

DATE: August 9, 2019

From: Golf Course Advisory Committee

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Subject: Semi- annual report on the Lago Vista Golf course operations

### **Role of the Golf Course Advisory committee**

By city ordinance No. 17-11-16-02 the Golf Course Advisory Committee (GCAC) for the city of Lago Vista was re-established November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The Duties of the committee among others states that the committee shall make a semi-annual report to the City council on the status of the golf courses in December and June and shall include in the report a summary of its activities for the past six months and proposed program for the next six months.

### **Conditions of the course**

The condition of the Lago Vista Golf Course (LVGC) at the writing of this report, have improved from poor in the spring and early summer of this year to fair. Late spring and early summer saw conditions on the greens deteriorate to become almost unplayable. Some of the greens worse than others. Other courses in the area were in much better condition and pulling play away from Lago Vista.

### **GCAC recommendations**

One of the most important decisions employed by LVGC management, this year, was calling in the United States Golf Association for a course evaluation. The evaluation report is incorporated herein as a reference and guide by which many of the recommendations of the Golf Course Advisory Committee (GCAC) are made. The report summarizes the most critical issues facing the city going forward with the management and marketing of the LVGC.

I. In accordance with the findings of the USGA report the GCAC's number one recommendation is the replacement and reconstruction of all 18 of the LVGC greens as soon as possible. The cause of the deterioration has long been coming

and without correction will continue to worsen making LVGC an unmarketable golfing experience.

In order to maintain operations of and cash flow for the LVGC the construction of new greens could be staged such the interruption of play is minimized and construction costs are spread over 18+ months. There are at least three approaches that can be considered optimal. All utilize temporary greens.

1. Close the entire 18 holes and utilize temporary greens thru out the course. This approach will reduce the down time of play and improve the speed of construction which in turn should reduce the overall total cost.
2. Close 9 holes for 6-9 months allowing for replacement of those 9 greens and their reopening prior to closing and replacing the remaining 9 holes. This allows for less disruption of play than the no 1 option, but will take a good 18 months to complete. Staging will normally add additional cost due to efficiencies in construction.
3. Close 6 holes at a time allowing for 6 months construction of the new greens staged over an 18 – 24 month period. This method will allow for spreading the costs over a longer period of time but may increase the costs due to inefficiencies in construction.

## II. Course wide recommendations:

1. Level all tee boxes
2. Better define fairways with varying the height of grass using a fairway cut, first cut (2-3") and then the rough.
3. Cut sand trap edges and remove the grass remaining in the traps
4. Fix pot holes alongside cart paths
5. Expand the number of rakes available in all traps to 2 of good condition and 3 rakes in the larger traps
6. Place "Cart Path Only" signs on all par threes on the cart paths below the Silver/Red Tees.

7. Move tee box markers more often to avoid major deterioration of just one area of the tee box
8. Move cups on the greens at least 3 times a week to avoid deterioration of the green in one place. The cups should be moved at least 3 yards from each previous location if possible.
9. It is highly recommended the Golf Course Manager and the Superindent "drive" the entire course, together, weekly and make a written list of needed repairs, concerns and maintenance recommendations. This could be used as work direction for the next week and a long term list for larger items.

### III. Specific Hole recommendations:

1. Attention should be paid to grading the front fairway between the cart path and the 150 yard marker. This area is always a problem when a large rainfall event occurs.
2. Repair and repaint the pump house. An engineer should be consulted about the pond on the left side of #2. The retention elevation of the pond is such that it continually leaches water under the dam creating wet conditions across the fairway. This is worse in wet weather.
3. Trim the trees on the approach to the #3 green. They have grown to substantially impede the approach to this green and interfere with play especially from the back tees.
4. Address the drainage around the #5 green. Currently water flow is impeded in front of the green causing water to stand in front and to the right of the green.
5. Hole #7 needs a complete reconfiguration of the cart path approaching and leaving the tee box. This is a health and safety issue. The cart path is slanted such that a cart can easily turn over and injure someone. This is a liability for the city. Trim the trees to the left of the tee box back 5-8'. The approach to the fairway is beginning to become impeded, especially from the back tees.
6. Hole #8 needs attention paid to the slope of the cart path leading down to the tee boxes. The angle is extremely steep and could result in accident or injuries.

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7. Hole # 9 needs attention to the drainage in front of the green. Water holds in front of the green during and after rain events, which impedes play and traffic damages the fairway.
  8. Hole # 14 consider re-opening the gold tee box above the rest rooms. Paint and repair the pump house.
  9. The cart path approaching the white tees on #15 presents a safety issue. The slope of the path, even in dry weather, creates a hazard. The city could be liable for accidents or injuries at this location.
  10. Hole #18 consider trimming the trees on the right and left side of the fairway as they are beginning to impede the approach to this green.

#### IV. Practice Facilities:

Consideration should be given to re-designing and enlarging the driving range, practice putting green and chipping range. There is ample land area to move the practice putting green behind the existing tennis courts and even providing a chipping practice area. Safety is not an issue given the improvements in screening that could be constructed.

**Golf is a recreational experience that draws players based upon the price of a round of golf, distance to the course, and playing conditions. Playing conditions often will outweigh some of the distance traveled and pricing if they are good enough to challenge a player and create a pleasurable golf experience.** In a recent article published by the National Golf Foundation titled “A Texas Muni Back from the Brink”, details how the city of Fort Worth made some hard decisions about rebuilding the historic Rockwood Park golf course. While some “muni” courses are of a relatively high-profile example of municipal renovation work, Rockwood Park fit a different mold: lesser-known “muni” investing significant money to replace aging infrastructure and reverse declines in rounds-played and revenue. In 2015, the last full year of play, Rockwood’s condition resulted in only 25,000 rounds of play and less than \$700,000 in total revenue. According to the article, the course reopened in 2017 after a \$5.1 renovation.

**Rounds were up by 56% to 40,000. Rounds in FY2018 and gross revenues increased by 142% to about \$1.7 million and turned a net profit of \$463,000.**

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## **Marketing**

I. In 2018 the city sold the Highland Lakes course to private investment and an outside operator. While this afforded the city with a return of some of the monies invested in the course over the years it added another dimension to operating the Lago Vista course. "Direct local competition." Although marketed as a private country club (Lake Travis Country Club), public play is allowed and encouraged at the same fee as LVGC. It also competes with the city for the same membership now. Thru June membership was down by almost \$20,000 for the year. This makes it that much more important than ever to employ a comprehensive strategic marketing program.

The GCAC encourages the city and LVGC staff to develop a much more comprehensive and detailed marketing plan that is designed to meet competition head on and increase play from outside the community. The following are some suggestions as how this might be done.

1. Develop an overall objective for the city golf operations and develop a multi-tiered plan that will achieve the objective.
2. Develop a communications program that will provide a positive element to any and all communications to the public via any and all media opportunities.
3. Given the recommendations for rebuilding the greens an opportunity to rebrand the course as the "new" LVGC and attract more outside play exists. Create the perception of a greater value at a championship course in a beautiful hill country setting.
4. Develop a comprehensive signage program that ties all of the signage together. **Everything** should carry the logo. This program should include new directional signage in and outside the community, informational/marketing signage in other communities and locations on 1431.

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5. Through internal training develop a sense of pride in the golf operations, that LVGC is better than all of the other courses within a 40 mile radius.
  6. DEVELOP AN INEXPENSIVE BROCHURE for management to use in developing outside marketing.

## Financial

- I. By isolating the LVGC revenues and expenses associated with the last three years, through the end of June, and comparing them to actuals through June 2019, there appears to be a positive trend in revenue. By eliminating costs associated with the grill all income from the lease is now positive. In years past the grill contributed to the loss of the overall golf operation. Fortunately this lease revenue has offset the loss from memberships this year.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	
GC Revenues	\$407,483	\$356,996	\$397,736	\$417,109	
Grill Revenues	105,283	176,068	105,978	28,10	
Expenses	741,382	823,179	883,518	792,713	I
Profit (Loss)	(228,661)	(299,115)	(379,804)	(347,502)	

## Summary

In order to continue a positive trend in golf course operations it is going to be necessary for the city to commit the capital necessary to rebuild the greens over the next 2-3 years. The problems that caused the loss of the greens this year will not go away. It is the result of a lack of technology when the greens were built some 50 years ago. As seen with many courses that are 20 plus years old just a standard maintenance program will not keep up with the wear of play and weather.

The GCAC recommends the use of the USGA on an every two year program to come in and review the course conditions and make recommendations for continuing maintenance and redesign.

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Golf is a recreation for all ages and an asset to the city. The asset must be maintained to reap the benefits associated with having a golf course in a community.

Respectively Submitted on behalf of the members of the City of Lago Vista Golf Course Advisory Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Z. O. "Chip" Hamilton

GACA Chair