

**REPORT OF THE  
TASK FORCE ON MUNICIPAL GOLF  
IN MADISON PARKS**



**July 31, 2020**

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MUNICIPAL GOLF IN MADISON PARKS**

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## A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Common Council created the 9-member Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks (“Task Force”) to consider all options for the parkland currently in use for municipal golf and to make recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council, Committees and Commissions on the future of the City’s Municipal Golf Courses. The Council directed the Task Force to solicit input from local stakeholders, examine best practices, and balance the allocation of resources among various parks uses. The Council also directed the Task Force to prioritize equity, public health, financial sustainability, and environmental sustainability in making recommendations on the future of Madison’s Municipal Golf Courses by May 1, 2020.<sup>1</sup>

The Task Force originally scheduled nine (9) meetings over a 7 month period beginning on October 23, 2019. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, the final 3 meetings scheduled for March and April were cancelled. Subsequently, the Common Council adopted a resolution<sup>2</sup> to extend the deadline for the Task Force until July 31, 2020. Beginning on May 18, 2020 the Task Force began meeting virtually.

The Task Force reviewed the current operational model for the Golf Enterprise including course utilization, current operations, staffing, capital infrastructure, and financial performance of the courses. The Task Force also collected and reviewed public input using focus groups, surveys, direct public speaking, and public question and answer sessions.

[INSERT TASK FORCE STATEMENT TO POLICYMAKERS/STAKEHOLDERS HERE]

### 1. Recommendation #1

Insert Here

### 2. Recommendation #2

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution Establishing the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks, see Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> Resolution Extending the Deadline of the Task Force, see Appendix B

## B. CURRENT OPERATIONS

### 1. Level of Service and Market Analysis

The City of Madison owns and operates four public municipal golf courses with 72 holes of play on approximately 750 acres of park land. The four courses are two nine hole courses at Glenway and Monona, an eighteen hole course at Odana Hills, and a thirty-six hole facility at Yahara Hills. The City has offered golf to its residents and visitors since opening Glenway in 1927. After acquiring an 18 hole Monona Golf Course from private operators in 1932, the City operated 27 holes of municipal golf until the opening of Odana Hills in 1957. In 1968 Yahara Hills opened as a 36 hole facility, and between 1966 and 1978 Monona was reduced to a nine hole course. The City has always been a significant provider of golf within Dane County. The table below shows the relationship between the number of holes provided by the City to the number of public holes and total holes available within Dane County over time.

Year	City Holes	Public Holes	City/Public%	Total Holes	City/Total %
1950	27	36	75.0%	126	21.4%
1960	45	100	45.0%	180	25.0%
1970	77	176	43.8%	284	27.1%
1980	72	171	42.1%	279	25.8%
1990	72	198	36.4%	306	23.5%
2000	72	288	25.0%	414	17.4%
2010	72	378	19.0%	504	14.3%
2020	72	360	20.0%	486	14.8%

This indicates that the City's relative share of holes in the Dane County golf marketplace has been in decline since the 1970's. This is due to the opening of 207 holes of golf in Dane County since 1985. The majority of these golf holes (171 holes, or 82.6%) are public daily fee courses while both fully private and municipal golf holes increased by 18 holes (8.7% of holes added) each during this time period. The increase in courses benefits golfers by providing more differentiated golf options to golfers and acting as a restraint on cost increases across the marketplace.<sup>3</sup>

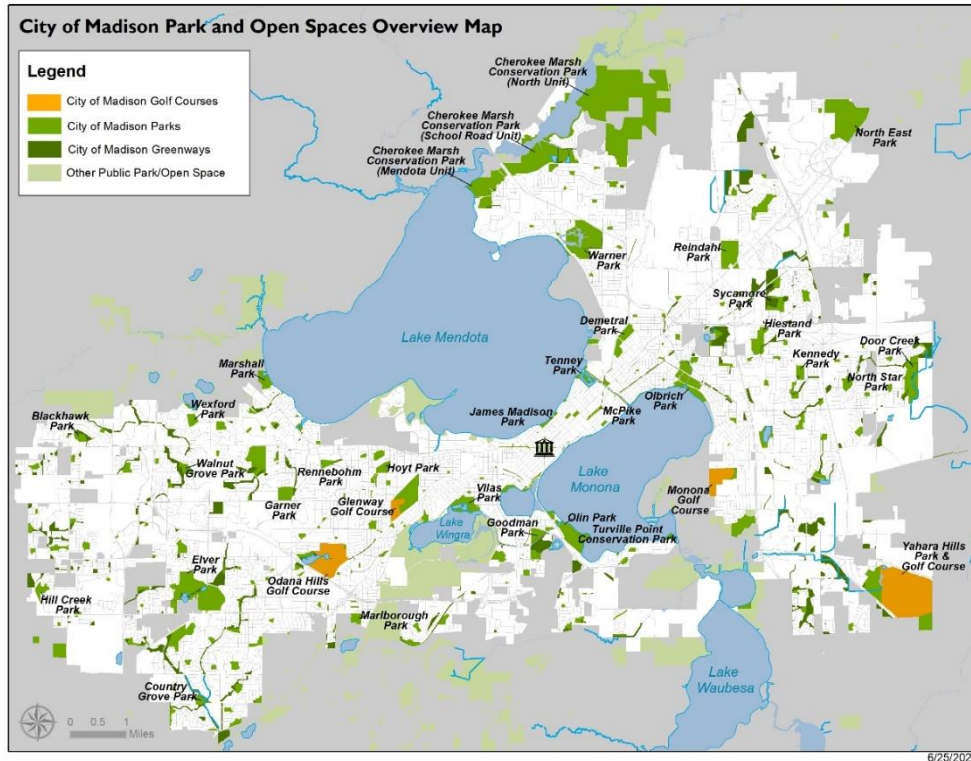
From a Metropolitan Statistical Area, the Madison area has a total of 711 holes of golf, which equates to 16,563 people per 18 hole golf course. This compares to the National median average of 22,027 and mean average of 23,757 people per 18 hole golf course. This means that the Madison area provides approximately 30% more golf access than the national average. The Madison MSA ranks 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 381 metro areas ranked by the National Golf Foundation in its annual industry report. This report also highlights that the State of Wisconsin offers the 10<sup>th</sup> most golf by state across the United States. Wisconsin also has a higher than average golfer participation rate than the national average.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that Dane County also has a higher than national average participation rate, though data on this is less available.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix D, Legistar File #58298 – Operational Models of Municipal Golf Courses and Market Comparison

<sup>4</sup> NGF 2019 Edition Golf Facilities in the U.S. – Golf Accessibility by MSA 2018

## 2. Land and Facilities

The four courses currently utilize approximately 750 acres (13.13%) of the 5,712 acre system of public land managed by the Parks Division. This includes land owned by other City entities (e.g. City Engineering), but that is managed by parks, most notably former landfill sites.



The Mission of the City's golf operations is "to provide the Madison area golfing public with the finest possible golfing conditions at reasonable prices and for all levels of play." The objectives of the program include promoting physical, mental, and social health for all golfers while also providing land stewardship of the public lands on which the courses are located.

The four courses operate as a separate budgetary unit within the City of Madison Parks Division. This separate budgetary unit is referred to as the Golf Enterprise Program ("GEP") based on the City's policy choice to budget and account for golf operations using enterprise fund accounting standards. The GEP has been unprofitable over the last twenty years and has exhausted all available financial reserves. The GEP has been supported by a \$1.5M loan from the City's General Fund, which is supported by the property tax levy.

Glenway Golf Course is located on the west side of Madison at 3747 Speedway Rd. The course is a 9 hole, 2,346 yard Par 32 executive course. The course occupies 41.98 acres of land at the intersection of Speedway Rd, Glenway St, and Mineral Point Rd. The course is adjacent to the Forest Hill Cemetery, which is a 94.59 acre parcel owned and operated by the City of Madison Parks Division. The course was opened in 1927 with the plan for it to be taken over by the Cemetery for future expansion at a later date.



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Glenway has a modestly sized clubhouse that is approximately 50 years old which includes a concession counter, restrooms, merchandise, and limited seating. There is a 45 stall parking lot adjacent to the clubhouse that is aging, but in average condition for the parks system. The parking lot does not meet current standards for stormwater management. A 1,360 sq ft. maintenance building constructed in the late 1960's is used by Glenway, but technically is located on Forest Hill land. The golf course itself is in generally good condition, with limited deferred maintenance or capital needs over the next decade.

Glenway's land consists of signature hills with landscape elevation change of 80 feet and a significant number of trees along the fairways and edges of the property. Though no tree inventory has been completed, the vast majority are in good health and are desirable native species. There are significant mature oak trees on the property. The largest sized oaks are along the ravine that runs across the property from west to east beginning near the terminus of Meyer Ave at Glenway St. Aerial photos from the 1930's confirm that the course itself was mostly without trees other than along Glenway St. and along this ravine. Of particular note is that on the eastern edge of the golf course there is a woodland edge of mature oak trees that is part of a larger approximately 12 acre tract of oak woodland dominated by white oak and bur oak. This oak woodland has a significant remnant herbaceous plant community featuring abundant patches of wild geranium, large-flowered bellwort, and Solomon's plume. This land is technically part of Forest Hill Cemetery, but staff consider it to be an area of acute interest from a preservation of natural lands perspective.

Glenway is often used for walking and nature viewing (often with dogs) and for sledding, skiing and snowshoeing in the winter months. The course is also adjacent to the Southwest Bike Path and is adjacent to Glenwood Children’s Park, which is a Landmark site. The Forest Hill Cemetery is also a National and State Landmark.

Monona Golf Course is located on the east side of Madison at 111 E. Dean Avenue. The course is a 9 hole, 3,183 yard Par 36 regulation course. The course occupies 85.42 acres of land with an additional 8.48 acres of land on the east edge serving as Monona Park, which is a neighborhood park in the system. The park includes a playground and an athletic field. The park does take on stormwater and a portion of the park is regularly wet during the spring months. The course is adjacent to La Follette High School and Sennett Middle School.



The course was constructed in 1920 as a private course, but was acquired by the City of Madison in 1932. The course was constructed as an 18 hole course, with a reduction of 4 holes in 1966 for the development of La Follette High School and a subsequent reduction of 5 additional holes in 1978 for the development of Sennett Middle School. The Nathaniel W. Dean House is adjacent to the course parking lot, and for a time served as the golf clubhouse. The Dean House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Historic Places. It is currently leased to the Historic Blooming Grove Historical Society and hosts numerous meetings and events.

Monona’s gentle terrain consists of 32 feet of elevation change. The course was significantly impacted by the loss of trees due to Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), but those trees are being replaced with a number of diverse species in order to reduce the likelihood of a similar



loss in the future. There are high quality trees on the property, but notably very few oaks and century old trees. This is likely due to clearing of the land for farming before it was a golf course. Aerials from the 1930's to the 1950's show very limited tree cover.

Odana Hills is located on the west side of Madison at 4635 Odana Rd. The course is an 18 hole, 6,608 yard Par 72 regulation course. The course occupies 171.27 acres of land with additional land on both the east (2.28 acres) and west (12.78 acres) edges of the course that serve as neighborhood park amenities within the park system. In addition, approximately 24 acres on the property is administratively parceled to City Engineering for stormwater management purposes.



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Odana Hills Park includes a playground, soccer fields and is part of the cross country ski system. Odana Hills East Park includes a playground, basketball court and three tennis courts. Both of these parks are Neighborhood Parks within the park system.

The landscape at Odana Hills consists of very gentle terrain, with 25 feet of elevation change. Similar to Glenway, there are some mature oaks on the course, mostly in the three main wooded areas (between holes 14 and 15; between the driving range and hole 11; and near the maintenance shop on the eastern edge of hole 9). These areas were the only areas showing canopy in the 1930's era aerials. Hundreds of trees have since been planted on the golf course to provide a significant increase in the canopy on this parcel over time. In addition, a number of natural areas have been introduced to the course over time. Of note is a large volunteer driven pollinator prairie at the southwest corner of the parking lot and a newly established prairie along hole 2 as a result of EAB mitigation work.

Yahara Hills is located on the south east side of Madison at 6701 Hwy 12&18 East (i.e. Beltline Highway). Yahara Hills features 2 18 hole Par 72 courses, East and West, which both opened in 1968. At maximum playing distance, the West Course measures 6,885 yards and the East Course measures 6,983. The two courses are mostly geographically oriented, but are interwoven to an extent across the first five holes. The courses are situated on a 451.08 acre assemblage of parcels.



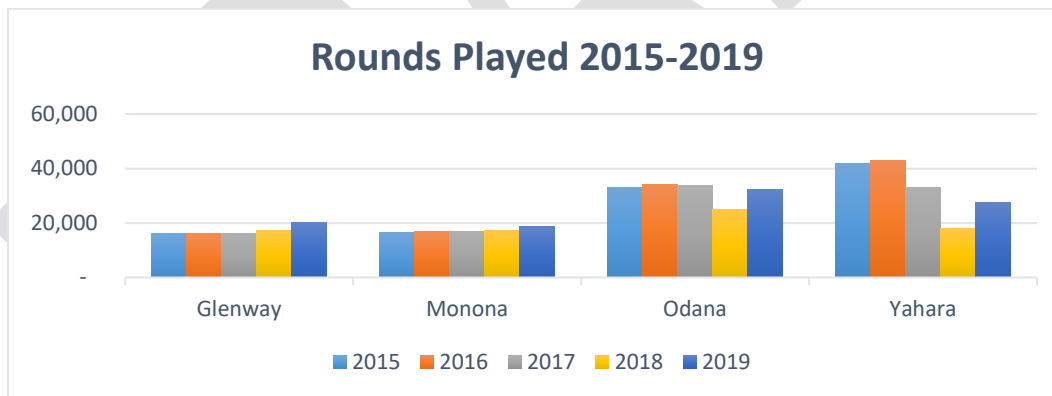
In addition to the golf course, Yahara Hills West (82.2 acres) and Yahara Hills South (43.59 acres) are both undeveloped park lands that have been held for future community park development to serve the Southeast side of Madison as the area develops further. The Yahara Hills West parkland was initially contemplated to be developed for additional golf holes, but the project did not move forward. Winter Disc Golf does utilize the Yahara Hills West area to a significant extent, which is more practicable with colder temperatures given the wet nature of this area of the property.

From a landscape perspective, Yahara Hills is more accurately one large hill that slopes from the southeastern portion of the property back to the northwest near the clubhouse. The elevation change on the 500+ acres is nearly 100 feet, which is substantial. A diverse tree canopy exists across the entirety of the course, including significant mature oak trees on the property on the east side. A number of these oaks are prevalent on the 1937 aerials, when the area was mostly in agricultural use. In addition, about 15 acres of land that was once intensively managed as turf areas was converted to natural areas over the past 15 years. There are significant wetlands on and around the property, including an old excavated agricultural ditch on the southwestern corner of the property that is the primary drainage of the site.

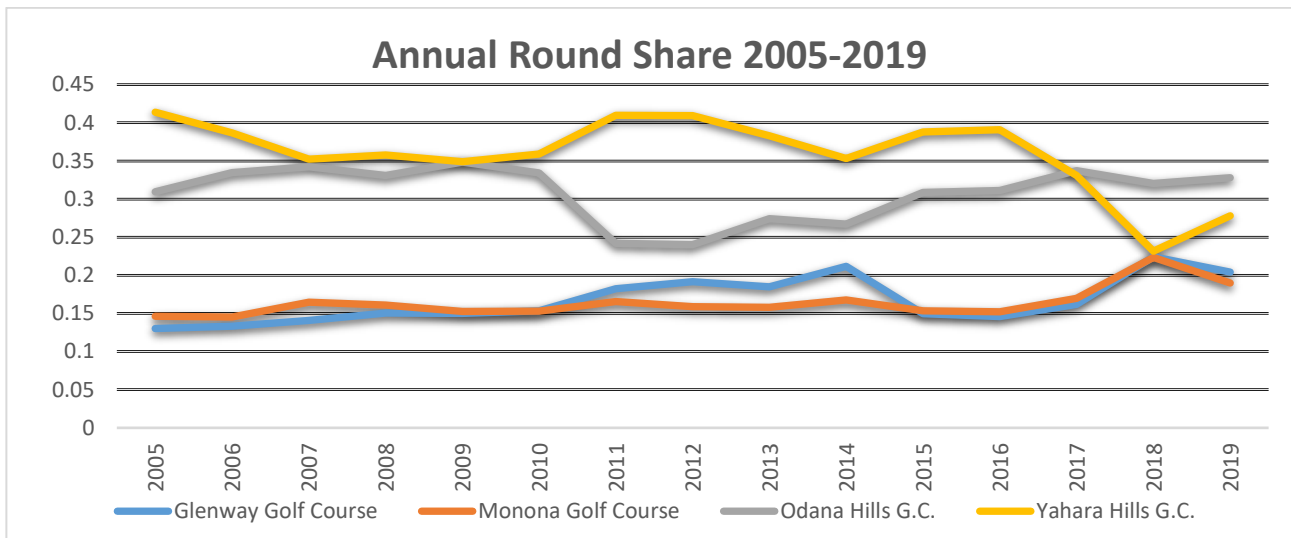
### 3. Course and Park Usage

The GEP uses rounds played, in conjunction with revenue generated, as the primary metrics for measuring the level of play on the four courses. In this analysis a round is equal to 18 holes of golf, which means that for the majority of customers at Glenway and Monona the average customer score is 0.5 in these numbers. Rounds data from prior to 2019 is not completely accurate due to limitations of the GEP's software at the time. The software used prior to 2019 went through a number of upgrades that led to data that is reliable overall, but there are concerns about the validity of the unit counts. In addition to software changes, the management of the courses transitioned in 2013 and data on rounds before that date are inconsistent with data since 2013. GEP upgraded to a new software program in 2019 that provides substantially more reliable and valid data.

Over the past five years (2015-2019), the courses have had 494,009 rounds played in total. The largest number of rounds over this time period were played at Yahara (163,284, or 33.1%), with Odana a very close second at 158,479 (32.1%) rounds played. Both Odana and Yahara experienced significant reductions in rounds in 2018 due to extreme flooding. Odana recovered to close to 2015-17 averages in 2019, while Yahara was still 10,000 rounds below the 15-17 average. Monona (86,317, 17.5%) and Glenway (85,929, 17.4%) were very close and both quite stable over the five-year time period. Overall, Glenway and Monona have shown very little dispersion on an annual basis for rounds played, while Odana has been mostly steady with the exception of 2018 flooding. Yahara, however, has shown dramatic swings, with a high of 42,972 in 2016 and a low of only 17,955 in 2018, for a peak to trough gap of 25,017.



Staff performed an analysis comparing the share of rounds by course over the time period of 2005-2019 to consider longer term trends, with the caveat above regarding rounds data. This analysis showed that over the ten year period the approximate share of rounds played was Yahara 36%, Odana 31%, Glenway 17%, Monona 16%. The most notable trend across this timeframe is the significant stability of all but Yahara. The decline in share of rounds played at Yahara in 2018 and 2019 is extreme. In 2018, nearly as many rounds were played at Glenway and Monona as were played at Yahara. In 2019, Yahara did bounce back to a 28% share, but remained behind Odana for the third consecutive year.



In addition to the amount of play, the Task Force reviewed and discussed available information regarding who uses the courses. This data is heavily reliant on staff, public, and task force observations and perspectives given the lack of demographic information required to use a course. Survey and observational data indicate that the vast majority of customers are relatively loyal to the course they play the most often, but that a significant number of players do play multiple municipal courses in a given year.

Glenway attracts players from all generations and abilities. The course works well for young and beginner golfers as well as seniors looking to stay active in the game but not able to play longer courses. Glenway hosts a large junior program through the First Tee of South Central Wisconsin. With 15 weekly leagues, Glenway is a busy course for league play for a course its size.

Monona attracts a large number of senior golfers, hosting six morning senior golf leagues each week. Senior golfers find the course to be suitable for their golfing abilities especially if looking for a bit more length and challenge than is offered by Glenway. Monona also has a significant presence of the First Tee and is the primary East Side course for our partnership as well as for local high school teams.

Odana Hills is one of the busier courses in the state, based on its excellent location and golfer friendly layout. It is home to 20 weekly leagues and hosts a number of events annually. Given its level of business, there has been limited focus on developing an outing business at Odana. Odana's popularity and level of use does create its biggest negative, which is pace of play.

Yahara Hills hosts 17 weekly league groups and approximately 35 golf outings annually. Yahara is the home course for 4 high schools and two colleges, and hosts over 30 high school and 12 college teams each year. Yahara is also the host of multiple junior tournaments annually, which normally have well over 100 participants. With 36 holes, the course is popular with casual golfers on perfect golfing days due to the ability to get out and play without having to book a tee time significantly in advance.

The four courses are all sized and located as important assets within the broader park system. As referenced above, all four courses provide additional, non-golf amenities to the broader park system. It is difficult to assess the total number of actual users or uses throughout the course of the year, but it is considered to be significant based on feedback and staff observations. All four courses offer year-round recreational opportunities, as Odana and Yahara have regularly groomed cross country ski trails, while Monona and Glenway are open for cross country skiing and snow shoeing. Other popular uses of the spaces include nature viewing, walking, dog walking and jogging on all courses. In addition, the courses have served as cross country meet locations for local high schools.

#### **4. Operational Model and Staffing**

The Golf Enterprise Program (“GEP”) is currently operated entirely using City staff, for both operations and maintenance. The GEP incurs all expenses and receives all revenues associated with the program. Within the Golf Industry, this is known as a Direct Management Model.

Prior to 2013, the GEP used a model where the City was responsible for course and facility maintenance and contracted golf professionals were responsible for clubhouse operations, which is considered an Indirect Management Model. Under this model, the City incurred all expenses for the course maintenance and received revenue from the course greens fees. The contracted golf professionals received a retainer from the greens fees from the courses, incurred all expenses related to the clubhouse operations and received the vast majority of revenues from clubhouse sales and cart rentals, paying a commission on select revenue streams to the City.

Under the current model, two (2) program Supervisors, who are trained and experienced in the golf course industry, oversee the day-to-day clubhouse and course maintenance operations with executive oversight from the Parks Superintendent and Assistant Parks Superintendent. The program also has five dedicated permanent employees three (3) Greenskeepers and one (1) Maintenance Mechanic all with degrees in Turfgrass Management and extensive experience in golf course maintenance in addition to one (1) Equipment Mechanic responsible for maintenance and repairs of equipment for all four courses. The program also employs between 115 and 120 seasonal and hourly employees annually. This includes Assistant Golf Professionals, who assist in running clubhouse operations, Attendants to provide customer service, Food and Beverage Servers and Laborers to maintain the courses on a daily basis. All staff are paid at minimum the City’s Living Wage. Overall, the level of staffing is substantially lower than it used to be. Since 2008, the level of permanent staffing has decreased from 10 FTE to 7 FTE while taking on clubhouse operations in 2013.

## 5. Capital Infrastructure

The Golf Enterprise Fund has significant capital infrastructure needs that range across all asset classifications at the four courses. The failing infrastructure, including both course and building conditions as well as equipment, pose an increasingly concerning problem to the GEP's overall profitability as they have led to course closures and increased operating expenses as staff work to make repairs and short-term fixes to keep mission critical areas and equipment functional. The three main asset classifications are Clubhouse and Restroom Facilities; Golf Course Infrastructure; and Golf Maintenance Equipment and Facilities.

Staff prepared a capital needs assessment, which identifies all known capital investment needs as of today and anticipates the needs for reinvestment over the next decade in a manner to demonstrate the scale and scope of capital infrastructure necessary to operate 72 holes of municipal golf at four courses. Conservative estimate ranges are based off best information available for comparable work completed within the City and golf industry and known conditions. More detailed analysis would be required for true project budget development in the future.

Stormwater management is the biggest concern on Yahara's course and is the leading factor in loss of revenue over the past three years. Correcting the existing drainage concerns will require increasing the courses stormwater capacity, raising the grade on a number of holes and improving drainage across the course and likely incorporating a path system. Critical course infrastructure is failing and in need of investment, including the irrigation system and well pump and bunkers. The addition of shorter tee boxes would appeal to a wider variety of golfers. Capital needs of Yahara range from \$21-32 million over the next 20 years, with significant immediate need.

Odana plays a significant role in the drainage of the Lake Wingra watershed. With more frequent and significant storms saturated course conditions have become a major concern. Correcting the existing drainage concerns will require increasing the courses stormwater capacity, raising the grade on a several holes, improving drainage on key areas of the course and incorporating a cart path system. Installation of a well and updating the irrigation system will provide for more sustainable turf management. The clubhouse is one of the oldest in the parks system, it is inefficient and not ADA compliant. Replacement of the facility would require redesign and reconstruction of the parking lot. The maintenance facility lacks bulk storage capacity, which results in loss of product and/or increased expenses due to ordering in smaller quantities. Odana's capital needs range from \$12.2M-\$18.4 million, with significant immediate needs.

While Monona is smaller in scale, critical course infrastructure is failing and in need of replacement or repair, including the irrigation system and pumphouse and driving range tee box. The clubhouse is inefficient in terms of layout for maximizing and utility usage, and its replacement, regardless of scope, would require redesign and reconstruction of the parking lot. The fairways are showing signs of a need for attention, as regrading will be required to repair some terrain concerns and the oversized bunkers need to be downsized and redesigned to limit maintenance costs. Estimates for Monona's entire capital project needs range from \$2.5M-3.8M.

Overall, Glenway's course and amenities have withstood the test of time well, and there is significantly less need here than other courses. Replacing the failing clubhouse patio is a necessity. The tees, which see heavy use yearly are in need of renovation. In time, the modest clubhouse should be replaced and the parking lot redesigned to better meet the needs of the community. The entire project for Glenway is estimated to be between \$1.7M-2.5M.

The aging fleet of equipment consists of a variety of specialized mowers, implements and other machines necessary for proper course maintenance. Deferred maintenance costs of approximately \$2M is estimated to cover immediate needs of the 72 hole course. As machines age and reach the end of their useful life, staff continue to incur inefficiencies and expenses to keep the operations running.

## **6. Financial Analysis**

The golf program is operated as the Golf Enterprise Fund (GEF) within the City's budget and accounting program. This means that from a financial perspective the City treats the golf program as if it were a stand-alone business, whereby its revenues must cover all related expenses over time. The enterprise method of accounting has been in place for the golf program since at least the early 1980's. Since 2000, the GEF has struggled to be profitable on a comprehensive net income basis, with total expenses exceeding revenues in all but four years since that time (and all but one since 2003). The primary driver of these losses has been the sustained long-term lack of growth in revenue. Due to market and course conditions, the ability to increase price or volume has not been sufficient to provide financial stability.

The GEF spent \$3,305,901 in 2019, which is up from \$2,177,494 in 2000. This equates to an annualized growth rate in expenditures of only 2.59%. It is critical to recognize that embedded in this number is the City taking on the clubhouse operations in 2013, which added approximately \$750,000 in annual expenditures to the GEF. If the annual rates of increase are adjusted for this fact the growth rate is 0.87%. In 2019, the GEF earned \$2,769,146 in total revenue, which is up from \$2,390,322 in 2000. This equates to an annualized growth rate in revenue of 0.79%. Of the \$2.77M in revenue in 2019, approximately \$1.84M was from greens fees and memberships. This would be the value that is closest in comparative value to the 2000 revenue, which would indicate an annualized loss rate of -1.15% over the past twenty years.

The financial losses over the last four years are now greater than \$2,000,000. Despite the fact that 2015 was the only profitable year since 2003, the outlook for the financial position and condition of the GEF is dire and clearly unsustainable. The significant flooding issues in 2018 led to the worst performance on record for the GEF, as it lost \$863,320. This was also the first time on record that the GEF's Total Net Position went into negative territory requiring Common Council action to provide a loan to the GEF. In 2019, despite a rebounding in rounds played, the GEF lost \$536,755. This loss in 2019 effectively exhausted the \$1.5M loan authorization from the general fund to the GEF. With another challenging economic year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely the City will have to address another significant financial loss in 2020.

The table below shows the financial results by course over the last four years. On average, Glenway and Monona have been relatively consistent in their amount of losses. Odana has shown significantly more volatility than it has historically, but this is primarily driven by the 2018 flooding leaving Odana in the red for the first time on record. Yahara has shown the most significant dispersion between financial results with a range of outcomes of almost \$500,000 over the four year period. This correlates to the exceptional volatility in rounds played due to the course conditions as referenced above.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	Avg
Glenway Exp.	454,043	383,736	473,022	434,105	436,226
Glenway Rev.	(372,358)	(359,215)	(354,555)	(386,351)	(368,120)
Glenway Net	81,685	24,520	118,467	47,754	68,107
Monona Exp.	549,595	490,397	524,592	484,467	512,263
Monona Rev.	(448,116)	(440,721)	(402,651)	(405,898)	(424,347)
Monona Total	101,479	49,676	121,941	78,568	87,916
Odana Exp.	1,040,864	944,106	986,814	1,002,216	993,500
Odana Rev.	(1,163,494)	(1,116,039)	(986,091)	(1,172,269)	(1,109,473)
Odana Total	(122,630)	(171,933)	723	(170,053)	(115,973)
Yahara Exp.	1,566,168	1,413,798	1,339,233	1,385,114	1,426,078
Yahara Rev.	(1,233,328)	(943,279)	(717,045)	(804,628)	(924,570)
Yahara Total	332,841	470,520	622,188	580,486	501,509
GEF Total Exp.	3,610,671	3,232,037	3,323,661	3,305,901	3,368,067
GEF Total Rev.	(3,217,296)	(2,859,254)	(2,460,341)	(2,769,146)	(2,826,509)
GEF Total	393,375	372,783	863,320	536,755	541,558

It is important to note that the GEF operates as an integrated unit and there are certainly costs that are recognized at a course, but truly incurred at another. This is particularly true at Yahara due to it being the primary shop and warehouse of the system. Overall, the situation for the GEF's financial issues is that expenditures are relatively fixed and growing within normalized rates, but revenue is exceptionally unstable and significantly impacted by changing climate and lack of reinvestment in capital infrastructure. The trend lines are clearly going in the wrong direction and there is no reason to believe the current level of service can be sustained without significant structural changes.



## C. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the Methodology Section is to provide an overview of how the Task Force completed its work and references to the information it studied and discussed as part of its deliberations. The Task Force was created via resolution in 2019 (with a later resolution in spring 2020 extending the deadline for submission due to the COVID-19 pandemic) to make recommendations about the future of golf courses in Madison parks. The Task Force met 9 times between October 2019 and July 2020. The Task Force gathered relevant information and made requests of staff for additional information for consideration. The Task Force provided input and oversight on a public engagement process that included an online survey, focus groups, and two well attended public input meetings.

### Step 1 - The Resolution

The Common Council created the Task Force by Resolution (RES-19-00456, Legistar File 56004).<sup>5</sup> The Resolution provided that the Mayor appoint eight (8) Task Force members, including a current or former member of the Board of Park Commissioners and one member of the Golf Subcommittee. The Resolution provided that the President of the Council appoint one Alderperson as a Task Force member. The preamble of the Resolution notes some of the reasons for creating the Task Force:

- The City of Madison currently owns and operates 4 golf courses that utilize 750 acres of parkland;
- The courses are currently considered a Special Use within the City's Park and Open Space Plan;
- The golf courses are operated as a the Golf Enterprise Fund, which means they are to be operated like a business and independent of the tax levy;
- The Golf Enterprise Fund has incurred significant financial losses, including an \$813,848 loss in 2018

The Resolution then listed the issues the Task Force is to address including:

- Solicit input from local stakeholders,
- Prioritize equity, public health, financial sustainability, and environmental sustainability,
- Review available research, best practices, and operational models related to municipal golf.
- Discuss and evaluate all options for the use of the land currently occupied by Madison's public golf courses,
- Consider how to balance the allocation of resources among various park uses,
- Recommend if the City of Madison ought to provide municipal golf to the public, if so, recommend how much, where, and how,
- Develop recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council, Committees or Commissions, on the future of Madison's Municipal Golf Courses that provide for

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A, Establishing a Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks

both Golf and the City of Madison to be in a long-term financially sustainable position. At least one recommendation should not require an annual general fund operating subsidy and no tax levy supported debt.

Finally, the original Resolution states that the Final Report shall be submitted by May 1, 2020 and that the Task Force will be dissolved upon the submission of the recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council, and Board of Park Commissioners. A subsequent Resolution<sup>6</sup> was adopted by the Common Council to extend the deadline to July 31, 2020 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff have worked diligently to support this new deadline while also working to open golf courses in a manner that is safe for the public during the pandemic.

## **Step 2 - Information Gathering**

The Task Force began meeting on October 23, 2019 and spent its first three meetings gathering information. This included receiving information from staff and prior public input. A list of the information the Task Force received and considered is included in Appendix D. Staff prepared and led tours of Yahara, Monona, Glenway, and Odana courses for all Task Force members, which were open to the public. Additionally, individual tours were offered for those unable to attend scheduled tours.

Information reviewed by the Task Force included staff presentations on:

- Current Operations of City of Madison Golf Courses
- Golf Enterprise Budget and Financial Reports
- Operational Models of Municipal Golf Courses and Market Comparison
- Land and Resource Management
- Capital Infrastructure Needs
- Previously Explored Concepts and Processes
- Racial Equity and Social Justice Comprehensive Tool

## **Step 3 – Outreach and Input**

The Task Force solicited input from local stakeholders using a number of methods. Staff established a dedicated [website](#)<sup>7</sup> for the work of the Task Force and to keep the public informed of its progress. Staff provided all previous survey data and public comment prior to 2019 to members of the Task Force during the early stages of the assignment. Between October 2019 and July 2020, approximately 4,300 contacts were made for the purpose of soliciting feedback via survey, focus group meetings, two (2) public input meetings and various email, phone calls. While the majority of respondents were white males over the age of 50, females, non-binary/third gender individuals and people of color from youth to over the age of 64 also responded as either golfers or non-golfers. All public input received was provided to the Task Force for review and is available in Legistar.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B, Legistar ID# 59434

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/golftaskforce.cfm>

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix D, Legislative File #58296

## 1. Review of Previous Public Input

The Task Force was provided with surveys prepared in 2013 and 2015. These surveys provided insight as to customer's needs, preferences and satisfaction with the program and its offerings. In addition, public comment in the form of emails from 2017 to 2018 regarding the future of golf courses was included.

## 2. Task Force Survey

A survey was developed with the Task Force's oversight and administered via Survey Monkey. The survey was open from February 28 until April 9, 2020, and was announced through a press release, social media posts, Task Force's website and via email to golf contacts and parks contacts. In total, 4,092 people responded to the survey and many followed up with more detailed email responses. The majority (3,590 or 88%) of survey respondents were golfers with 12% or 502 individuals who use the courses for purposes other than golf also providing input. Full survey results are available on-line in Legistar.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of golfers feel the amount of golf currently offered is the right amount. These individuals are satisfied with the quality and cost of the courses, but recognize a need for capital improvements. Individuals using the courses for purposes other than golf, such as disc golf, cross country skiing, walking/jogging and nature viewing tended to indicate that there was likely too many holes of golf within the city.

## 3. Focus Groups

The focus group consisted of seven (7) regular golfers, those who golf all four courses, a high school golf coach, a woman and a person of color and various ages ranging from graduate student to retired, who were selected by staff and invited to participate in a facilitated discussion. The group met on March 10, 2020 for 90 minutes to discuss their perspective on the current program and proposed scenarios discussed by the Task Force.

The group was largely satisfied with the number of holes, cost, quality of play and professional customer service offered. There was concern over the use of the enterprise accounting system, deteriorating infrastructure of courses and that other options were not discussed, particularly the possibility of eliminating only 18 holes at Yahara.

## 4. Public Input Meetings

The public input meetings were attended by approximately 150 members of the public, who received an update on the work completed by the Task Force to date and overview of the four (4) possible scenarios being considered by the Task Force. Approximately 95 people attended the meeting held at Olbrich Botanical Gardens and approximately 55 attended the meeting held at Goodman Maintenance Facility. Attendees were encouraged to complete comment and/or question cards. Those that wished to speak were allowed to do so and staff answered all written and verbal questions.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix D, Legislative File #58296

While some voiced concerns over past mismanagement and the severity of capital needs, many opposed any sort of course closure or reduction in holes, especially at Monona. There was some support for considering closure of just 18 holes at Yahara and additional course configurations ranging from 9-14 holes. There was considerable support for eliminating the enterprise accounting system. In addition, there were suggestions for improved marketing, differentiation of services, environmentally sustainable practices and consideration of alternative uses.

#### **Step 4 – Initial Findings**

Prior to the public engagement meetings and survey, the Task Force came to a general consensus that affordable and accessible municipal golf is important to the residents of the City of Madison and some number of holes should remain open for play. The Task Force requested that staff prepare and present four (4) different course closure scenarios for the body and the public to consider. These four course closure scenarios included closing 18 holes, 27 holes, 36 holes, and 45 holes. All four scenarios improved the financial position of the GEF, but as an Enterprise none of the four were estimated to produce a profit. Course closure scenarios and information presented to the Task Force is available attached to Legislative File #59227.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Step 5 - Discussion, Debate, and Final Recommendations**

After gathering information, the Task Force spent its remaining meetings discussing, debating, and making recommendations to be included in the Final Report. The remainder of the Final Report will detail and give context to those recommendations. Minutes from those discussions can be found in Legistar File [INSERT HERE].

### **D. RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO MUNICIPAL GOLF IN MADISON PARKS**

#### **1. The City should provide Municipal Golf in Madison Parks.**

The Task Force recommends that Madison continue providing golf course opportunities to its residents and visitors. The Task Force found that golf is a highly desired recreational outlet for a number of residents and visitors and that it provides significant positive social, emotional, and physical health benefits to the public.

#### **2. The City should update the mission of the golf program to focus it clearly on affordable and accessible golf.**

The Task Force recommends that the mission for municipal golf be updated to focus it on affordable and accessible golf for those that need the access. The Task Force recognizes the value in offering quality playing conditions and securing the revenue support from doing so, but the current mission of the golf program in conjunction with the enterprise accounting system creates an inherent tension between revenue generation, playing conditions, and affordability/access.

#### **3. The City should reduce holes of golf operated.**

The Task Force recommends that Madison reduce the number of golf holes operated to better position the golf program to be financially stable. The growth in available golf

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 4, Legislative File #59227

courses in the marketplace and the lack of corresponding increase in golfers makes the current allocation of land and resources to golf unsustainable.

- 4. The City should work with the University of Wisconsin, including the OJ Noer Ag Research Station, to develop Integrated Pest Management protocols that are at the forefront of managing public golf courses sustainably.**

The Task Force recommends that Parks staff continue developing a working relationship with the University of Wisconsin's world-class research teams to establish a rigorous scientifically based management program for the course that promote quality playing conditions while ensuring golf courses are a benefit to the natural environment.

- 5. The City should work to promote positive ecological outcomes at the golf courses through reducing reliance on limited natural resources and providing ecological assets.**

The Task Force recommends that Madison should work to eliminate the use of City water for irrigation across the system. Special emphasis should be placed on Odana Hills given its size and usage rates in certain years. Additionally, the City should work to reduce energy usage and consider adding additional non-fossil fuel production capacity to the courses. The City should also work with partners to utilize golf courses to manage stormwater in a way that enhances playability and improves the quality of the watersheds. The City should also work to increase biodiversity on the golf course properties.

- 6. The City should develop and sustain relationships to promote golf instruction to grow equitable access to the game of golf.**

The Task Force recommends the City work to enhance its golf instruction options to increase equitable access to the game of golf. The City should consider working with community partners to develop and implement innovative plans to ensure that golf is a game that can be accessed, learned, and enjoyed by all members of the community.

- 7. The City should work with residents, stakeholders, and partners to promote wider utilization by the community of the golf courses to better integrate the courses into the wider park system.**

The Task Force recommends the City explore and develop relationships with residents, users, stakeholders, and partners to promote the vision of the golf courses being a part of the community's park system. Consideration should be given to alternative time based uses and complimentary uses.

- 8. The City should ensure that if City resources are used to invest in capital projects at golf courses it is done in an equitable and fiscally responsible manner to reduce negative impact on park services across the system.**

The Task Force recommends that if the City considers allocating city funding towards capital needs at the courses, it does so in a manner that balances the needs of the entire park system.

**E. CONCLUSION**

TO BE DRAFTED WITH FINAL REPORT

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## APPENDIX A – Resolution Establishing the Task Force (RES-19-00456, Leg#56004)

**SUBSTITUTE** - Establishing a Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks to make recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council, and the Board of Park Commissioners regarding the future of the City’s Municipal Golf Courses.

The City of Madison Parks Division currently operates a municipal golf program at Yahara (36 holes on 451.08 acres); Odana (18 holes on 171.27 acres); Monona (9 holes on 85.45 acres); and Glenway (9 holes on 41.98 acres). The courses have all been in operation since at least 1968. Over the past four years, the golf program has hosted an average of 100,000 18 hole equivalent rounds (a 9 hole round is 0.5 rounds). The golf program has been structured within the City’s financial system as an Enterprise Fund since approximately 1980 and the program is budgeted for as a separate budgetary agency as the Golf Enterprise Fund (“GEF”), which is intended to be a fully supported business type activity fully funded via user fees. This includes funding all operating and capital expenditures related to the courses.

WHEREAS, the Adopted 2018-2023 Park and Open Space Plan (“POSP”) provides the vision, mission, strategies, and goals for the Parks system for the next five years and beyond; and,

WHEREAS, the POSP aligns with the *Imagine Madison Comprehensive Plan* update through the use of guiding lenses of equity, public health, adaptability, and sustainability; and,

WHEREAS, the POSP contains twelve strategies to meet the needs of the community which, along with the guiding lenses are the basis for park planning and development during the next five years; and,

WHEREAS, the twelve strategies are:

- Improve Public Access to Lakes
- Design Park Facilities to Accommodate Diverse Activities and Populations
- Protect and Enhance Natural and Cultural Resources
- Acquire Parkland to Reduce Parkland Deficiencies and Address Increasing Residential Density
- Ensure that New Park Development Occurs in a Fiscally Sustainable Manner
- Ensure That Existing Levels of Service Are Maintained and Supported Through the Park System and Are Increased as New Parks and Facilities Are Developed
- Create Equitable Access and Funding For Parks
- Improve the Park System’s Capacity to Withstand Future Environmental Changes
- Increase Connectivity Between Parks to Enhance Access
- Develop a Healthy and Diverse Urban Tree Canopy Within Parks
- Increase Engagement with Groups and Organizations and Develop New Ones
- Pursue Regional Solutions to Regional Issues, and;

WHEREAS, the mission of the Golf Enterprise is to provide the Madison area golfing public with the finest possible golfing conditions at reasonable prices and for all levels of play; and,

WHEREAS, the POSP classifies golf courses as a Special Use park use, the classification that is used for “parkland whose primary function serves unique recreation opportunities” based upon the model of the GEF being independent of tax levy support; and,

WHEREAS, the GEF has had a negative net income in nine of the last ten years and had liabilities exceeding assets in the amount of \$888,442 as of the close of 2018; and,

WHEREAS, to address this deficit, an advance to the golf courses enterprise fund of \$813,848, was made from the general fund on the City's 2018 financial statements with 1<sup>st</sup> quarter projections for 2019 indicating an additional loss of approximately \$400,000 by the end of this year; and,

WHEREAS, this liability on the City's financial statements creates real and significant financial and budgetary concerns for the City of Madison moving forward; and,

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Common Council need to recognize, through resolution adopted in 2019, the advance from the general fund to the golf courses enterprise fund and identify the source(s) and schedule for its repayment,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Mayor and Common Council direct the creation of a taskforce on the future of the City's municipal golf courses that will be primarily staffed by the Parks Division and comprised of the following members: .

- An Alderperson appointed by the City Council President
- One Current or Former Member of the Board of Park Commissioners appointed by the Mayor
- One Member of the Golf Subcommittee appointed by the Mayor
- Six Residents appointed by the Mayor, to include representation of golfers, parks users, non-golfers, potentially impacted neighbors, and youth residents, if possible; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the taskforce shall conduct and complete the following actions/duties:

- Solicit input from local stakeholders,
- Prioritize equity, public health, financial sustainability, and environmental sustainability,
- Review available research, best practices, and operational models related to municipal golf,
- ~~Consider the highest and best use of the land currently occupied by Madison's public golf courses,~~
- **Dicuss and evaluate all options for the use of the land currently occupied by Madison's public golf courses,**
- Consider how to balance the allocation of resources among various parks uses,
- Recommend if the City of Madison ought to provide municipal golf to the public; if so recommend how much, where, and how,
- Develop recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council, Committees or Commissions, on the future of Madison's Municipal Golf Courses that provide for both Golf and the City of Madison to be in a long-term financially sustainable position. At least one recommendation should not require an annual general fund operating subsidy and no tax levy supported debt; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the taskforce complete its review and make final recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council and the Board of Park Commissioners; and,

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the taskforce will be dissolved upon the submission of its recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council, and Board of Park Commissioners **by May 1, 2020.**



**APPENDIX B – Extending the Deadline for the Task Force (RES-20-00296, Leg#59434)**

Extending the deadline to July 31, 2020 for the report and recommendations from the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks to the Mayor, Common Council and the Board of Park Commissioners regarding the future of the City's Municipal Golf Courses.

WHEREAS, Resolution RES-19-00456, Legistar File 56004, created the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks; and,

WHEREAS, the Task Force was given a deadline of May 1, 2020 to complete its work and issue its report and recommendations to the Mayor, Common Council and Board Parks Commissioners; and,

WHEREAS, it is clear that the report and recommendations will not be completed by the May 1, 2020 deadline due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Common Council extends the deadline for finishing the work of the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks to be no later than July 31, 2020.

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## APPENDIX C – Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks Meeting Schedule

Agendas and Minutes for meetings can be accessed at:

<https://madison.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Information is also available through the dedicated website at:

<https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/golftaskforce.cfm>

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
10/23/2019	6:00 PM	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
11/20/2019	6:00 PM	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
12/18/2019	6:00 PM	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
1/15/2020	6:00 PM	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
1/29/2020	6:00 PM	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
2/19/2020	6:00 PM	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
3/18/2020	Canceled	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
4/15/2020	Canceled	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
4/29/2020	Canceled	Goodman Maintenance Facility, 1402 Wingra Creek Parkway
5/18/2020	6:00 PM	Virtual Meeting
6/11/2020	Canceled	Virtual Meeting
6/29/2020	6:00 PM	Virtual Meeting
7/15/2020	6:00 PM	Virtual Meeting

## APPENDIX D – List of Topics and Legistar Numbers for On-Line Documents

Legistar File Number	Title
57639	Presentation of Current Operations of Golf Courses
57871	2019-2020 Task Force Meeting Dates
58298	Golf Enterprise Program Budget and Financial Reports
58297	Operational Models of Municipal Golf Courses and Market Comparison
58296	Community Engagement and Input
58295	Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative
58718	Land and Resource Management
59057	Capital Needs Assessment
59058	Park and Open Space Plan Overview
58735	Annual Statement of Interest Due
59229	Partnership Presentation -- Change Golf Instruction
59227	Task Force Deliberation, Discussion, and Possible Recommendations

Legistar, the City of Madison's Legislative File Database, can be accessed by going to the Task Force on Municipal Golf in Madison Parks [webpage](https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/golftaskforce.cfm)<sup>11</sup> and selecting the Current Agenda & Minutes link on the right side of the homepage. Once in Legistar, clicking on the agenda for a specific meeting will open the agenda file that includes hyperlinks for the topics above. Relevant attachments are available within the legislative files.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/about/golftaskforce.cfm>

**APPENDIX E – Summary List of Final Task Force Recommendations**

- 1. A
- 2. B

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