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Ashland City Council

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Work Session Minutes  
Tuesday, July 28, 2009

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Tuesday, July 28, 2009, Council Chambers Conference Room 7:00 P.M.

**Purpose: Brookside Golf Course**

*Attendance:*

*Council members: Ruth Detrow, Paul Wertz, Steve Stuart, Robert L. Valentine W1, Robert M. Valentine W2.*

*Mayor: Glen Stewart*

*Human Resources: Cherie Bailey*

*Parks & Recreation: Tim Clingan*

*Finance Director: (Acting), Bill Strine*

*Fire Department: Mark Burgess*

*Brookside Golf Course: Terry Valentine*

*Council Clerk: Valarie Bishoff*

*Media: T-G Jeff Russ, WMFD*

Citizens:

Cliff Hubler

Al Garrett

Sunny Riffle

Anthony L. Watson

R. Dale Kindall

Bob Thie

Steve Paramore

Phil Bush

Jess L. Hamilton

John Chorpening

Larry Willis

Sam Weyrick

Jim Willis

ROLL CALL: Ruth Detrow, Paul Wertz, Steve Stuart, Robert L. Valentine W1, Robert M. Valentine W2.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

**Paul Wertz:** This is a Work Session on Brookside Golf Course and I am going to turn it over to Stephen Stuart, Chairman of the Committee.

**Stephen Stuart:** Thank you Paul. We appreciate everyone in attendance this evening too. Just a little bit of background. I think the City Council; the Mayor recognized that with the financial press of the city that we needed to look at every aspect of city government. And one of the components to look at was the long-term viability of Brookside Golf Course which has been a tremendous asset to the Community and I think we all agree with that. It was a desire of Council to have some knowledgeable citizens participate and look at that long-term viability and we are really fortunate to have volunteers that devoted a lot of hours. And they are here as a committee this evening and I would like to introduce them first before I turn it over to John Augustine.

*Brookside Golf Committee Members:* 1) Lisa Armstrong  
2) John Augustine  
3) Kim Edwards  
4) Gene Augerman  
5) Mike Huber  
6) Robert L. Valentine  
7) Stephen Stuart

And again starting the meetings in April and continuing until this past week, this group has devoted tremendous amount of time along with our Golf pro, our golf course superintendent and our Parks & Recreation Director. John, I turn it over to you.

**John Augustine:** Thank you Steve; I am not sure where I am supposed to do this. I will move over here so I can see all of you and not have my back to everyone out there necessarily. The committee did meet about five times and we received a great deal of information from Terry Valentine and from the course superintendent Larry Willis and from Tim Clingan. They gave us about everything we needed to know. We looked at the rounds played out there; we looked at the history of rounds played. The transition over the past ten years. We looked at the fees that the course is charging now. We looked at the number of outings that the course has and what the trends have been along those lines. What efforts have been made by course management to improve the number of rounds played? I think there is a little history that goes with this and it is not unique to Ashland Ohio at all. Golf has a story and history as we all know. It has a very storied history in Ashland itself. But for the past decade, golf in general has turned a little away from what its boom was maybe ten years ago. It is competing with other sports, with family time; families were all busy with activities. Of course our own economic situation is something that has affected people's ability to play or their choices to play and things at that time. A course is judged by the quality of the course's maintenance. And I think without question there is no public course in this part of Ohio that rivals Brookside Golf Course. I don't think of one anywhere around that is a public course that is operated for profit and is in the condition or has been maintained the way Brookside has. Now, at that same time, during the past few years with play dropping, revenues falling; some corners have been curtailed to bring back the cost of maintenance at that course. I play out there in a league; I know many people in this room who play out there in league and the cost of not putting money into that course is beginning to show. In that, I think some of the revenue that was generated at that course at one time made it quite the profitable operation, has gone to other courses around the area. People are driving to other locations to play. When they have run the rounds at discount or tried to bring people in; they have had them lined up. It is not that they don't want to play the course, it is just that people go other places.

We have a number of nice courses around the area. It was our charge, I think, to come up with some short-term and long-term goals. We looked at revenue possibilities to help offset what we were told was and rightfully is a shortfall in the ability to cover the cost of the courses operation. And we have come up with some recommendations. These are early recommendations. I guess from the city's standpoint, before I get into those recommendations, I think that the course, as Steve has pointed out is clearly an asset to both the community and monetary value and historic value for the city. A golf course to be developed from scratch is a very expensive enterprise. There is a huge amount of intrinsic value in maintaining the greens, having fairways with watering systems; all of that stuff. So to maintain that is an investment in an asset that has great value to the city in its long-term. I handed out a sheet of paper to each of you and I gave copies to the committee. We looked at what other golf courses are doing to attempt to raise revenues from other than regular golf play. And that thinking I guess is part of the entire golf, I guess I am going to call it the golf experience. When groups go out to play golf, either outings or groups of four or groups of ten or whatever goes out together; they go for the golf experience. And that golf experience is the quality of the course. It is the challenge the course presents. And of course it is the cost to play as it relates back to that challenge. You pay a little more for the more challenging course. I think [Item \(1\)](#) on that as far as short-term goals. We are, besides looking at fees from course play; we are recommending as many other courses do in this area or anywhere in the state as a source of revenue, that you consider the purchase of a permit to sell beer at the golf course for those that are playing there. Now that is not in of itself something that is going to make people flock to Brookside Golf Course, but it is something that does attract people to other courses because it is a normal course of business at other courses around this area. It is made available for sale. There is no restriction on bringing beer on Brookside Golf Course and we made a rather unsophisticated study of how much of that actually occurred by counts in trashcans on a given week or two. And it is surprising how much there is. This is just the cans that were left. These aren't the ones that were taken home to be recycled. But in a sense, it is a restriction on how that beverage is dispersed. If the course controls the entire dispersment of beer, it controls how many each player would have per side of golf and I am just pointing out possibilities here but there will be money made on the sale of that alcoholic beverage and beer and it would control consumption of it by side, by person. So not only in a revenue sense it controls how much of it is actually being consumed by people on the course. I think there is benefit from a behavior standpoint as well as an economic standpoint. So I think from that sense there is a significant potential for revenue. I think with that, besides selling that, that the food area could be expanded to sell hot sandwiches, French fries and possibly provide a place for people to sit down after they finish a round; to talk about the round, a place to eat, a place to do business, if nothing else. There is a paramount of business over golf. [Item \(2\)](#) we have looked at some sketches about accommodating the golf course itself with a change to the pro shop area there. We would accommodate seating, both inside and some outside. We would expand that area allowing people to sit down after a round of golf. Here again thinking that all of these factors will make it more accommodating to the individual golfer or to the group of golfers to come to that spot and again, incremental rounds that are bought by golfers at that course to help cover fixed costs tremendously. The more rounds played, the more likely it is to be a self-sustaining entity by itself. [Item \(3\)](#) We have studied the fee structure both in Ashland and Richland County and Terry has some too ideas on that. There are other ideas that could be implemented possibly to increase again, the number of rounds of play. Incrementally it would come off each round played will

help make that course self-sustaining. [Item \(4\)](#) there is evaluate current revenue estimates to provide projections. We have done some of that; we haven't run through all of the possibilities that we think combinations that could generate the most revenue. We have taken a fairly conservative approach on that. But I think the long range priority for anyone that plays golf in the city is that the course operate and earn at least (Item (1) long-range) \$1 of profit from its annual operation without any city funding. So whatever plan is endorsed, I think that is important that we try to do things that are going to bring revenue to this particular sport and recreation enterprise for the city. We know that in the late '80s, 1989 I believe, the city through the golf course, bought 64 acres of land immediately south of the front side of the golf course and that was future expansion for additional golf. That is not likely in my estimation to happen. (Item (2) long-range) We are looking at that as a possible sale of that land. The money used for that came from profits from the operation of the golf course at that time and was accumulated from green fees and that kind of thing. We would suggest that that money be used to make these proposed improvements to the club house to allow that expansion of revenue from either beer sales or food sales or just general sales to people who would dine there, eat there, not dinner dining eating but after a round of golf sitting down having an enjoyable time there. And some other improvements to the course itself. Elevate the level of play. Make the quality of play better. Make the experience of golf at that city course better. All of this we believe would enhance the number of rounds played gaining additional incremental income to the city for the covering of the costs. We will also in (Item (3) there, long-range) priorities investigate the establishment of an endowment fund for the course to benefit. The idea being that if money were left from the improvements we wish to make there at the clubhouse that that money would go into this endowment fund as seed money to start and the possibility of selling off the rights to each hole to interested citizens, groups, businesses, whatever; sort of a naming right thing for each hole would bring money into that fund and the interest off of that money would then be used to help maintain the quality of the course in each years operation. These are some of the preliminary ideas that we felt comfortable sharing tonight. We think they have merit; they are methods that are used in other municipalities. I know some of our folks, Terry has gone up to Cleveland Metro Parks and they have endowments. They have taken several of these approaches and they are beneficial to their operation. They help support; I think, what did they say Terry? Seven courses or eight courses. They have seven courses in Cleveland. So these are not new earth shattering ideas. They are ideas taken from others and other places but they have application in this particular case. When you look back on time and the history of golf in Ashland Ohio, you have to include the benefits that have come, the pride that has come to the city from the golfers that have come through Brookside Golf Course and through the Ashland Community in general. Some of our greatest sources of sports pride have come through that course and the development of young people in the future citizens and there is no question that the history is there. My guess is the history would repeat itself if it is perpetuated. That others will come along, the values of golf would perpetuate through other young people that come to that course. The junior program is one of great remark. It has been a stalwart here in this community for a number of years. So I guess with that, those were our observations. Those were some of our general ideas about what we would do and how we would approach this. We did look at number, we did look at scenarios. We didn't spend great amounts of time looking at those but we did have some numbers on what revenue could be for the course from those ideas. I guess I am just going to throw it back unless anyone else from the committee has something else they would like to add. Does anyone have any questions?

**Stephen Stuart:** Why don't we start with questions from Council?

**Robert L. Valentine W1:** Well let me express mine and as Steve mentioned too; we had to make a change in the group and there were two Councilmen on that and this is the first meeting. I felt as each meeting went along that the people that were at that meeting had a knowledge of the community and how important golf was to the community and each time I went to a meeting, something else was introduced and I knew they did their homework and I felt very comfortable in what transpired there. One of the things you had mentioned and that was the beer sales. I don't know of any course around here or any course I have played, and I am not a drinker, but the point is, I don't know a place that doesn't have beer. And I also know that we have situations out there where people who play, I am sure the beer just doesn't come from the air. It comes from somewhere and so I can't see any myself, I can't see any reason for not doing that. Not having that, I think it, not necessarily is for nutrition or anything, but it is something that can be controlled and it can bring money into the golf course. I don't think it can provide all the money that we need but I think it will provide a great deal of the money. But again let me kind of let the people here in the audience know that you had to go to the meetings, and you had to hear what these people had to say and the research they did. This was a very working committee and I appreciate what they did.

**John Augustine:** Well I guess I would reiterate again that the number one long-term priority of whatever is recommended here, it is that this course be self-sustaining. That somehow through revenues, it be something that the city is not funding down the road. We know the challenges that you folks face are great and if we can set a plan that allows us the time to develop this, it could be a great thing. I mean I really believe it could be a continuing asset to the community. If the city decided after 5 years that it didn't choose to be a golf course manager; I am just throwing this out; I am not saying 5 years is what we recommended but it would be much better served to develop this course; maintain this course, improve the play on this course because if the asset were to be sold, it would carry a much higher value for the city down the line. If the costs are cut; if the revenue falls to cost cuts and people tend to move away from it because it doesn't offer those aspects of quality play, I am going to call it the ambiance of the nice course and it is a nice course and I don't want to say that it is not. But it needs to be maintained and has to be perpetuated a certain level to attract people in. What we are talking about with beer sales and food sales is kind of a little aside. It is money left on the table. We are not taking advantage of that and that in it of itself; I don't know if it keeps people away necessarily because a lot of people bring in what they want to have. But we would be able to control that and we would be able to make some money off of it. I think all of those things would come into play when we are looking at trying to improve the bottom line of the operation of the course.

**Stephen Stuart:** I would like to make an apology. I was quoted in the Ashland Times Gazette today saying that Brookside has served the city well but it has never made money. Well that is obviously not a correct statement. You just heard that the 64 acres that were purchased were purchased with profits from the golf course. I got a call from Jack Messner today. He was in the Seattle Airport, on his way to Alaska and very disappointed that I would make a statement like that so I owe Jack an apology and everyone else. A more accurate statement on my part would

have been, based upon the financial information that we have been provided for this study, we didn't see any years that had made a profit.

**Paul Wertz:** Is there anything that you guys discussed in your committee that we can do to try to bring play in this year. There are days out there where there is nobody out there. Did you discuss that?

**John Augustine:** Yes. It would be difficult to make a change this year with the remaining season that we have. We would implement the beer sales as soon as possible, but there is a four-month lead-time to get that license. The facility has, other than a couple of coolers, that it would need for that. That would be the only revenue thing we could see starting right away. If you are going to start serving food, you need to have a place for people to sit down to enjoy that and talk after a round of golf. So we would not see; I don't see anything we could necessarily this year. I don't think raising fees is going to be the thing to do this year. It is not going to be material to the bottom line by changing the fee structure this year. Unless somebody else has something they would like to say.

**Kim Edwards:** This is a process; it is not something that is done overnight. I think Terry has done some things with rounds of play and it was just in the paper today; \$15.00 dollars on Thursdays. Those types of things are being done currently and I think there is a lot of making some adjustments to those. It is my understanding.

**Lisa Armstrong:** Play is up this year, through June.

**John Augustine:** I play out there on Wednesday nights in the Courthouse league and I don't know how many times we got rained out. That is several hundred rounds of Golf.

**Robert L. Valentine W1:** We got rained out too. That is 12 teams, 24 teams, 96 golfers, 96 rounds x 6 is 600 rounds.

**John Augustine:** We are going to have some of that.

**Robert L. Valentine W1:** But we are still ahead of last year.

**Ruth Detrow:** Did you consider any other source of.; it sounds like a big chunk of income you are going to need to redo the clubhouse and that sort of thing; something besides sale of that land. Land isn't selling really well right now; there just is no doubt about that. I mean if we should fail to sell the land, how do we pay our bills this year? How do we keep people employed in the city? Because that is what it is doing. I want that golf course to stay. I like to play there. It is important for the whole image of our community but we are in a real mess financially now. That is the thing that is really bothering me. I know we can't just say, let's just shut it down for a couple of years. I have been told very emphatically by people who know a lot more than I do that you just don't do that. If you shut down a golf course for a year or two, it is just like starting over. It destroys it. I know that but it seems as though we need some other source of income and I don't know what it is.

**John Augustine:** We can only guess that how much play would increase if these other changes were made. We try to be fairly conservative and in our estimation, we saw, I am going to say around half of the deficit disappear in 4-5 years. But that is not doing anything today. And that is with a very conservative uptake each year in play and fees and things of that kind. We don't know what the response will be. There are a lot of people in this town that play golf and they play golf here and they play golf in surrounding courses. I think just the fact that the news about this is going to come out may change the revenue stream just like people make choices to where they are going to go. I think the other thing is the fuel situation. We may see people that may decide to stay closer to home and not drive so far off to play a round when they make a choice. These are all small things. To say that there is going to be an overnight transformation; we are not in that economical bracket. We can't stand here and say it is going to be great next week. I just don't think that can be done. I think perpetuating the course is operation; is critical for you because of the investment and the asset that you have. I think that there is a large asset there. Better times, we will be glad that you had it. Whether you choose to operate it yourself or not. If someone else operates it down the road, there is still an asset there that is owned by the city and to perpetuate it means maintenance, it means investment; it means those kinds of things. If you walked away from and I am going to say more than a million dollars because I think it probably would easily garnish that, it would not be a good thing to do. To protect that investment would be important. So I understand the side that you are saying and I can't diminish that. I understand that. I think the efforts have to be toward getting this thing down to where it is at least cost service to the community. We have the number of recreational venues in this town that offer service to softball, soccer. It's part of the community.

**Robert M. Valentine W2:** Mike Huber, remember the property that just sold up on Baney? What was the total acreage on that? That wasn't for sale long.

**Mike Huber:** That went for auction.

**Robert M. Valentine W2:** Yes and if the price for the whole exceeded the price.

**Mike Huber:** There was 67 acres.

**Robert M. Valentine W2:** All right. So what did the whole go for?

**Mike Huber:** \$338,000.00 dollars.

**Robert M. Valentine W2:** Just to be used as farmland?

**Mike Huber:** For the time being.

**Mayor Stewart:** If you don't mind, I would like to ask the committee; did you look at the pro shop sales and are we on target in the retail sales that are compared to other courses?

**John Augustine:** We didn't spend a lot of time on that because I think that; Terry, can you respond?

**Terry Valentine:** Sure. As far as our sales have gone, which is surprisingly, we are doing fine. The percentages are there. They haven't been in years past, which has been good. That is through June. Compared to what other golf courses do; they don't release those. I have no idea.

**Mayor Stewart:** Are there any publications that were put together; some general numbers like that?

**Terry Valentine:** I could probably get some stuff from the National Golf Foundation or the PGA.

**John Augustine:** We looked at more of the incremental income side; not to say the pro shop sales wouldn't add to that, but that would not be a variable that would change the necessary revenue of the course from what it is now. We were looking at incremental additions in our focus, mainly. Things that we thought would be maybe left on the table that could be added in. Pro shop sales might go up slightly if more people were through there, but year over year the competition in that field is really ferocious. It absolutely is ferocious.

**Mayor Stewart:** I would like to ask one other question if I may. The staffing at the golf course compared to other golf courses with the similar play, probably if you are looking at incremental play you probably didn't look at the labor structure.

**John Augustine:** Again, that is tough information to get. We know that some of the other courses around give free play to people; retired folks that come out and mow greens, mow fairways, do that kind of work and at first we weren't sure that that could be done here but we did determine later that that could be done at the course. So that is another possible source of some revenue, if I am correct on that, right Tim? We were thinking that that would not be eligible or not be a possibility here but it is a possibility. So there could be some trade off that way. I think what is done, I know at different courses, they get free play for the time they spend mowing, maintaining, that kind of thing.

**Mayor Stewart:** Appreciate that John, thank you.

**Paul Wertz:** Terry, the Thursday special \$15.00; I have been out there several times, that place is busy. And I have gone out on Mondays, no one is there. Is there any thought or consideration opening it up to a couple of other days a week, during the day?

**Terry Valentine:** Well, we just had our Junior Golf program end. So Mondays are now open. So certainly that is a consideration. Tuesday mornings are senior men, Wednesday we have our Ladies day and that is why we did Thursdays. Now Mondays are open, Fridays are open.

**Paul Wertz:** Your maintenance and upkeep is going to be the same, no matter if anybody is there playing at all. If you have somebody playing, at least there is some money coming in.

**Terry Valentine:** Sure, I agree.

**Citizen from Audience:** Question. How far did you go back when starting to find out that this golf course paid itself off since the first 9 holes were there and then the additional second 9. You have to take in the cost factor buying land that you don't have to buy anymore, you already have it, so it is already added 50-60 some acres which is an asset for the future as far as I am concerned. Right now, selling the land off is probably not a smart idea. I would like to be positive and move forward in the future, I am sure we will have some tough times, but figure out the amount of play that you are paying vs 9 holes vs 18 holes. Golfers are funny, they talk about the money all the time, but yet they want to go play a different course. Since the day is pretty busy with the discount, I would like to see you finally do something.

**John Augustine:** Mayor, we are all in favor of scenarios of pricing that would give us more advantage to bring people back to the course because the rounds were there, we know that people play upwards of 40,000 rounds a year when the course was at its income peak. You can put anything on it, the economy, the change of lifestyle, the change in whatever caused people to move away from that many rounds. I don't with the response that you get with the \$15.00 dollar rounds and people show up like crazy, there are still golfers around that are ready to play and for a value, they will show up just like what was said. But when there is no money in it after you pay \$15.00 dollars, if none of it sticks; it is kind of a test to see if you can draw golfers in and you can. That is what I think he has proven more than anything else is that price sensitive, yes they are. Will they come to the course? Yes. Is the quality there? Yes. Will it draw people at a price? Yes. What price?

**Citizen from Audience:** Well, we are also talking about softball games; we are also talking about swimming pools. Now how many citizens use each one of these facilities. What is our cost of every other entity that is out there? We keep adding entities, which is wonderful, its great. But why don't we have a cost factor here? Why don't we charge 50 cents for every body that comes to a ball game? I know it is going to be a cost factor and you will have to have somebody sitting there. You can't close the gates. There are a lot of different ways to go about this. I think we are forgetting and putting the golf course in a section all by themselves and the other entities within the city are not playing for free, but they are playing.

**John Augustine:** We have discussed that and we discussed the possibility of doing some integrating with other sports entities that are available. I guess the golf has always been looked at a little differently. It is a full cost sport. Most of the other sports involve kids and this involves kids but is largely an adult sport. I haven't had anybody call me to go play football for a long time. And now if they asked me, I decline. But to play golf, yes. It is all valid, there is no question. There is a lot of scenarios that could be viewed and reviewed that is why we looked at that as an incremental possibility to help this particular enterprise to sustain itself. We really think long-term that it needs to do that. Somehow. There is value there. There is asset value and there is intrinsic value to the community, no question.

**Citizen from Audience:** Have you also checked to see what happens if you decided to sell this course? Are you going to have to pay the government back?

**John Augustine:** We did look at that. That adds complications to that very aspect right there. Nobody proposed that that be done. We looked at ways to try and build the revenue so it can be perpetuated.

**Citizen from Audience:** This other 60 some acres that you purchased, was any of that money any kind of government money? Was that actually a profit from the golf course?

Yes. They don't have anything to do with that money.

**John Augustine:** That is a fact that we know. The profits from that course only were used to purchase that land.

**Citizen from Audience:** We were \$30,000 dollars in debt in 1945. And now how much are we into the general fund every year now?

**Mayor Stewart:** You want me to answer that? The budget this year for the Golf Course subsidy is \$141,750 dollars.

**Citizen from audience:** Okay, now has that gone up every year?

**Mayor Stewart:** We have diminished it this year. It has been higher and the golf course had to reduce what they were doing this year to live with that area. Now I am being told by Tim, that they are hoping to have some carryover out of that \$141,000 to get them kicked off for the beginning of next year, is that correct Tim?

**Tim Clingan:** That is correct.

**Mayor Stewart:** So will \$141,000 be spent this year? Their approach to what they are doing this year and the reductions that have implemented this year are not to spend \$141,750. That is in their line item as a golf course subsidy. It has been significantly higher than that in years past and it has been in many years past, there has been no subsidy. I don't know, the committee studied this Jess. I don't know when that transition actually took place. I do know that back in the '80's, early '80's the golf course occasionally would come to us as Council and we would loan them some money to kick the year off and before the season was over, it was all paid back.

**Citizen from Audience:** At the end of the year, where you had money; did that come back to the General Fund? Or did you allow that to stay in the Park system? At the Election Board, our money disappears at the end of the year. If we have any money left over, we send it back to the County Commissioners.

**Mayor Stewart:** Which funded your fund to start with. So you're funded by the General Fund, so moneys that came back went back to the fund that funded you.

**Tim Clingan:** What the park does now is a certain percentage comes from the Income Tax and it goes to the streets and the rest goes to General Fund. We keep that balance. Anything we have carryover, it stays. It becomes a forgiving balance for next year and we can include that in the appropriations that is also true with the golf course. Also true of the swimming pool. So that is technically how it works.

**Bill Strine:** The only thing I thought may be a little misleading is the Park gets the Income Tax money, not the golf course.

**Tim Clingan:** Right, just the park gets the allocation. That is a separate account.

**Stephen Stuart:** Glen, the \$141,000 plus subsidy this year, is that coming from the general fund or is that coming from the Park and Recreation?

**Mayor Stewart:** That went from the general fund to the Park and Recreation. That was in addition to some swimming pool money.

**Tim Clingan:** If I could just say, also the Parks percentages went down enough to cover the \$141,750.00.

**Mayor Stewart:** The Park's percentage of Income Tax. Which Income Tax is \$7.5 million projected for this year to run the General Funded Departments of the City. So it did go down to Parks and Recreation there is no question about it. It went down to the Street Department no question about it. But we have not laid off any Firemen or Policemen. I am pretty stone-faced about that because that is a fact. Now we haven't replaced some Policemen and Firemen that have left but we have not laid any off.

**Citizen from Audience:** I don't want you to think I am critical.

**Citizen from Audience:** I was at the golf course since its inception; I started working there in 1971 so I have some knowledge of some history from that period of time. When it was a 9-hole course, it was not profitable. I remember George at the time had to convince Council that going from 9 to an 18 hole would turn a non-profitable course into a profitable course. And it did. We did run profits there. What happened is, there is a demand for golf and we started to run deficits in rounds played, what happened is, particularly over in the Mansfield market, there was a change in ownership on three courses over there and he plowed millions of dollars into those courses to improve the quality of those courses and then there was also the new course that is over, a high end golf course, so that drew some of the available rounds of golf back over to Mansfield that we were getting at Brookside Golf Course. Now one of the nice things about the downturn in the economy, is it puts stress on a lot of pay to play golf courses and quite frankly some of them are having the same kinds of discussion about whether or not they can stay in business and there are golf courses over in Mansfield that are; those that had originally taken play away from us are now at the point where they may go out of business.

**John Augustine:** I don't know, do you know Terry, I think one of them has been sold and the other one is up, Coolridge went out of business, Woolridge is certainly draining and Oaktree was sold this winter.

**Citizen from Audience:** Again, one thing that is going to happen with two or three golf courses over in the Mansfield market; if they disappear and turn into houses, the demand for golf will still be there with nobody looking around for someplace to play and we may get those rounds of golf back from Mansfield market that we had lost. So there is a possibility if we swallow hard, we may find ourself in a position to reap the benefits of that market.

**John Augustine:** Terry acquainted us with that scenario that if a fair amount of play historically had come from Mansfield and that had drained away over time. Now with changes in golf ownership and courses not being able to make it. We could see it come back to here.

**Citizen from Audience:** And to address your point Glen. The National Golf Foundation, they will come in and analyze the books on the Golf Course and determine the profitability and where they are out of whack. These, are the other golf courses of the same kind in the area. It costs money for them to do that but they do it. It is one of the services. I think Brookside Golf Course would come out pretty well in that analysis. You are getting good bang for the buck.

**Citizen from Audience:** Does the golf course own their golf carts?

**Stephen Stuart:** Yes.

**Citizen From Audience:** It looks like if the senior rates were a little more competitive... Seniors drive for the most part. They are going to rent a cart, making those rates more better in the day time in the off hours. I think it would increase play quite a bit.

**Citizen from Audience:** There are a lot of seniors in the city of Ashland and I am one of them. I play out there. I play a lot of different places, but I have also been out there during the daytime. Four of us would be out there and we would say, "My, a private golf course?" How do we increase play during the day? Seniors have always looked for a bargain, whether you are in Florida or whether you are in Akron. Certainly when they charged \$15.00 you heard what happened. And I wondered right long for some time; the Junior Golf was done by noon, am I right? I often wondered why they didn't have something from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m., something before leagues start or at a much more reasonable figure. I say reasonable 20-22.00 dollars. The \$22.00 dollar one down there, I don't think that is keeping a lot of people away. A lot of people have been going there since, including myself. Other places around have much lower rates to go to if you wanted to drive there. It certainly would be nice to go close by. So if more people are out there on the golf course during the daytime, seniors don't play on the weekends unless their son comes home or something like that, they try to stay out of there pretty much, so there needs to be something to encourage those many, many seniors who are out there who are ready to play golf but they need like Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays. I know they have seniors in the morning. But I am talking about open golf now. That is open to people who aren't in the league or in this or in that. There are lots of time in the daytime I have been out there when I though, I can't believe

how free this thing is and they aren't making any money when it is like that. I remember some years ago in the Junior Achievement thing where we had a little ticket and you would go to a lot of different courses and there are several courses I do golf. I remember checking with this local golf course trying to say is there some reason why you are not on this Junior Achievement to let people know this is available and they said well, we checked it out and we can't make any money. When I talked to Mr. Woolridge when he was still living, he used to say, "I am not even going to mark this, come on back." Now why would he say, come on back if they weren't making any money on us? It only makes sense to me that somebody was and he wanted us back and a lot of places we went they did the same thing. We were feeling that during the daytime when nobody else was around. So if you give seniors something, an accessibility of time and reasonable rates for that, they will come as he found out on the Thursdays and I think at \$22.00 dollars, it certainly increased a lot more than that was a year ago or 2 years ago. I think you should take some good strong thinking on this. A lot of seniors will go if they could get access to that.

**Citizen from Audience:** I agree with everybody, it would be a tragedy to lose the golf course. Ashland doesn't need to lose anymore of anything. We lost some businesses; we certainly don't need to lose the golf course. I think the golf course serves from very small children through the charity that runs out there to the seniors that play there. I have been in business for 35 years; what I am hearing here this evening, some of it I understand, and some of it I don't because I am not in the political realm of it. I have not heard anything that has any reference to marketing the existing facility that is there. In other words, someone asked how soon can these changes take place as far as a place to dine, which I think is excellent to get a sandwich. I have always thought that. In the mornings out there, it would sure be great to go up and get a hot cup of coffee and grab a doughnut. Not some thing that is packaged up because it is convenient. I think there are some little things that looking at the internal marketing being I am business oriented, I look at it totally maybe differently. I think as far as the course itself goes, I think we are very fortunate with economic times that we have, and I think we are fortunate the course is in good shape as it is. Could be in better shape? Yes. What course can't? What I am talking about in truly marketing, I think I am making reference to who contacts all the outings in the area that are not having their outing at Brookside on the possibility of bringing them to Brookside or are we letting it just fate take its course? If anyone has been in business you automatically know that if you let faith take its course, it may not be the result that you look for. There are a lot of outings that I think if they were solicited and the way to promote them, that is a big pop. With some small adjustments, some outings could be brought there. The one outing that I know of for sure is Rolling Acres. Personally, I have nothing against Rolling Acres, but I think it is a tragedy that an outing went from here, as I understand it and went to Rolling Acres. Just an incidental thing; but again, it is revenue. Every bit of revenue counts. And somebody asked, how soon could we start to get revenue in? In this age that we are in; I can't imagine personally that when golfers sign up, whether it be fore their league play, open play or outing play, that we don't have their email addresses. I get emails from around all kinds of areas. E-mails can be used to promote items in the pro shop. Emails could be used to promote groups that are playing there; in other words, if you look back in my day when I had an outing and you had some things you might be able to do to promote my outing which would be contacting or just blasting to all these people that there is going to be an outing. I think internal marketing could be a slot that is being missed. The staff is already there. There is plenty of staff there to do some of these things already. I am concerned

about Brookside; I spent a lot of years there playing it. And there is Junior Golf. I love to see the kids, the comradery that goes on there. I don't know if Brookside Golf Course has a mission statement. And the mission statement in my eyes meaning, so they can train all personnel there, golfers first. That would set up the training of people, whether they be people behind the counter serving them coffee and it is going to become more prevalent when you start serving food and as you start serving alcohol it will even make more golfer friendly. So those are things I think can't be missed internally. I think some things can be put out there when there is going to be a golf outing. Not everybody reads the paper. Not everyone reads tell and sell. And we all know that media sales are going down. So it is not going to be the answer, but the real estate people have a neat little idea of putting a sign and putting some literature in it, why could we not do the same thing to help promote golf outings. Some type of a realtor type sign at number #1 or number #18 hole, outing and such and such a group is going to be there. And the application is in there. I see the folders out there. They are on the back table, which some people never set at. Some of them are on the counter where people may not go up to. It is going to be something; even if you do all of these other things, I don't know any business that doesn't need marketed and promoted. I have a real concern that if we do the right thing as far as marketing the organization after all these things are done that these will help. I think, what a shame, that there is not any more play here; I pull into the parking lot and it bothers me being a business person; I think golly, there should be more play here today; it is such a beautiful place. It needs to be more Golfer oriented. I think that is a key issue. How to bring people back.

Questions or comments?

**Citizen from Audience:** I don't know if it would work or not but I would like to see maybe seasonal passes to the course. Even from around \$400.00 dollars. To break even you would have to play 18, 18 hole rounds to recoup money. And if you had, just say 30 people, that is \$12,000.00 dollars that could be fertilizer money or equipment repair money. Will it work, or won't work, that I don't know. I know a lot of courses have a seasonal fee, called a seasonal pass and they have all rights to rounds. The other thing I would maybe like to see is early morning or even Saturday and Sunday; I know they have a 1:00 rate and usually the play picks up during the day on the weekends but maybe like 6:30 am to 8:00 am for a working guy who wants to play early morning and still enjoy the Saturdays with family. I live on the 14<sup>th</sup> hole Golf Course. For 12 years I would see everything that goes on past my house so, those are a couple of things I have always had in my mind that I wondered, could they be looked at? Could it work?

**John Augustine:** All the ideas that you brought up; we have tossed these ideas around in our committee. To really develop income scenarios off of these ideas would take more time than we have to really develop but there are opportunities out there. I think there are and I forgot what Tennis player it was; but he made a million dollars on a camera sale saying, "Image is everything". And in golf, image is everything. It makes a great deal of difference. The quality of the course, the quality of the clubhouse; the quality of play; how people are treated at the course. Word of mouth sells Golf rounds. And people talk to each other about where they had good service and where they had a good round of golf. It is not that they don't get it now; but there are things that could be done to enhance play; I think all these folks have great ideas. We have revenue potential there. The beer idea is just a supplement to these other ideas. That is a side that

would come. It is not necessarily going to keep anybody away but it is going to make the experience better for some folks that show up there. I don't know that I have anything else to add to this. Thank you for your time.

Questions or discussion?

**John Chorpening:** I was wondering if the golf carts actually pay for themselves?

**Paul Wertz:** They do. Yes, they do. That is a big moneymaker.

**Terry Valentine:** Green fees and golf carts make up the bulk of the money.

**John Chorpening:** When I would play golf, I used to walk all the time. I remember everyone riding in golf carts and there is a certain rhythm. When you add golf carts to that rhythm, it sort of messes everything up. Walkers are pushed by the golf carts so you need another course just to walk on.

**Terry Valentine :** That is quite possible. Probably 75-80% of the people right now, that is just a figure; use golf cart rentals.

**Citizen from Audience:** It has been touched on here about the seniors. Well who does all of this traveling five days out of the week? It is seniors. Because nobody has a job. The seniors are the ones that should be concentrated on. That is where the money is. They got it.

**Citizen from Audience (Steve Paramore):** I have played a few rounds at Brookside. I have worked in the pro shop. Mayor Stewart, addressing the question you had for Terry about the retail sales in there. To be honest with you, in my time, from age 14 to 22,23, 24, 25, somewhere in there, I spent my time in the pro shop. I would say the majority of your retail sales are going to be about two feet away from the counter because most of the people out there purchase golf balls. Your other big sales in the pro shop are going to be concessions. There is too much competition with Dicks, Wal Mart, everything else. You are not going to sell whole sets of clubs out at the golf course, so in my time out there, I have seen shirts in the clubhouse go from Ashford down to brands that I don't even recognize, so we are not selling really expensive stuff in there. So I think they do a wonderful job in they're trying to be competitive to the market. Also I think at one point when I was working we had 82-90 seniors on a Tuesday morning; that is their league morning. I think you could have that every morning in the summer during the week if you charged the correct price. I know people can go to; the course we are forgetting about is Mohican Hills. We are talking about the Mansfield market. We have a course, I don't know if it is in our county or in Wayne County; but you can go down there for the, I have heard words like Ambiance and experience. To me, it is a much better experience for the same price at Mohican Hills currently. If you drop the price, which, I guess you guys make that decision, if you drop the price, you make the experience worth the money out at Brookside. I guess I did go to the doom and gloom a little bit there about closing the Golf Course. I think I spent more time at the golf course from age 9 to 21 than I did anywhere else in the world. And to know that there is maybe three or four or five kids out there that might not have that opportunity. And I know you people

don't want that to happen. But coming from a person that coaches the golf team, even though there is another golf course in town, my golf program would go to shambles. We would lose every bit of tradition that it is currently. So I think when, and I am not sure what your name is, but I have seen you on Tuesday mornings a lot, if we don't make the \$15.00 dollars on Thursdays, if you did that three times a week and increase volume; I would take volume over the course of being empty at \$28.00 dollars. You have to increase your volume and right now if you go to Mohican Hills, their volume is solid everyday. I don't play there but I can guarantee you it is tough to get a tee time on Saturdays and Sundays. At Brookside Golf Course right now, I don't think it is that tough to get a tee time. In 1989, you couldn't get on that course until 6:00 p.m. So, it wouldn't take a whole lot to get it back to its heyday if you just thought more in volume than in price. I thought I heard a little bit ago somebody saying increasing the price for the rest of the remaining part of the season, I think that would be the worst thing you could ever do. Especially all the amount of league they would miss this year. It would just be unproductive I think. And I know that there, probably this facility, the golf course is probably the most flexible facility I have ever seen in my life. They have four high school golf teams that are able to play out there. I suppose now you are probably going to want to increase the price for us, but some of the people I know would not be in the endeavors that they are in now if Brookside wasn't what it was. I am in full agreement although it is not my age bracket but I would say we need to cater to the senior golfers because it is no mystery why there are 82 golfers there on Tuesday mornings. And let me tell you what, they will play extra nines, they will purchase a beer when they are done, they will buy a sandwich. That was kind of astonishing to me to hear about renovations to the clubhouse; I thought when they painted it looked good. I miss the brown.

**Paul Wertz:** Thank you Steve.

**Citizen from Audience:** Being treasurer of the senior league for a number of years. At one time we had 100 seniors in that league and now we are down to around 62-63 every Tuesday. I keep records on how much that generated with what we are doing now. Our senior league is anywhere from 9-10,000.00 dollars in fees but that doesn't include the carts. I think our league is basically the biggest league going out there. So that is how much money our senior league on Tuesday generates.

**Mayor Stewart:** Valuable. I would like to personally thank the five members of the citizens committee that facilitated and worked through this. I appreciate Steve Stuart and Bob L. Valentine Sr. for they are the designated golf committee from my appointment and I appreciate you two having the foresight to go the next step to bring in a nice cross section of the community to look into this. This was not an easy task. I think I have a page full of notes. I have heard a lot of these statements made individually over a period of time. But I kind of have a collective group of statements this evening and you know, it has been very positive from my viewpoint. The challenge is to make sure in some manner that we can preserve this asset. I don't have the answer to that yet. I am absolutely not saying that the golf course is going to close. I don't want to be misquoted that way; I don't want it to be thought that way. We have a challenge to see how we can keep things going and improve it. I think it is a mutual challenge between myself, the Council and the Golf Course Management. I think we have had good input and it has been positive and I

appreciate it and I appreciate Bob and Steve and I appreciate it to the five outside group that worked on this.

**Paul Wertz:** I appreciate everybody coming to voice your opinions because it helps so we know which way we want to go and with where we have to go. Anybody else having more to say?

**Ruth Detrow:** I think it is encouraging that that many people took the time out of their day to come and tell us that they want to see the golf course remain. We are faced with the problem of where do we get \$141,000 dollars to subsidize it and is it worth it. And certainly you have gone a long way toward showing that the community thinks it is worth it. We still have to figure out how to come up with that money. I do appreciate you all.

**Robert L. Valentine W1:** You know recreation is the integral part of this community. I was very fortunate, I was out there as assistant, and I was called the assistant recreation director for about 27 years to Vaughn Higgins. You sent me a note Mike, to Vaughn Higgins when you built the first nine. And then of course I was out there when they built the second nine too. For some strange reason I love golf. So the point being, let me express what the others have said too. I think a lot of good ideas and I think a lot of good things came out of this and I think a lot of these things have to be put into effect. I hear this idea that now we have Mondays and Fridays available, that has to be looked into. It really has to.

**Citizen from Audience:** I just wanted to say that Ashland is so fortunate to have a Junior League and you talk a lot about the seniors and I am one myself. I have been getting out there myself but I have a 12-year-old son that is in the Junior League and this is his third year. As history has said, we have had many youngsters go through the ranks and have been on the golf team and they stay in things like that. We are recognized in this area and I think our Junior Golfers are our future golfers. They go to school here so when they live here they are going to play golf to improve their game and I can't say enough about how well the hands on is for this Junior League. These kids pick up the skills that they need and carry that all the way through. They learn the right things young. I just can't say enough about the program. These kids are our future. They will play here while they are growing up. We are just lucky to have it and the volunteers that run it.

**Kim Edwards:** Just to tag on to that; that is not just for Ashland City Schools; I want to point that out, all of the community schools, all of the county schools. My son was Hillsdale golfer. It impacts all of the school programs.

**Citizen from Audience:** Kids this year are the best-behaved kids that we have ever had.

**Tim Clingan:** Not just the golf course, but the whole Park & Recreation department, all are subsidized with City Income Tax dollars. That is why we have as good of programs that we do.

*Motion to adjourn Work Session by Paul Wertz, moved by Robert M. Valentine W2, seconded by Robert L. Valentine W1.*

*Ayes: Ruth Detrow, Paul Wertz, Steve Stuart, Robert L. Valentine W2, Robert M. Valentine W2.*

Work Session adjournment at 8:20 p.m.

Submitted by  
Valarie F. Bishoff  
Clerk of Council