

Taskforce on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks
Focus Group Discussion: Golf Players
March 10th 2020
Goodman Maintenance Facility

Present:

Matt Pagel: Yahara, Monona, Odana

Peg Carlson: Odana, Yahara

Ben Houseman: Yahara, Monona – Coaches High School Golf at LaFollette

Michael Bekken: Grad Student

Owen Hoyt: Odana, Yahara

Bob Stockton: All courses, Glenway with wife

Matt Young: Yahara, Monona, Odana (5 times per year)

1. Think of your experiences with Madison Golf Courses. What comes to mind when you think of Madison Golf?

- Summer, competition
- Accessible, convenient to work/home, lunch game
- Walkable, affordable
- Social aspects are very important
- Group of 20, very important for some of them, play twice per week
- When traveling, see the quality of our courses compared to others, feels ours are well kept
- Family, daughter to play when younger, golfs regularly with wife
- Sees a decline in game over years, now seeing a plateau; at Odana and Yahara see huge value for youth golf
- Grew up at Monona, remembers Pepsi challenge, great memories, coaching in 2001, talented team from Monona. Played from age 6/7. Better as a team than country club kids because they had it close and accessible. Kids worked and lived there, won state championship because of experience as kids.
- Has seen similar trends, but is seeing uptick this year, 23/24 kids.
- Monona is close, can walk to course, don't have vehicle. Love game now, gave them options. Many exposed that didn't think they'd like it.
- Affordable junior pass and use it
- Monona is a connection with High School, almost like part of LaFollette (15-20 kids per year)
- Accessibility is important—kids to be able to walk are more likely to play as youth.
- Conditions of courses are quite good, knowing the limitations on resources, greens fees so low, and what you get for them are really accessible
- Cannot divorce courses from people staffing them, as president of organizations, staff are so responsive of needs of organized leagues—opportunities and structure to play. As compared to Milwaukee, she feels more like at home here
- Dan Breunig is attentive, no need for follow-ups, no surprises, practice at Monona, conference match at Yahara. Home courses are Monona and Yahara.

2. What do you consider to be *Madison Golf Enterprise Program's* overall strengths?

- No one knows that it is an enterprise program, it was set-up because golf was booming in the 80's. As county exec in Brown County, thinks City probably took money from the fund. Looks at what the course is losing, looks at staffing, feels parks does other things (ie. staff mowing at Yahara), questions why it's not folded under Parks Division to begin with. Feels they can stay afloat with some investment. Problem has been infrastructure and equipment. Water bills keep increasing rates substantially—they deferred maintenance, now time to do upkeep, golf no different. Golf is another amenity to the City, bike paths, parks, pool, etc are all great things to add value to the City. If it is a value, need to figure out how to fund it. You're tying people's hands by not letting them fix things and not giving them money. Example: Yahara, lose people because cannot play. If money is spent on improvements, you will beat the private courses.
- Great courses. Money needs to be spent to repair courses.
- Even when there was money, some went to the Parks Dept. Instead of investing in preventative, need to send to where the needs are likely other areas.
- If you want to be in the golf business, need to invest in it. Playgrounds don't raise money for the community, but it is good for the community. You're in or you're not.
- As a consumer, want consistency. You want to know what holes you're playing. Yahara has been inconsistent. It's hard to know what to expect and know that you are getting what you paid for. Figure out how to get a portion of the course to stay open.
- Feels loss of Pro's has not been a downgrade to the program. Have kept continuity. Biggest loss is that you cannot do alcohol, lose events because of it. Some less teaching, but allow Sue and First Tee. Feels it was a change, but still stayed steady.
- Food Issue—limited by clubhouses. Beer carts are limited, but understands there may not be a huge need/lack of sales and unemployment rates.
- Consistency is a strength.
- Staff does fabulous job, people know who to contact
- Location
- Quality
- Maintenance guys have done a fabulous job with their limitations, it's hard when the course is flooded.
- Location to schools, don't have to drive too far, limits practice, kids home early
- Geography of courses set up well (2 east/2 west)
- Run by the City. State of WI is relatively unique. There are a lot of municipal courses, where a lot of people owned. MKE county courses outstanding. Cheap and affordable. The Mission of a municipal course is to take care of older people and give young people something that will be with them forever. It is a lifelong sport if kids learn young.

- How do we keep it sustainable? Casual golfers—any target towards corporations, discount for the casual golfers, additional income source, draw in new customers. Discount for certain corporations (ie. 15% discount for Epic employees).
- Meet great people just by being paired up with others.
- Yahara only lost business on the maintenance side. Hard for casual golfer to play because they lose balls. Feels this will come when a decision is made to catch up on maintenance
- Private courses are in the same conditions—Cherokee in bad shape.
- If you want to invest, will start seeing return on investments.
- Have to fight for the people you lost. People don't want to go out and struggle on course.
- Yahara is most important course in the system, State qualifiers, High School golf, course is a driver.
- Promotion: as a tax payer, should the City be offering discounts to corporations.
- Trying to provide promotions: push out discounts
- Yahara is tough for an average course. If you spent the money on it, it would be good. Need to see an increase in revenues coming in, but what comes first (improvements or revenue) or which course?
- Must convince City Council this is not a money issue, it is an equality issue. Must provide for the populous. Enterprise must go away. Accountants need to figure out other ways to get the money into the fund.

3. What do you consider to be Madison Golf Enterprise Program's overall limitations?

- Great job with food with equipment you have. It is \$150 bill every time you go out. Since you don't offer what they want, they go out. A kitchen would help. Odana. Monona go out afterward, it is hard to make money on food.
- Hawks landing doesn't run their own food and beverage. Nice to offer more, but difficult to make money on food.
- Do not offer liquor.
 - State Statute dictates that municipalities cannot issue selves liquor license.
- Golf pros were able to hold the liquor license
- Feels lack of liquor, has hurt events
- Airline pricing, Oaks was cheaper than Yahara. Oaks has bigger menu, nicer venue, cart paths. Everything is online. People shop around for courses. Our website is not very user friendly. Face-to-face or to call is very easy. Their offer was available only to online customers, not in-person. When competitors do the airline type pricing, it can cause groups to go to other courses with lower rates.
- Use website a lot. Some feel it is a good basic website. Feels TeeSnap has been a nice improvement.
- Business Management person/position, cost containment, marketing, etc. could help manage some of the costs and bring in new customers. In Arizona, cut grass half as much as they do here. Something more creative when trying to manage costs.

- External person managing it, not a corporation, but with current structure, not sure how you'd get there.
- Cart usage has to be down. Odana, Monona and Glenway are easily walkable. Needed at Yahara. During wet times, has hindered play when course is walking only.
- GEF, don't have capital budget, cannot amortize, look at needs of other park facilities (ie. Breese Stevens). As soon as not profitable, couldn't invest.
- Feel inequity between other services and golf courses.
- "Run it like a business" We're not subsidizing. First Tee, High School are subsidized, which is contradictory to running like a business and making money. It has been a wonderful addition and do not want it to go away.

The Taskforce on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks has been clear that affordable and accessible municipal golf are important to the residents and visitors of Madison. They have also been clear that the Golf Program must be "right-sized" and some number of holes must be eliminated to preserve any piece of the program.

4. Among the scenarios presented, which do you find the most compelling and why?

- Anything operated as parks service is profitable, getting rid of enterprise important, the more holes the better.
- Does not feel there are too many holes, many golfers, Dane County is growing and there is a need.
 - NGF Dane County area doesn't feel is accurately reflected of actual market
- Keeping all holes is valuable service, but must be realization that golf has declined. Amount of people playing steady golf has declined, seeing shrinking everywhere.
- Madison does not say "let the private sector do it" if they feel it is a value to the residents. Let's fund the courses, let's be better.
- At one point, when program was booming, it was because Madison was the only one. If the quality of the courses improves, you will get a lot of play.
- Cannot compete if you cannot make the investment;
- Water issues at Yahara, being closed and no carts has been tough
- Odana is catching up to Yahara.
- Feels TF is missing a scenario an option to close only 18 holes at yahara.
- Doesn't make sense to close Monona or Glenway
- Monona expenses outpacing revenues every year, not looking to sell course.
- Don't like any of the options.
- Does not know how City operates for High School golf without Yahara. It would be bad for youth unless you turn away paying players.
- One Felt #3 was maybe the better one.

- Yahara's entrance is very dangerous. Monona is closer and safer.
- Consider closure of only 18 at Yahara.
- With 1 and 2, youth golfers and first tee most impacted, and there will be strain on remaining system. If Yahara is out of system, Odana is a totally different ball game. Would completely change the golf market.
- Pleased that they are in agreement that City provide affordable/accessible golf
- Must be making money
- Parks has never sold public land, doesn't think Monona would be sold.
- Remove Enterprise

5. Among the scenarios presented, which do you find the least compelling and why?

- #1: Total closure of Yahara, ramifications not seen by average constituent.
 - Put youth at a major disadvantage.
 - Yahara needs to market self as the MISSION course of the system, 9 holes walking only, market differently, repurpose into 14 hole course

6. Are there factors that must be considered that have not yet been discussed in determining the appropriate amount of holes of golf to be offered and how it is to be operated?

- Be creative in solutions, 14 hole course
- Hydrologic conditions have really changed at Yahara, makes sense to go with flow and likely not play golf on holes that are closed. May have something to do with development and lake level. Play golf where soil allows us to play.
- Keep Yahara Open all the time, find holes that are open, keep the holes consistent, so they know what they are doing.
- For price-conscious shoppers, make cart only course. To get people to the dry part of the course. You don't worry about walking.
 - Increase cart revenue
 - Consistency in play
 - Set rates for those conditions
 - Limestone cart paths where needed
- League play by week, pay for length of season.
 - Giving up revenue where people aren't paying.
 - In some situations, membership is higher than tee times.
- Glenway is a gem. A redesign could be substantial
- The people who are playing 9 holes need the smaller courses. If they disappear, will lose the less skilled golfers. It fits such a niche for youth and casual players.
- Must look at who is using the courses and understand
- Yahara designated 9 hole for 9 holers only.
- For Option #3, full 18, driest, transform remaining 9 into shorter executive course, similar to Jefferson. 14 hole course.
- Executive course at Door Creek, \$13 for adult, kid is free.
- Turn to the have and have nots. Those that have not played, can go out to the city courses and they can afford to do that. Those that have the resources and know how to play can go to the private courses.