

RECREATION AND PARK GOLF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Date: July 14, 2010
To: Board of Recreation and Park Commissioners
From: Recreation and Park Golf Advisory Committee
Subject: Fate of Golf Program

Submitted by _____
Ted Winship, Chair

At its June 28, 2010 meeting the Golf Advisory Committee voted 16 – 0 to authorize me to write a communication to you indicating our concern not so much with the onerous nature of the task immediately before the Recreation and Park golf program but rather with our Members' concern about the lack of your Body's and the Department's recognition that the task immediately ahead demands something more than business as usual.

In an environment in which most municipal golf programs are lowering rack rates and offering considerable discounts in addition thereto, the Department's system is instituting large fee increases in conjunction with service curtailments --- all while moving from the most ossified and ancient of command-and-control bureaucratic structures to a modern enterprise fund structure – and doing so with personnel who have never known anything other than the old regime, i.e., have zero experience managing a business enterprise.

If not for the fact that our Advisory Body recommended as long ago as 2003 the convening of a multi-faceted task force to recommend the steps necessary to move from the current structure to an enterprise fund structure, we would likely be in a more charitable and patient mood.

We long ago recognized that command-and-control bureaucratic delivery of services in conjunction with an appropriations-based financing mechanism was a status quo that could not and would not hold up under the long-term pressures of the public sector's wildly oscillating budgeting cycles and the long-term capital reinvestment needs of golf facilities. We long ago recognized that financial transparency and fiscal sustainability were the twin pillars of all successful municipal golf programs, and we long ago recognized that modern municipal golf programs needed to recalibrate the delicate balance between revenue generation and recreational mission in slight favor of revenue generation. That is why we pushed hard for years for the convening of a multi-faceted, stakeholder-rich task force to begin making recommendations as to how to move from a past living on borrowed time to a future capable of meeting modern challenges within the context of the City's unique rhythms and institutions – a task we understood would require significant cultural and attitudinal changes.

The fact that the advice and recommendations of our Body, one often reviled for its "parochialism," went unheeded until it became apparent that the system would not have the appropriations necessary to stay open past July 1, is not something for which we particularly feel the need to apologize.

But better late than never.

However, coming so late to the task, we would ask you to recognize that the old playbook is not going to get this enormous job done, certainly not under the exigent circumstances created by such chronic lack of vision. We would ask that your Board follow precedent and consider the re-creation of a Golf Task Force in addition to the three extant standing Commission Task Forces. We would ask that you begin to consider the adoption of practices that might give this municipal system the flexibility routinely used by surrounding municipal systems, and we would ask that you begin to follow in the footsteps of previous Boards and actively engage the Golf Advisory Committee in a larger discussion of where the venerable program goes from here.

In short, we would ask that you demonstrate a bit of proactive engagement, as opposed to the kind of panic driven reactivity you demonstrated on May 17, when you quite rightly indicated that your options had been severely limited by circumstances beyond your capacity to affect, let alone control.

Start acting to get a measure of that capacity back.