

# Lago Vista Golf Course Advisory Committee

FY2022 Annual Report





## **GCAC COMMITTEE**

- Advise City Council concerning the policies of the city's municipal golf courses
- Revitalized in 2022 with full membership and involvement.

## COURSE CONDITIONS

- Course conditions are at an all time low
- Resulting from
  - Worn out irrigation system
  - Irrigation water quality
  - Inadequate maintenance funding
  - Equipment condition
  - Past management
  - Greens construction
  - Extreme weather



Hole #9



## **GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT**

- City management recognition of Golf Course value to the community.
- Very encouraged with the hiring of a Professional Golf Course Superintendent.



## GOLF COURSE OPERATIONS

- Significant increase in revenue (rounds played) seen in late FY2020 & FY2021 are not expected to continue
  - Course conditions and more local golf options now available.
- New carts a positive for safety, player management and potential revenue increase
- Course maintenance equipment is significantly deficient
  - Past lack of maintenance has left much inoperable
  - Long lease terms resulted in worn out equipment still on the books





## **GOLF COURSE STAFF PAY**

- Pay rates are below market and an impediment to hiring and retaining quality employees.
- Work conditions for much of the staff are under harsh conditions.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Replace the Irrigation System ASAP
- 2) Fix water algae problem at the source
- 3) Solve the Wage Issue
- 4) Support the Golf Course
  - Improvements proposed by course management, with budget allocations
    - Includes equipment needs





## **COUNCIL GUIDANCE**

- Any Specific Items the Council would like the GCAC to address during the next year?



# **GCAC 2022 Annual Report**

To: Lago Vista City Council

FM: Lago Vista Golf Course Advisory Committee

## **Role of Golf Course Advisory Committee**

Per Municipal Code ARTICLE 9.2000 (Golf Course Advisory Committee), Sec 9.2007 (Duties)

1. The committee shall act in an advisory capacity only and shall have no power to bind the city by contract or otherwise; authorize any expenditures out of the city's budget; hire, appoint or terminate staff; interfere with administrative or personnel affairs; nor create any other obligation on the part of the city.
2. It shall be the function of the committee to advise the city council concerning the policies of the city's municipal golf courses.
3. The committee shall make an annual report to the city council on the status of the golf courses in June and shall include in the report a summary of its activities for the past year and proposed program for the next year.

(Ordinance 18-02-15-02 adopted 2/15/18)

The Golf Course Advisory Committee (GCAC) has been revived in 2022, after a period of inactivity. Two new members were assigned in Nov 2021, however the lack of quorums continued to be an issue. We are encouraged by Council's action to replace two additional members in April 2022. We believe we now have willing and enthusiastic members who are committed to their roles in the GCAC.

## **Conditions of the Course**

The overall condition of the Lago Vista Golf Course (LVGC) has been degrading over the past several years and more significantly in the past two years. To state it bluntly, the course conditions from tee to green are abysmal and at its worst condition ever and the worst in the region. It is this Committee's position that until the Irrigation System is

completely replaced/upgraded, course conditions will never improve to a level that is necessary to bring the course back to a playable level and increase revenue to the desired outcome. Incremental improvements will be a band-aid at best. We are thankful that there was an effort undertaken in 2020 to begin replacing the greens. However, due to multiple issues such as, construction, management, maintenance, water quality and adverse weather conditions, the improvement benefit has not been obtained. Without a supportive irrigation system, proper management and commitment to invest in this city asset, further greens replacement will provide no benefit. Although short term improvement in course condition is being observed, these will be short lived as the Texas heat takes its toll and the irrigation system is unable to keep up. The Golf Course Superintendent estimates that the current system provides about 40% coverage whereas a normal irrigation system would provide 85%. It is this Committee's position that total replacement of the LVGC Irrigation System is of utmost importance.

The course maintenance staff continues to fight water (effluent) algae issues that clog sprinkler heads that then leads to multiple issues. Once clogged it affects the water flow and contributes to greens and general course erosion, plus it requires staff time and effort to unclog. This takes time away from regular maintenance items that are necessary to preventing additional course degradation.

- ❖ Please see Addendum-1 for a May 2022 snapshot hole-by-hole documentation of course conditions.
- ❖ Also please reference "Lago Vista USGA Course Consulting Service (CCS) Report dated October 25, 2021, for a professional evaluation of course conditions and recommendations. Included in this report as Addendum-4.

## **Golf Course Management**

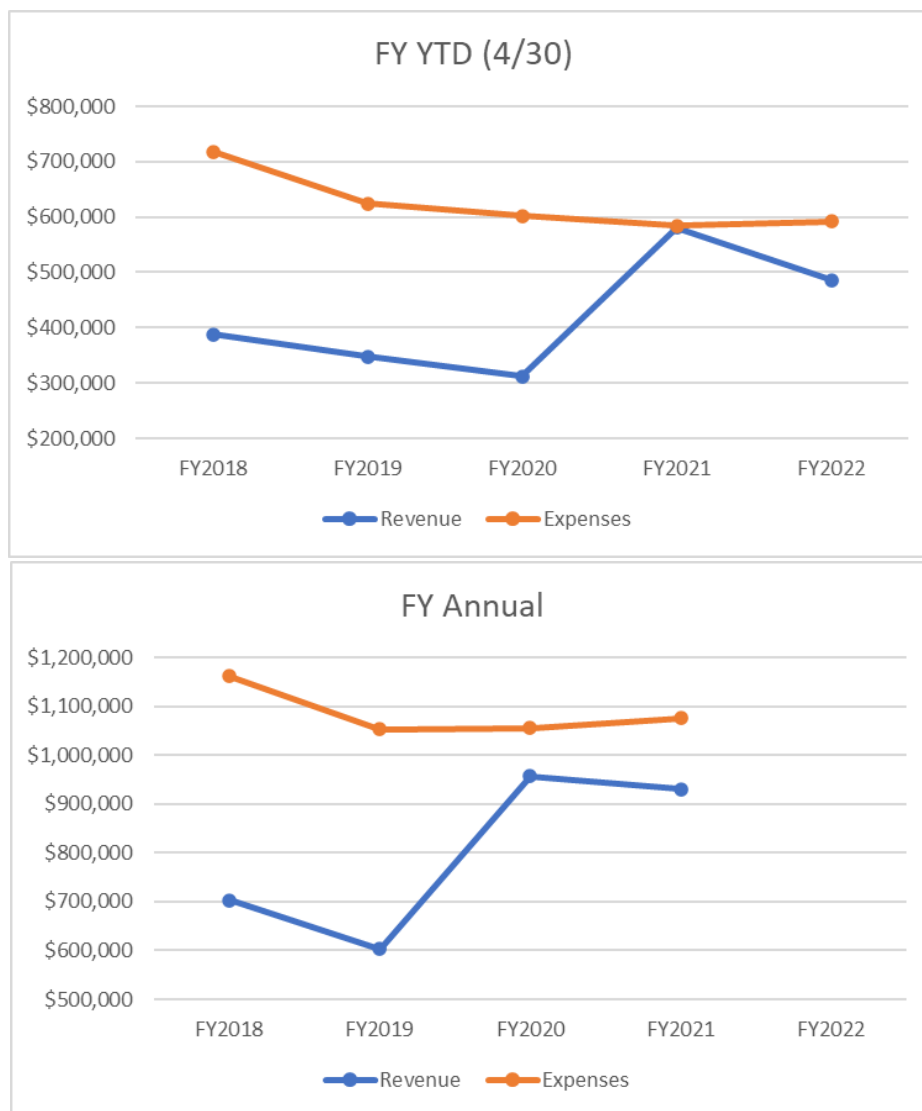
We are very encouraged by our new City Manager's perspective and vision for the golf course being an important City asset both recreationally and economically.

We are also very encouraged with the hiring of a professional Golf Course Superintendent.

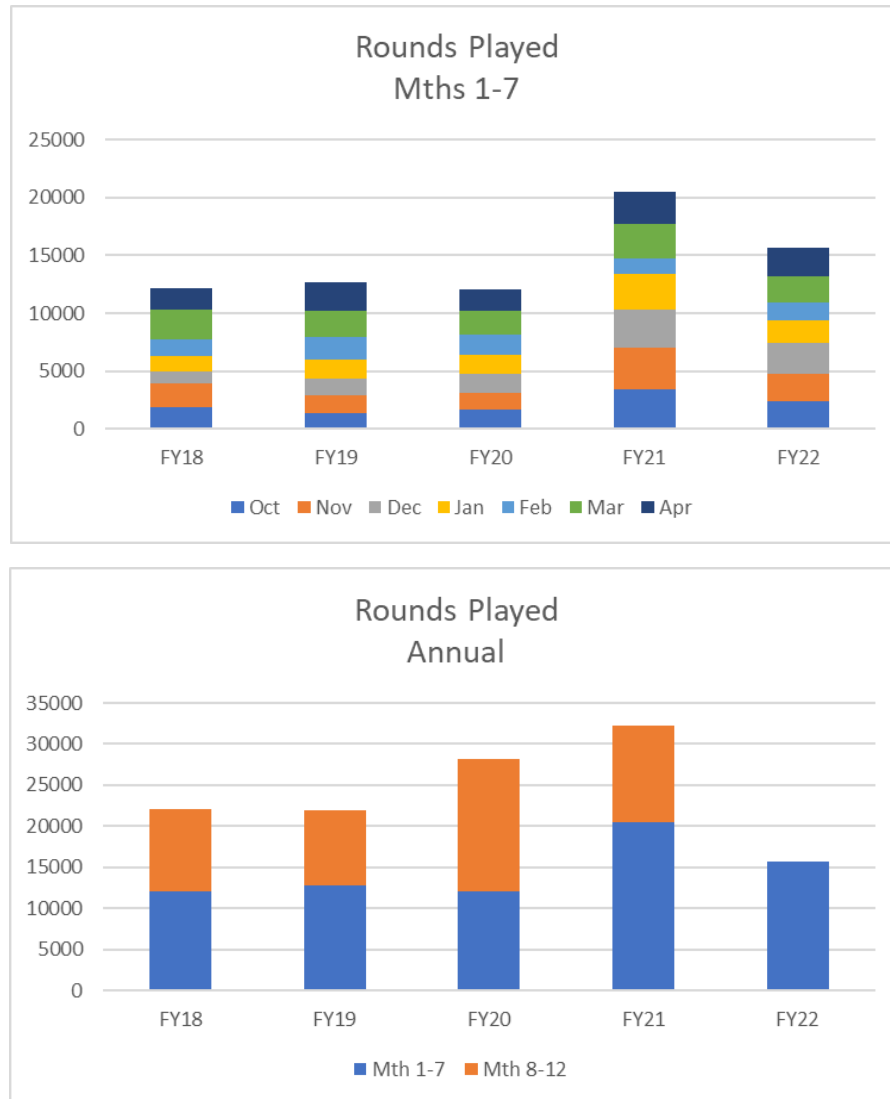
We are optimistic that these changes give the golf course a chance for survival.

## Golf Course Operations

The LVGC has seen significant improvement in rounds played and revenue during the past two years. This was primarily due to Covid related availability of golf options in the Austin Metro area, and that level is not likely to continue as the local golf options increase, especially given the decline of LVGC conditions. Revenue and play level numbers are showing a decline from the pandemic highs, but it will take a few months to see the real effect. Included below are revenue and expense data for FY18 through YTD FY22. Although it is encouraging that the gap between revenue and expenses has decreased, it is also concerning that expenses may have been decreased at the expense of course conditions.



The downward trend is also evident when the logged golf rounds are analyzed. Comparing the same period, FY YTD is down over 23% from FY21. See charts below,



Lago Vista has benefitted in the past by a significant number of winter visitors (Canadians) who rented lodging, played golf, and made purchases from other local businesses. That revenue stream started to diminish when course conditions began to degrade, and the Highland Golf Course was closed. As a consequence, they began going to other central Texas locations where they were offered better course conditions and multiple course options. In 2015 the Canadians purchased over 90 temporary golf memberships. This number reduced to just over 50 in 2016 and to 28 by 2018. These golf memberships alone contributed over \$8500 to LVGC revenue in 2018. Covid



impacted all visitors in 2021 and in 2022 there were 11. This was significant to Lago Vista and is an indicator of the economic impact the golf course could have.

The Golf Course Superintendent is addressing maintenance projects to improve course condition, but without the irrigation system replacement, these efforts will not bring the course to the level necessary to bring back and retain outside play.

We are supportive of the change to close the course on Mondays. This will allow uninterrupted maintenance on the course and permit the staff to accomplish more projects in a shorter period of time.

In conjunction with Monday closure, a list of Volunteer course maintenance activities has been provided by the Golf Course Superintendent. This will allow organizations, like the men's and women's golf associations, an opportunity to assist with course condition improvements. The list is shown in Addendum-3.

The level of play and, subsequently, revenue were being restricted by golf cart availability, primarily due to lack of maintenance. A new fleet of golf carts was recently acquired. These will improve player safety, player management, and staff can now open the Tee Sheet to enable a higher level of play and revenue.

The golf course maintenance equipment is badly in need of repairs and replacements. Lack of proper maintenance and long lease terms have resulted in substantial inoperable equipment, some of which lease payments are still being made. Lease expirations range from 1/1/2024 to 6/29/2027. About a third of the leases don't expire until June 2027, and one of those pieces of equipment (shown below) is inoperable and would cost over \$20K to repair.



In addition, there are five (5) Tee/Greens mowers of which only two (2) are currently in useable condition.



Some new equipment is in progress, but much more is needed.

The maintenance facility is ineffective and deficient in its capability to perform certain maintenance tasks safely. It also does not provide sufficient capacity to store the equipment, subjecting it to the elements and degradation at an even higher rate. In fact, for the piece of inoperable equipment shown above, unprotected storage has been a major contributor to its inoperability.

## **Golf Course Staffing**

Current staffing is well below the level authorized by the budget. Salary levels are not conducive to attracting and retaining employees. We understand the City is undertaking an overall salary study, but this may not bear fruit for several months. The golf course is in immediate need of qualified personnel and without some short-term adjustments, they will not be able to compete in the local market

## **Golf Course Marketing**

It is this committee's opinion that until golf course renovations are completed and course conditions are promisingly improving, that any marketing effort would be a waste of taxpayer money and could be detrimental to future revenue by giving players a bad experience. Once soured, it is very difficult to get players to return.

### **Summary/Recommendation**

1. It is this committee's recommendation that the Irrigation System be replaced as soon as possible. Until this improvement is made, all other improvements will be ineffective and a waste of tax-payer funds.
2. Solve the algae problem that is causing excessive and unnecessary expenditures of time and money. Filtering needs to be installed before the effluent reaches the golf course irrigation system. This is an immediate improvement that will benefit the golf course while a new irrigation system is being pursued. It will also free up maintenance staff for higher priority tasks.
3. Resolve the wage and staffing issues faced by the golf course management team. Salaries need to be competitive in the overall marketplace, and equitable across the city departments, before the course will be able to attract and retain competent employees.
4. We also are supportive of the City's effort to get restitution from the golf course construction company for the mistakes made during the replacement of greens on holes 4,9,18.
5. We fully support the Golf Course Superintendent's list of changes/improvements and encourage the Council to address funding for the management staff's course proposals and equipment needs.
  - Please see Addendum-2 for the current list of course proposals.
6. Although there are many more pressing needs, to advance the community's benefit of the golf course, we recommend the hiring of a Golf Professional. Programs such as adult group golf lessons, junior programs, tournaments, etc. will go a long way toward enabling additional play, golf revenue, and general community involvement.

The GCAC will continue to monitor course conditions, revenue and expenditures, operations that are goal based, monitor outcome timelines and look at outside play. The committee will continue listening to the golfers and other Lago Vista citizens on how best to improve and utilize the golf course, including activities other than golf.

Respectively Submitted by the members of the City of Lago Vista Golf Course Advisory Committee.

Darci DeVough

GCAC Chair



# Addendum -1

## Golf Course Status

### A Hole by Hole Snapshot

May 22, 2022

Practice area. Green: 20% bare sand. 70% dormant or dead. Putts do not run true.



Practice Tees: Worn, thin, some holes. "Grassy" area in front of tees is mostly divots or bare dirt.

**#1. Tees: OK.**

Fairway: 30% dormant or not growing. Many divots. One of better fairways until close to green which is very thin.

Green: 30% dormant or dead. Goosegrass in damaged area on green front.

The damaged areas on 16 greens were caused by months of spraying too large irrigation droplets.



**#2. Tees: OK.**

Fairway: 30% dormant. Like most of the fairways, the grass is thin and dirt is visible on 80% of fairway.

Green: One of the worst conditions. The green is eroding (present tense) across the entire front. 70% dead.



**#3.** Tees: Pock marked. Not green. 50% dead or dormant. Hard.

Green: 50% dormant or dead. Grass is clumped creating bounces. Damaged sandy right side.



**#4.** Tees: OK, but hard.

Fairway: 40% dormant.

Green: One of the worst. Badly damaged. Multiple sandy “holes” make up about 30% of the green. Very little area of good grass. Often treated by golfers as unplayable.



**#5. Tees: OK.**

Fairway: Well mowed. 20% dormant where it appears the irrigation does not reach. Some areas of mostly nutsedge. Appears to be improving.

Green: Badly damaged. Back of green is sand. Large area of sand in the middle. 60% dormant or dead. Some goosegrass coming up.



**#6. Tees. OK, except blue tees not mowed.**

Fairway: good.

Green: 40% dormant. Three "sand traps" on the edges, where sprinkler eroded the green, as on many holes.





**#7. Tees:** Hard and pocked with divots.

**Fairway:** 25% dormant. Well mowed. Seems to be improving. Irrigation does not reach the entire fairway.

**Green:** Badly damaged. On par with #4 green for worst shape. More than a dozen sandy holes make about 60% of the green unplayable.



**#8. Tees:** Blue and red hard, but OK. White tee box not used since it was put in. No water.

**Fairway:** Well mowed, except about 50 yards in front of green. 30% dormant.

**Green:** 55% dormant. About 30% may not get water. 20% in sand. Deteriorating. A new "hole" is eroding away.



**#9.** Tees: OK, but hard. Leaking irrigation.

Fairway: 40% dormant. Leaking irrigation. Significant old erosion on right side downhill.

Green: Damaged front. Nutsedge and some goosegrass coming up. 25% dormant. May be improving.



*The back nine is in much better condition than the front 9.*

**#10.** Tees: OK. White tees are hard.

Fairways: One of the best. In good shape except in front of green. The grass is thick.

Green. 50% dormant or dead. Clumped grass. Some damage in front.



**#11.** Tees: OK. Blues not mowed.

Fairway. Before ditch is in good shape. Thick grass. Rest is improving, 25% dormant. Limb trimming on two trees needed.

Green: 20% dormant or dead as this area does not appear to get any water. Damaged front.



**#12.** Tees and fairway are OK.

Green: 40% dormant.



**#13.** Tees: OK, but hard.

Fairway: 30% dormant. Some good grass.

Green: 80% dead or dormant.



**#14:** Tees and fairway are in good shape.

Green: In good shape, but may be dying.





**#15.** Tees. OK, but white is small and hard.

Fairway. Very dry. 80% dormant. Right side uphill eroded. Slope 100 yards in front of green lacks grass so balls hit left before green roll out of bounds right.

Green. 1 small sandy hole. Generally good, but could be dying or have fungus.



**#16.** Tees: OK.

Fairway: 10% dormant. Bare ground under trees.

Green. One damaged sandy hole. 10% dormant or damaged.





**#17.** Tees: OK.

Fairway: OK, except thin near green front. Some area not mowed, 8 inch tall grass.

Green: 40% dormant, but ball roll is not bad.



**#18:** Tees and fairway and good.

Green: One of the worst. Many undulations and small bumps/the green is not even. Damage on edges. 4 sandy holes. Clumped grass bounce and turn putts.



## Addendum - 2

### List of Improvements For Golf Course

- New irrigation system complete with mainlines (HDPE), Heads, and quick connects on tees and greens for hand watering
  - New pump stations (#2 & #14) and buildings (That are controlled by GCM)
- The following items are dependent on a new irrigation system to be successful. Some work may be done in parallel within the list and to Irrigation system installation,
  - Reshape all green complexes to original sizes to add more pin placements
  - Replace all greens with Tiff-Eagle Bermuda (According to USGA SPECS)
  - Build turf nursery for Greens, tees, and fairways
  - Level and enlarge tees for more teeing areas
  - Extensive top-dressing program to help with Bermuda root system and smooth fairways and tees
  - Redesign practice facility
- Add drainage to traps and replace with new sand
- Complete tree trimming with some removals (Safety item)
- Add driving range netting to protect tennis courts and loss of range balls (Safety item)

- Refurbish GCM building. Adding awnings to protect equipment investments and help with pest control.
- Repaving GCM area.
- Build bins for material such as Sand, Gravel, and Soil
- Install slats on chain-link fencing to block the view into the maintenance area

## **Improvements To Clubhouse**

- Repave parking lot and behind clubhouse (Safety item)
- Replace curbing (Safety item)
- Extensive tree trimming and some removals
- Add proper irrigation to planters and medians  
*(this item ties with irrigation system replacement)*
- Add and repair planter areas
- Resurface pool area to level (Safety item)
- Add awning to cover pool area for seating
- Remodel of Pro-shop area

## Addendum-3

### List Of Tasks For Volunteers

- Pickup broken tees and fill divots on driving range tee.
- Shag balls from ditch left side of driving range.
- Weedeat around driving range tee area.
- Clean around Proshop, rake leaves, pick up trash, weedeat and push mow lawns.
- Pickup broken tees on tee boxes and fill divots 1-18.
- Fill divots on fairways.
- Pickup sticks, branches, and trash.
- Paint OB and lateral stakes.
- Trim tee and yardage markers.

# Addendum -4

## **USGA Course Consulting Service Onsite Visit Report**