**Deerfield Park District**

**Golf Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**

**September 9, 2020**

Meeting came to order at 7:00 p.m.

Present: Brian Bradford, Kevin Butler, Sharon Edwards, Casey Kremer, Bob Neary, Mat Smarjesse, Joe Cohen, Jason Mannina, Mike Bavier, Kris Oldeen, Derek Domaleski, Joe Martinez, Jeff Nehila

Absent: Terry Levy, Dan Mazur

Director Nehila welcomed new members Kevin Butler, Sharon Edwards and Casey Kramer and returning members. Director Nehila explained the process for holding meetings under the Governor’s Emergency Declaration as well as the requirements of the Open Meetings Act.

**Review of Meeting Minutes**

A review of the September 12, 2019 minutes revealed no changes or comments.

**Public Comment**

No public comment was received prior to the meeting.

Jason summarized the 23 emails received regarding the Sr. Pass and discussions to potentially considering Fridays as a weekend in the rate structure. The biggest impact would be any passholder that has a daily pass of any type. Of the 23 emails they expressed concern that the change would really impact how they play. The long time passholders felt that it would be a slight on them after all the years they have supported the course. The rationale behind the change will be discussed under the Competitive Market Analysis.

Director Nehila explained that after the initial shutdown for COVID in mid-March, golf was allowed to reopen May 1 with strict limitations and as we moved into Phase 4 a lot of the protocols remained in place. Staff was able to pivot as guidelines and restrictions changed. Staff is planning to remain in Phase 4 in 2021.

**Staff Reports**

**Golf Operations**

Jason provided a recap of the operations. Since there was a late start to the season this meant no driving range revenue or cart revenue in the month of April. The course opened May 1 with a 9 hole only option Monday through Friday, twosomes only, 15-minute tee-time intervals, no cart use and no driving range use allowed. The driving range was turned into a short course that was used for lessons. This allowed for our independent contractors to continue to offer instruction. Staff sold unused short course time slots to junior players. Staff learned to pivot as changes from the Governor’s office were released. In June, single rider carts were allowed but players from the same household could ride together. From then on, the restaurant began serving food outdoors only and the driving range opened with time slots being sold online only. Offering only one size bucket helped to speed up the turnover. Now the course is going strong and the Fish Fry is back on Fridays and we even had 3 tables of diners that ate inside. Most diners still prefer to eat on the deck. The course has maintained a strong staff force throughout the season. We shared custodial staff with other park district facilities that were not open. Staff has the health and safety of our patrons as a priority.

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Staff has been promoting the restaurant as much as possible. With the loss of dining indoors and the loss of our large outings the restaurant will recognize a $70,000-$100,000 loss.

Staff has implemented, with signage, the updated restaurant guidelines requiring a mask to be worn by all patrons during any interactions with wait staff, food service workers and other employees at restaurants and/or bars.

Staff has not had to do a lot of marketing because people are looking for outside activities to stay busy.

Staff will be budgeting for FY2021 as if we will remain in Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois plan. The current precautions that are in place such as no ball washers, benches, etc., on the course will be the same next season.

We are still renting the carts from Sportsman’s. We are seeing fuel costs increase as the single rider cart is preferred by so many golfers.

The pro shop is open with limited capacity. Golf clubs have been a popular item this season. We are basically out of golf gloves and we do not know when they will be available. We are also having trouble getting beer due to an aluminum shortage.

**Golf Maintenance**

Mike reported that last year’s bunker project is looking good and things have grown in nicely this year. Staff has spent a lot of time hand watering those areas because of the dry summer. Staff will be shortening the height of the cut and creating more of an approach setting soon.

The start of the 2020 golf season was surreal. It was strange to maintain a golf course with no golfers. Five staff started the season and when some restrictions were lifted additional staff came on.

One of our longtime seasonal golf maintenance workers lost his life to COVID in Mexico prior to the season. Staff has taken the necessary precautions such as daily sanitizing of the maintenance shop, wearing face coverings and staggering breaks to keep staff safe at work and protect our families at home.

A big project completed in March and April of this year was the installation of the irrigation pumping system. The pumping system is located on hole 7 and is one of the components of the irrigation system that is very important in maintaining the golf course especially in periods of hot, dry weather. The complete system has over 5 miles of underground pipes and wires and over 700 sprinklers. The original pumping system and manual irrigation core satellite boxes were installed in 1989 for $483,000. Today an irrigation system will cost $1.5 - $2 million. There is a deep well on located on the east side of the lake on hole 7 that supplies water to the irrigation lake that was installed in 1996 for $212,000. The deep well and the irrigation satellite stations have been updated or replaced. The deep well was replaced back in 2008 and the satellite station was replaced in 2017. The park district has done a good job approving replacements and updates to an aging system. The system is well over 30 years old. The pumping system was the next scheduled

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replacement. The new system features 3 new energy efficient pumping turbines that are capable of pumping over 2,000 gallons of water per minute. The main component is the VFD, (Variable Frequency Drive), which limits the initial surge of water allowing the pressure in the pipes to rise in relation to the number of sprinklers that are on. Ultimately this new system will increase the longevity of the underground pipes. The cost for the equipment and installation was $174,000. This year the irrigation pump expense will take the place of bunker renovations. There are 3 holes left to go. We are looking at pricing for next year’s renovation project.

Extensive tree trimming was completed on the course in-house this year. Staff removed all of the low branches on the golf course. The materials will be recycled into mulch and spread into flower and perennial beds.

We have continued incorporating bent grass seed into fairways through the broad cast spreading and our divot mix. The fairways were originally seeded with blue grass but an invasive species of grass, poanna, has taken up a lot of the area on greens, tees and fairways. The way we control this species, which unfortunately has a shallow root system and sometimes doesn’t survive the hot weather, is we try to use growth regulator to control it. We are mixing bent grass in with the blue grass to provide a better playable surface. Playability has increased dramatically on a number of holes. That along with deep tine aerification and verti-cutting the fairways which we have started doing more often, have increased the playability of the fairways.

The greens were successfully aerified and topdressed with sand at the beginning of August. This was a timely and productive event, helping to relieve stress by creating holes in the greens and allowing improved water and air movement throughout the soil profile. Sand is spread after aerification to fill-in the holes and improve drainage.

Drainage repairs and improvements are other areas staff has been busy with throughout the summer. Projects have included installing new drain lines on holes 1, 2, 9, and 15. Drainage improvements will continue throughout the fall.

Upcoming maintenance projects include: Verti-cutting the fairways, verti-cutting greens, deep tine aerification of the greens, tees and fairways, winterizing the irrigation system as well as additional drainage projects.

Despite some of the weather challenges this year we were able to stay on track with mowing and our spray programs. A lot of our spray programs are preventative. We like to stay ahead of the game. We like to spray every two weeks. We didn’t have any breakthrough of disease or fungus this season. The greens were consistent all season with the help of rolling, verti-cutting and applying growth regulators.

Jason addressed a question that has been mentioned regarding the marking of the course. Golf course departments have been understaffed on purpose for budgeting reasons knowing that we lost April. We have forgone a few things like marking the course. It has allowed us to rethink how we do things. What

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we have learned from this season is that it affects leagues, outings and the club championship. In discussing different concepts with golfers of different playing levels, we are going to start going forward

with where there are white stakes, paint or fences are out of bounds. All other areas will just be penalty areas, which in the old days were just lateral hazards. This situation is almost gray right now and in the rule book it actually is. If there’s no markings and the grass have different height differentials from when it was last mowed, in the old days it would be a lateral hazard. We will be adding this information to our scorecards.

Staff will be doing an in-house renovation project of hole 14 forward tee this fall. Staff will also be reviewing the rest of the bunker renovation plans to determine if any of the work can be done in-house.

In fall of 2019, staff undertook a drainage project on hole 8 green. Historically when we’ve had rains water stands on the green for an excessive amount of time and has to be squeegeed off. Since the drainage work has been completed there hasn’t had any issues with standing water. The grass has been slow to come back. When you are doing work on a green and want grass to grow back in a certain amount of time you would close the green down. Since we can’t do that and the greens get mowed almost every day, it is a challenge to get grass to grow but eventually it will. When we aerify and verti-cutting greens, we are always incorporating bent grass in those areas and it takes times and persistence to return it to its original condition.

Treasurer Cohen asked about the 150-yard marker poles. Mike responded that we removed them due to COVID but did add marker plaques in the fairway. Treasurer Cohen asked if lines could be painted across the cart path to use as markers. Mike said that is something that can be done.

Sharon asked which 3 holes were left to be renovated. Mike responded that the three holes are 3, 11 and 14. We are uncertain how much money will be available in 2021. We are at the beginning stages of getting pricing so we have a better idea of how much work will be done in fall of 2021. Treasurer Cohen explained that the park board voted to defer bunker renovations this year due to the cost of the irrigation pump then resume the renovation schedule next year.

Brian asked about leveling that is being done in-house to some of the tee boxes. On hole 16 the gold tee box is at an angle. Mike responded he could look at moving the sod and raising it up with some fill. Casey commented that on most of the bronze tees you stand on a hump or are standing down and having to hit up. Mike responded that the bronze tees were just cut into the rough. They need to be raised up like we did on 10. That’s definitely a project we would like to undertake. The tees will be on our 7-year plan but for now the priority is getting the bunkers completed.

**Learning Center**

Derek reported that as the golf course was allowed to be open in May, the driving range was not allowed to be open. To adjust, staff set up a short course on the driving range. This allowed people an opportunity to start to practice and work on their game. We started planning to offer programs in June should we get the word to do so. We created smaller groups and had a ratio of 4:1. The program ran Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Participants were guaranteed to get on the course every day.

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The program ran so well that we are going to continue the same format next year. The program generated $53,000 compared to $43,000 last year.

We are seeing many people that haven’t golfed in years or have never golfed. The small children’s programs began in July and will run through September. The programs are popular, and many are filling

and have wait lists. Our programs are designed to be a stepping stone. When you complete one you are ready for the next all the way up until they are ready to play on the high school team. We always want parents to understand how the progression works. In addition to that the range went from paying for buckets to paying for time. The driving range is very busy, and we have people waiting to hit balls.

Our instructors have been busy, and our fall programs are full. We have added instructors in order to accommodate more participants.

Jason reported that a survey was put out to our participant’s parents and we determined that they would like to see programs offered indoors during the off season. We are fortunate that Derek and his staff will be developing indoor programs.

In the past the small group classes were offered Tuesday – Friday and this year we changed to Monday-Thursday to open up tee times on Friday.

**FORE Restaurant & Bar – Chef Joe**

Chef Joe reported that with the lockdown closing FORE, he was furloughed for 45 days and only worked a shift here and there. In quickly trying to figure out what we were going to do, we did curbside meat service. We were able to sell some of our frozen proteins online and offer curbside pick-up by appointment at a time when it wasn’t safe to go to the grocery store. As soon as we got the okay to open, we began setting tables up 6 feet apart from each other, however, we quickly realized how limited our seating was. We are fortunate to have a master carpenter on staff and he made perimeter shelving along the deck railing so people could stand up and eat. We have hand sanitizer stations and have roped off a 2-way walkway. Wearing a mask was also a requirement that was sometimes challenging to enforce. This was also challenging for the kitchen staff as they could be working near a 600° oven or over hot grease but necessary to keep our patrons safe. Since we are trying to promote people eating outside, we put a TV on the deck and play the Cubs games. This has helped keep customers hanging out a little longer.

The Friday Fish Fry is back. We started out slow, with about 10 people coming in. As the weeks went by we increased our number to 30-40 per night. We would have liked to offer a soup and salad bar but with the restrictions in place we had to serve everything in clam shell containers.

This year since we can’t offer any large indoor dining for outings, we are offering more food at the halfway house. We are having issues getting certain beverages such as Gatorade and Dr. Pepper due to manufacturing issues. We struggled to find a vendor able to deliver on a regular basis.

Staff adjusts prices as necessary to try to make up for some of the shortfall. The menu was kept similar as last year and some portions were adjusted to not be sharable.

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Staff adjusted as necessary to keep things running smoothly and most importantly keep everyone safe.

Jason commented that hopefully the weather will cooperate, and people will continue to be able to golf and eat outside. We are investigating heaters for the tent on the deck. We are also looking into an indoor simulator for winter.

Executive Director Nehila commented that the Capital fund within the park district’s General fund pays for the bunker renovations which is about $150,000 per year. We would like to at least get 2 holes done next year. The park district deferred close to $1 million in capital projects this year because of the short comings that we anticipated in revenue across the district. We had to do a lot of things at the beginning of the year to minimize the overall financial impact of COVID.

There were separate guidelines for golf, retail, restaurants and the golf course staff had to adjust more than any other department of the district. They did a great job at creating protocols to keep staff and patrons safe. We have had COVID at each of our facilities whether it was participants or staff but because of the protocols in place, we were able to minimize the spread. Decisions that staff had to make might not have been popular and not made people happy because we want to return to normal. Staff made these decisions so the course could stay open. We will probably be in Phase 4 for quite some time and the most important thing is people’s safety and well-being.

**Competitive Market Analysis**

The CMA data was compiled from 11 area courses and allowed staff to see where the DGC rates and daily play polices fell as planned for the 2020 season. With 2020 COVID online fees reducing most all competitors complete fee offerings / sku’s, this year’s exercise is somewhat moot from years past. In 2020 DGC staff has also reduced its online sku offerings and is proposing increases for 2021 that will positively impact our revenues with daily 2021 online COVID fees. Staff also feels comfortable increasing rates on our most popular pass options and after reviewing trends with competitors is following suit in having Friday’s priced and declared as weekends for rates and policies. Staff has reviewed the multiple concerns from current resident and non-resident pass-holders who this will impact and has offered a compromise of allowing Monday-Thursday season passholders (2) Friday visits per calendar month in 2021. This compromise will allow for increased daily fees on Fridays and a higher dollar per average round on historically the busiest day of the week in-season. With this proposed plan staff can follow the board’s direction of a maximum of (2) allocated shotgun starts on Friday’s per month and hopefully book a few of these in mornings to allow for more public play in the afternoons. After an analysis of all pass holder rounds staff is recommending a 2.5% non-resident pass price increase and a 1.75% resident pass price increase. Staff also recommends a cart fee increase of $.50 for all 9- and 18-hole rounds and a $1 increase on single rider carts in 2021.

The analysis was included in the Golf Advisory Committee meeting packet and was reviewed at the last meeting on 9/9/2020. In the meeting, staff outlined the key findings of the CMA and shared proposed rate increases that came out of the results. After some discussion, some on the committee voiced concern of the Friday to weekend rates and policy proposal.

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**Fee Recommendations for 2021**

For the 2021 season, staff is recommending increasing the highlighted proposed green fees, cart fees, pass fees and proceeding with changing Fridays to follow weekend rates and polices as noted on the CMA and 2021 pricing document. Rate recommendations will be submitted to the Park Board for approval at the October 1, 2020 Special Meeting.

**Upcoming Important Dates and Events**

Upcoming important dates and events include:

* Pro-Am Scramble – September 19
* Deerfield Park Foundation Golf Raffle Par-Tee –September 29
* 6th Annual Chili Open & Food Pantry Drive – October 24
* Permanent Tee Time Lottery (Virtual or TBD) – December 8

**Other**

**Ladies’ Golf League**

Casey mentioned a letter with comments sent to Jason from the ladies’ golf league. Staff will continue to work with the league to work out any issues for the rest of this year and be optimistic for next year.

Casey commented that it’s amazing how staff adjusted when needed and kept golfers informed.

Staff is considering opening the downstairs ladies’ locker room for use during the turn only. This will help speed up the time it takes to make the turn.

Casey commented that she liked the pre-pay option we used this year.

Jason thanked the committee for their feedback.

The next meeting is scheduled for TDB January, 2021 at the Deerfield Golf Club.

There being no further discussion, meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.