>th</sup> tee, 10<sup>th</sup> tee and 14<sup>th</sup> tees.

Gary reviewed the entire list, which was done in priority order. Chairman Hunter said that items 3 & 5 would probably be pushed to the future but the other items are probably doable. Hunter showed a sample of the potential new tee markers made of wood and painted as a prototype. Gary said items 1,2 and 11 are pragmatic and really must be done. Jim Harman mentioned that possibly there could be a sponsor John Cooper knows who would be willing to provide a clock for the clubhouse. Lee F. asked about the cost of item 10 which Hunter said has not yet been determined. The list will be forwarded to Stuart McCarthy who will then assign costs to each item.

On a separate note, Ellen Ehli asked about future tree planting to accommodate inevitable tree loss in the future. Chairman Hunter added that Charlie Haberstroh definitely has a plan for the future built on the basic premise that if a tree is cut down then two trees are to be planted. In addition, under Charlie’s direction, an inventory of existing trees on the golf course is being created in order to then plan for the future.

Chairman Hunter asked for any further additions to the list and there were none. The motion was made to forward the list, as is, to Stuart McCarthy and motion passed unanimously.

## 5. **Discussion – Long Term Improvements**

Chairman Hunter shared a list of long term improvements that had been prepared by Mark Holod and Jim Harman. Jim reviewed the list, which was given in no particular order.

### Proposed Long Term Improvements

Reconditioning tee boxes

Recondition/Rebuild path/railing below the 3<sup>rd</sup> tee

Longshore Site Plan

- Plan to Rebuild/Relocate Clubhouse

- Relocating Park's Department Maintenance building

- Improved Site Parking

Bunker Redesign/Reconditioning

- Improve drainage of practice bunker on #17

Adding new bunkers (#6/#12?)

Moving selective irrigation (relative to fescue bunkers)

Natural areas – assess areas to increase course beauty

Improve sight lines (remove trees #16/#10/#11/#12) to improve views

Extend/Improve Driving Range/practice area

Expand cell phone service coverage (emergency response)

Course layout expansion/modification

Sean Doyle mentioned adding to the list the switching of holes 9 and 14. As for the Longshore Site plan, Hunter added that Charlie Haberstroh and Jim Marpe are committed to beginning the site plan next fall and there is actually money in the town's budget to start that process.

Chairman Hunter added that the list of long term improvements will be given to handpass holders in the form of a survey in order to gauge the priorities of the membership. Timing for the survey is slated for the first part of May.

Regina Masterson asked about the status of Splash. Chairman Hunter said that negotiations are ongoing between Rory Taggart, the current lessee of the Longshore Inn/Splash property and potential restaurant operators. He further explained that Rory Taggart currently has 4 years left in his lease with the town of Westport with 2 automatic 5 year extensions. Hunter added that within those negotiations Jim Marpe has been emphasizing the need to reestablish the pub room just inside the inn entrance.

**6. Old Business**

Gary Solomon added that gift cards for Longshore had been discussed at the last GAC meeting and in fact Chairman Hunter determined that Oak Hills course in Norwalk currently sells gift cards online. Gary suggested that Longshore and the town of Westport consider doing so as well.

**7. New Business**

John Cooper submitted an item via Chairman Hunter suggesting a change in the twilight cutoff time from 4pm to 5pm during May-Aug. in order to raise additional round revenue. John Cooper added that he will be including a new junior league golf program to his existing junior programs this year. The junior team from Longshore will play against other golf clubs in the area. Cooper also reported that he is currently working on a phone app for Longshore.

Motion was made to adjourn meeting and passed unanimously.

Chairman Hunter adjourned the meeting at 9:05pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lura Paschal  
Acting GAC Secretary