

**Minutes of the Waukegan Park District  
Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners**

**Golf Advisory Committee Meeting  
December 10, 2015**

The Board of Commissioners of the Waukegan Park District and staff met for a Special Meeting to hold a Golf Advisory Committee Meeting on December 10, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at the Bonnie Brook Clubhouse, 2800 North Lewis Avenue, Waukegan, Illinois.

**I. Call to Order**

Chairman Marc Jones called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and directed the roll.

**II. Roll Call**

Commissioners Marc Jones and Bill Sarocka. GolfVisions staff Tim Miles, Tony Tinetti, Ralph Sabatini and Greg Benson. The staff and members present introduced themselves.

**Tim Miles**

Tim attended the meeting in place of Dirk. He noted that they were off to a tough start weather wise, but can't complain about the weather as of late. He noted that October and November had much greater revenue than expected. Highlights of the golf industry were noted, with the impression that globally the industry is up 2-3%. Not a lot of new golfers, though, and the industry continues to rely heavily on the weather.

Changes in the golf industry include demographics in the Chicago area, but that the numbers seem to have stabilized. They are planning for the worst, and hoping for the best.

He noted that there have been 173 special events, and all are pleased with what Ralph has done in this area. Tony has continued to provide great service, and a fine high quality, operation. The group applauded both Tony and Ralph.

Tim noted that this is a fine group of staff who are performing well.

As far as the golf course and Greg Benson, he noted that Greg was wary about the management takeover, but has since embraced GolfVisions and has absolutely performed well, keeping the course in spectacular condition.

Continuing, he noted that the course was not just beautiful, but wonderful to play. The group also applauded the efforts of Greg Benson and his staff.

Greg Petry interjected about the number for the courses and feels that a decline in play will continue, as there are so many courses in the area. He described his vision for the next few years, with golf courses in the area such as Midlane and Glen Flora closing/or becoming public.

Also noted was that with the 70% Hispanic community composition, he feels that there will be continued pressure and decline in play, exacerbated by the weather conditions. These factors together do not paint an optimistic picture for the future. Discussion followed. Tim agreed that these factors do impact the number, and that Greg was painting a fair assessment of the situation. He stated that he and Greg had visited multiple courses in the area to see what results when different options are chosen.

Tim continued and discussed the loss in valuation of golf course properties in the area. It is important to plan for the worst and hope for the best. With him having four of his children in the business, he is concerned and continuously monitoring the situation.

Questions were asked and answered. First Tee was given as an example where there were more attendees, but it is not a revenue generator.

### **Tony Tinetti**

Tony thanked all for attending and thanked Greg Benson and Ralph for their efforts. Having worked at six different courses, he noted that conditions here are as good as any others he has worked at. He received comments this year from golfers noting that the course is as good as any country club.

Continuing, he stated that the pass holders are an older group, with not many under 45 years of age. We are down in passes for this year, but have made a concerted effort to try and get golfers from north of the Illinois Wisconsin border.

Through November, the numbers show 1300 more rounds than 2014, and 600 more than in 2013. Pass holder rounds were down 400 this year, and down 1100 rounds from 2013. We lost pass holders and rounds are down, but we have more rounds overall. He noted that a league was added this year, another is planned for next year there were two big outings from Wisconsin and an additional outing has been added. Despite the industry not doing well, he feels that by providing excellent service, people come here and remember it and return.

Due to the golf industry downturn, we must make sure that they have a great experience so they return. We are doing a good job of getting return golfers. His staff is excellent, Ralph's staff is excellent and Greg has an awesome staff, too.

We have a great product and should continue to do as well as anyone else in the golf business.

Tony responded to a question about returning pass holders and follow up. He noted that we added a new pass this year which was used by some of the league players. He reiterated that there were 1300 more rounds this year than last. More people are trying Bonnie Brook and many become return customers.

He also discussed the prepaid rounds with Great Green Fees and how that has brought in additional business. We reached many more golfers using this option.

Further discussion was regarding rates, with Tony confirming that there have not been changes for about three years. The value of passes versus daily pay was discussed and Tony noted that he is committed to keeping the integrity of passes and will not offer coupons or other discounts at preferred times. Extensive discussion followed.

## **Ralph Sabatini**

Ralph described ways that Bonnie Brook can move forward, and noted that he works to bring a lot of energy and enthusiasm to the events and meals. He tried to find the common denominator between park district needs and GolfVisions needs and commended the support and leadership of both entities.

That being said, he works to achieve satisfaction of those who use the facilities. With having been here a couple of years now, he spoke of the commitment of his coworkers. He believes that there is a need to reinvent ourselves every day in the hospitality area. A great experience needs to be provided at each visit. The renovations (e.g., bathrooms) have gone a long way to enhance that experience.

With transition occurring in Waukegan, we must be novel and remain fresh to be financial successful. Must think of ways to do things differently and upgrade/improve facilities. He wants the members to feel good about what is happening here when they are out in the community. He sees a turnaround and feels that we are branding ourselves at this time. He agrees with attracting guests from southern Wisconsin and knows that the energy is there to do great things moving forward.

Commissioner Sarocka complimented Ralph on his marketing and customer service efforts in the past year as well as the Tuesday and Thursday music.

Tim Miles also complimented Ralph on his efforts and the growth in the food and beverage operation, noting a 30% increase over 2013 numbers. The group applauded Ralph's work.

Commissioner Jones noted that Ralph and Tony's energy and enthusiasm are encouraging and taken into account by the board of commissioners when making decisions.

## **Greg Benson**

Greg stated that he thinks we had really great turf this year, and were able to create excellent conditions throughout the year. Slight pressure from dollar spot, but no issues on greens and few on tees. The weather was so good again that they used about half the amount of water to irrigate and all in all, it was a great season.

He hopes that the playing conditions met the golfer expectations. He noted that with his core group of ten full time staff, he felt that things ran very well. He complimented his staff and stated it was a good year.

Clubhouse parking lot was worked on, and roofs were replaced. In house crew also removed 31 ash trees and did drainage work on #3. Much was accomplished with the small crew.

Greg replied to a question about the ash tree removals, and noted that 100 have been removed by in house staff. He also noted that ten new trees were planted.

Tony replied to a question noting that they are using Weiler Tree for memorial donations and the process is more streamlined.

Jim responded that the capital budget will be ready in January when a question about the timing was raised.

## **III. Questions and/or Comments**

A member expressed how well liked Tony is, and what a good job he does. John was also complimented and it was noted that they take care of any issues, and no one goes way unhappy. He noted that the pass holders are proud of the course and appreciate the great condition it was in this year. He said how the Ryder Cup that Tony had was really nice and very much enjoyed. He noted how the golfers stay and eat following their rounds, which is a change from a couple of years ago. The Tuesday night music is wonderful too.

Ed Holm asked about a rumor that the commissioners can play golf at no charge. This was confirmed and Commissioner Sarocka provided details. Mr. Holm noted that the State's Attorney has been asked about this. He expressed disdain about the situation, particularly since it benefits only one commissioner. He indicated his feelings that it is a violation of the law and asked about 1099 forms.

Greg Benson's efforts were commended, along with the expansion efforts for events.

Also commended were the bartenders, though a request was made for more help, as they are very busy at key times, such as Saturday and Sunday. Ralph replied he is committed to working on it, and noted his appreciation of this comment as he finds this information helpful. She continued, noting that Tony is doing a wonderful job.

Commissioner Jones closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending the meeting.

#### **IV. Next Meeting**

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 5, 2016.

#### **V. Adjournment**

**Motion by Commissioner Sarocka, seconded by Commissioner Jones, to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

James Glogovsky  
Acting Secretary

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