

5.18 Task Force on Municipal Golf in Masdison Parks Discussion Summary

The discussion and questions from the Task Force Members are summarized below, with answers provided by Superintendent Eric Knepp.

- What options have been explored other than course closures?

The city has considered contracting out golf course management. Staff are prepared to provide examples of existing models upon request of the Task Force. The First Tee, an equity-focused golfing organization, may present at the next meeting.

There are ongoing discussions of partnering with the the Stormwater Engineering Department to facilitate capital improvements at Odana, which would benefit the Wingra watershed as a whole. The city is also exploring the well permitting process to transition Odana off of city water usage.

More detailed financial information, including course line-item details from the past 4-5 years, is available to the Task Force if needed.

- Could course improvements to Yahara be included in the Interstate 39-90 construction project?

It is possible that Yahara drainage improvements could be included in the plan. However, the estimated completion is no earlier than 2026, so this is not an immediate solution.

- Has Dane County been approached about taking over course management from the city? As many golfers are not Madison residents, this could relieve the taxation burden of residents.

There has not been an interest from Dane County in the past. However, the discussion can be reopened.

A concern of ending the enterprise fund model is the lack of tax support from non-residents. There are not many municipal golf courses in Dane County, so it is notable that the city does operate so many holes.

- What portion of the golf course deficit is from operating expenses and what is from capital expenses?

Roughly 85% is operational expenses. The courses tend to break even from a purely cash perspective, with 2019 being an exceptionally bad year. Despite the late opening in 2020, the courses are on track to match 2018 financials, with lower numbers on food/beverage, carts and memberships. With the current hiring freeze, the golf program is well below the standard expenditure profile. There has been a lot of successful work in cost containment over the past few years.

- Can staff provide a comparison of the cost of running a golf course versus maintaining a park?

Per acre comparisons are difficult, as some special facilities like Olbrich Gardens and conservation parks receive a greater investment. Staff will try and provide a comparison report.

- Are there opportunities for creative marketing?

Creative advertising could be a solution, but it is important to decide on the goal of any rebranding. Additionally, advertising campaigns do not address fundamental infrastructure issues.

- How can we work to break down the divide between golfers and non-golfers? Multi-use courses have the potential to help, particularly at community courses like Monona and Glenway.

There is an unhealthy dissonance between golfers and non-golfers. The enterprise fund model can make it difficult to experiment with multi-use courses due to the potential of lost revenue.

- What is the responsibility of this Task Force? Should recommendations be based on what is best for the golf program or the City and Parks system as a whole?

The Task Force has already voted to recommend that the city should provide golf. If they believe that the burden to solicit input from stakeholders has been met, then the next recommendations should "how much", "where" and "how". The recommendations will be sent to the Mayor, Common Council, and other relevant boards, committees and commissions. The recommendations will serve as a guide to the work being done in golf over the next five years.

The new deadline for recommendations is July 31st. City Staff will support an additional meeting if the Task Force deems it necessary. A draft report of recommendations will be shared at the next meeting.