

**Public Input Meeting 3/5/2020**  
**Olbrich Gardens**  
**93 Members of the Public Present**

**Summary of Major Takeaways:**

- Many questions regarding accounting system, including PILOT, and why golf is expected to be self-sustaining while other services are not.
- Many objections to any sort of closure.
- Many expressed concern for accessibility and affordability for youth and seniors if holes or courses are closed.
- Many supported the City investing in the courses, but didn't agree with numbers presented.
- There was much opposition to the sale of Monona Golf Course or park land.
- Encouraged exploring additional funding sources, such as partnerships and private fundraising.
- Request for consideration of additional options, such as reducing Yahara by 18 holes.

**Public Comment:**

All attendees were given an opportunity to submit a comment card, those that wished to speak were allowed to do so. Staff captured spoken comments, **individual written comments are provided in accompanying document.** All attendees were encouraged to email additional comments if they chose to do so.

- Soukup:
  - Monona is best course, it drains well
  - Would be a disaster if Monona were eliminated
  - High property taxes, use them on the courses
- Gary Petersen:
  - Courses are physical and cultural assets to the City of Madison, part of its overall rating.
  - Need to maintained and improved, city invests in other large projects
  - City needs to do the hard thing, and not sell land.
- Steve Brown:
  - Supports keeping all 72 holes, says it looks like a bail out
  - People can't afford private courses
  - Reducing holes would be taking away golf from juniors and seniors
  - City failed to keep the program going
  - Questioned other ways to generate revenue
  - Feels nothing has been done on maintenance
  - Supports ability to host a junior tournament
- John Volker:
  - Why do the golf courses have to be independently sufficient? Nothing else does.
  - PILOT – Not good.
  - Won't work to have to pay our own way.
  - Cart paths at Odana are not necessary. Does not agree with capital needs assessment.
  - Don't need to be independent.

## Questions:

- Some cities, like Milwaukee, have pitch & put courses. Pitch & put serves the working class better, due to the lower cost. Is switching to that model being considered?
  - We are working at shortening some of the courses. This was part of the work outlined during the Capital Needs Assessment portion.
- What developers want to buy the courses?
  - We are not aware of any developers looking to purchase courses at this time.
- Would buying wells offsets costs or shifts costs to other water users?
  - This would need to be determined. Moving any or all of the courses that use drinking water to well systems would be significantly more sustainable than current model.
- It did not appear that any of the recommendations included the options of joint management with private entities. Was this considered and reflected? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - The Taskforce has reviewed information regarding various operational models used within the industry. This would be an operational decision. We do know that, based on how this has happened around the country, no national companies would take our courses in their current conditions without initial capital investment by the City.
- Is the golfing public sufficiently represented on the Task Force?
  - Yes, there are three regular golfers on the taskforce. In order to make balanced decisions that are in the best interest of the community long-term, the Task Force must be more than just golf represented.
- Why is Monona even being considered? It is fully used both for golf, recreation, open space and drainage.
  - The Task Force is considering all three courses, Yahara, Glenway and Monona.
- With all the neighbor parks that aren't being used why not sell parks for income and it would also eliminate maintenance fees and taxes?
  - Selling assets is not a good idea. This creates neighborhood deficiencies, and once parkland is lost, it becomes very difficult to get it back for future uses.
- Greens fees should be used for supporting golf courses, not parks.
  - Greens fees are used to support courses, but revenue has gradually failed to outpace expenses. Due to the fact that Golf is set up as an enterprise fund, it operates like a business and is expected to be self-sustaining. The PILOT, which is charged to the program, is based on commercial assessed value, which would be paid by any other business.
- What happened to closing 18 holes at Yahara and re-programming?
  - These are not exhaustive scenarios, but what the Task Force asked to explore first based on all available information. The capital needs of the Yahara course are significant, and played a factor in this request. There is still room to discuss this as an option.

- Monona Golf Course – If closed, how will the course and adjacent properties be assessed?
  - We cannot say for certain, but as long as the land remains park land, we do not believe assessments will change much.
- Are you just trying to decide what options to close courses, or are you looking at any options to keep all the courses???. Do you not care about the 90% of golfers that can't afford private courses?
  - Looking at data, it is hard to justify 72 holes when capital needs are so significant. All available data indicates that the market is saturated and the amount of play has declined from where it was when many of the private courses were built in the 1990's.
- From here on, I would like to be assured that when I pay my greens fees, I will be supporting Madison golf courses and not the rest of the Parks system.
  - Greens fees are used to support courses, but revenue has gradually failed to outpace expenses. Due to the fact that Golf is set up as an enterprise fund, it operates like a business and is expected to be self-sustaining.
- Have other cities with golf courses been evaluated regarding how they operate theirs in comparison to the City of Madison courses?
  - Yes, we worked with and looked at various other comparable municipal operations. This information is available in the Task Force's Legislative files.
- You have money for all other parks upkeep + bike trails, why not golf courses?
  - Divisiveness is not helpful when comparing golf to other services offered around the City. The City is ranked in top 10 or so nationally overall for services and accessibility as compared to other cities of similar size, but are ranked closer to the top 40% in terms of capital funding for these facilities. This is a large city with many competing priorities, there is no magic button for funding.
- Why are golf course treated different than other public spaces i.e. parks, ball diamonds, bike paths, beaches?
  - This does not need to be the case, but a change to the accounting/financial system for golf would have budgetary impacts for the rest of the City or Parks budget.
- What other entities pay pilot? In parks? What does the charge consist of? Is it solely used by the golf enterprise?
  - CDA, Monona Terrace, Water Utility, Parking Utility all pay PILOT as well, but Golf is the only one that pays PILOT that is in a competitive market. The rest of the Parks Division does not pay PILOT. Payment in Lieu of Taxes, is charged to the program based on commercial assessed value, which would be paid by any other business
- What is the fleet service charge for?
  - This covers depreciate, fuel and repairs for road vehicles and large mowers. Charges are itemized per piece of equipment, usage and needed repairs.

- Where can we find accurate accounting information?
  - All of the Golf Enterprise Program's statements are audited annually. We have shared these documents during this process to assess the financial situation of the courses.
- Are golfers that aren't Madison residents paying an increased fee if they are not a resident of the city?
  - Not currently, when there was a resident/nonresident rate when Golf was receiving a subsidy from the City. It is possible if subsidy, would charge a non-resident rate, but this could be problematic when golfers tend to be very price conscious.
- Is the 2 18-hole courses at Yahara a plus from the viewpoint that it makes this facility very amenable to corporate outings -- close one course and keep other open?
  - Theoretically, yes, this can be considered. Even 18 holes would likely require a significant capital investment in infrastructure, as Yahara was built on a place with hydric soils.
- Should the course build bridges with the community: - end charging for cross-country skiing (Middleton's public course allows free skiing), - create a bike path on the edge of the Odana course. A hard-packed trail would make biking safer than the street. Currently there is no connector trail between the southwest commuter trail and the beltline trail.
  - We can certainly look at this, as golfers and non-golfers need to come together on a solution. At Odana, there is some concern with ATC's rights.
- Have you considered establishing a non-profit capital development fund -- collecting donations specifically directed toward capital improvements?
  - No, the City has not explored this, as it would likely need to come from conversation with the community. The enterprise fund structure and magnitude of capital improvement needs makes it very complicated.
- How do we advocate for the courses?
  - You should work with your Alder.
- Has the City considered using land for solar panels?
  - Yes, this can be considered, but will require capital funds in order to make initial installation. Yahara does have solar panels at the clubhouse that were installed within recent years.
- Has there been any private course growth?
  - There has been little change in the private market since the early 2000's. Some have closed holes, and one course closed in total. However, many find themselves in a very similar situation as us, with increasing expenses that outpace revenue, along with a need for capital investment.
- If developing Yahara as a park, won't it cost millions of dollars to move earth?
  - No, the redevelopment would likely be much less than repairing the course, as the park design would work with the soils in order to not fight with water management. If this were to happen, Parks would follow the formal park master planning process to determine future park amenities and determine appropriate land management.

- Is any funding available from the National ‘The First Tee’ office?
  - The First Tee is an important partner in subsidizing youth golf. We understand there may be some potential here, but we are not aware of any large national firm looking to fund.
- Several cities mentioned. How many have closed holes and how are they doing?
  - Many of the comparable courses mentioned have either closed holes or are considering it. This would a policy choice, as municipal golf is on the decline.
- Are the 4 options listed in the paper the only options?
  - These are the preliminary options that the Task Force requested be reviewed. No decisions have been made, the public input process is intended to assist the Task Force in their decision-making process.
- Council and Mayor have been alerted of capital needs for years and have not funded. Will they fund now?
  - We have to have honest conversation around the number of golfers in Madison. There are many competing demands and many factors influencing decisions for funding projects.
- Monona Terrace and Overture Center get subsidies every year.
  - The City does not operate the Overature Center. The subsidy you are referring to is funding received through room tax for Monona Terrace from room tax, as funds brought in by Destination Madison.
  - City does not own Overture Center.
- We understand the May 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. What is the timeline after that?
  - The importance of date is to accommodate the budgeting process. This would allow for programming of funds into the future. In addition, the City authorized a \$1.5M loan to cover Golf’s shortfalls, which will be exhausted at the end of this year.
- Does Odana make any money on the golf simulators.
  - City doesn’t market them, but they help to offset some of the program’s fixed costs and provide a recreational outlet during the winter months.
- Did the City make more money when the pros ran the courses?
  - No, we did not. There was comparable net income, but we pay 120% more for water today than we did 10 years ago, and we now cover unemployment rates. Historically, golfers have been more elastic on greens fees, which the only thing the City got money from and people move if fees get higher. On top of that, we paid retainer fees to the Pros. The Pros controlled the only place we could have made money, which is carts, food and beverage, rentals.
- People liked the pros.
  - Rounds have not gone down.
- Does City get greens fee?
  - No, greens fee goes to courses.
- Did we model out climate forecast in our plans?
  - We utilized available FEMA data to indicate flood plains at Yahara and we are working with Stormwater Engineering as they complete the study of the Lake Wingra Watershed, which directly impacts Odana’s course.

- What is the likelihood of a major renovation at Yahara Hills to make it more usable (perhaps make it the flagship of Madison municipal golf)? Spend money to make money?
  - Difficult decisions will need to be made and funding determined for such a project to happen. We have no way of knowing the likelihood of this until the work of the Task Force is complete and Common Council has made their decisions.
- Does eliminating the enterprise fund guarantee the listed upgrades will happen to the remaining courses? Would Parks cover this?
  - This is yet to be determined.
- What are the benefits of the enterprise fund? Why was it structured this way?
  - We understand that this structure was implemented at the request of golfers in the early 1980's. There has not been support in recent years to operate in any other model.
- Does the City pay the golf enterprise fund for storage of water/flood mitigation services? What is the separation of golf land and city land and who decides who the golf land is used?
  - All parcels of land within the city, regardless of who owns them are assessed stormwater fees. This includes all other park lands. All parkland goes through a master planning process to determine the use of the land.

**Additional Comments:**

- Numbers without inter-departmental charges, Monona breaks even.
  - Capital money not honest showing numbers.
- Not a fan of Monona. Likes Yahara better.
  - Tee boxes are very big. A lot of areas left to grow natural.
  - Pleasant View has paid off its debt.
  - Downsize maintenance requirements.
  - Best greens in city are at Yahara.
- Demographics
  - Individual observed that middle aged players are not golfing as much.  
They tend to pick up golf in their 50's
- Economy has had an impact – recession.
  - Right now, we have an opportunity to talk through all issues.