

THE COLUMBUS GOLF AUTHORITY MINUTES

JUNE 27, 2023

Chairman Ricky Wright called the meeting to order.

Minutes of the May 23, 2023, Authority meeting were offered with an amendment and approved unanimously as amended.

Five people signed up to address the Authority and were allotted five minutes to speak. All who signed up, as well as more than 15 others in attendance but who did not sign up, expressed support for the Fore Kids Golf charity operating at Godwin Creek Golf Course and expressed concern at the lack of funding support from the city or the Authority in this year's city budget.

Before the first public speaker came forward, Chairman Ricky Wright said he wanted to make it clear at the beginning of the session that the Columbus Golf Authority supports Godwin Creek and the Fore Kids of Columbus program that has done so much for golf among the youths of the Columbus area. He noted that Godwin Creek is included in the Master Plan about to be commissioned to outline the needs and projects to be

undertaken to make golf opportunities even better at the public courses in Columbus.

Wright said much of the controversy about funding, or the lack of public funding for Godwin Creek, came about because the Golf Authority in its budget presentation to Columbus Council sought \$50,000 for Godwin Creek operations, but was informed no city funds would be included and that, as an Enterprise Fund, the monies from Bull Creek could not be used to support Godwin Creek.

Therefore, the 2023-24 fiscal year city budget to be voted on by Columbus Council contained no funding specific for Godwin Creek. The council session also resulted in the City Attorney noting that no lease – heretofore at a \$1 a year premium – had been approved for Fore Kids, which has previously operated the course under such a lease.

Wright said the council session, broadcast on public television and available on cable television, had resulted in concern and confusion among Fore Kids supporters. He said if his remarks at council in an attempt to secure funding had contributed to the confusion, he apologized as that was never his intention.

Billy Poole then told the Authority he urged that Godwin Creek not be closed and asked where the money to support the course owned by the city was to come from.

Wright responded that it appeared the funds would have to come from the city, due to the Enterprise Fund status of Bull Creek preventing the use of funds generated at that course from being used elsewhere.

Doug Stephens noted that, like many others present, his son had progressed in golf initially through the Fore Kids program, which changed kids who participated by teaching them not only golf techniques, but integrity, honesty and sportsmanship. The course needs to remain open and the youth program continued, and if the city will not support it financially, it becomes important for golfers and families in the area to increase their financial support efforts for the Fore Kids program.

Jason Carson, Kerri Mann, Steve Davis and Steve Taylor also echoed their strong support for Fore Kids and the Godwin Creek operation that benefits so many children.

Authority Secretary Jim Houston also read a letter received by e-mail from Kurt Hitzeman, President of the Georgia High School Golf Coaches Association, in support

of the Fore Kids Golf of Columbus program at Oxbow Creek.

John Godwin, whose father, Bill Godwin, helped found Bull Creek Golf Course and the man for whom Godwin Creek Golf Course is named, said he is glad to hear that the Columbus Golf Authority supports the Fore Kids program and Godwin Creek. He noted that although the charity operates the course and oversees its maintenance and play, the property and the building upon it belong to the city, which indicates a city obligation to maintain it. He also urged community support and for constituents to encourage their city council members to find a way to financially support the operation of the course for area youths' benefit.

Authority member Jim Houston noted that the City Attorney had expressed that no lease had been approved for the Fore Kids' continued operation. There has been no lease for more than four years, although the Authority has frequently asked for such a lease. He made a motion directing Golf Director Jim Arendt to negotiate a new lease to be prepared by the city that would resolve that problem. The motion was passed unanimously.

After the public session concerning Godwin Creek, Superintendent Steve Brown reported that Bull Creek's

East Course was recovering well from its recent aerification, although frequent and heavy rains – including 4 and ½ inches last week – had dispersed the sand used to help smooth the punched surfaces. Bull Creek’s West Course aerification will begin July 10, with the Godwin Creek greens aerified after that.

New mowers ordered long ago have finally arrived and work has begun to connect needed wiring to make water coolers on the course fully operational again. Water coolers at the clubhouse and at the driving range, able to refill water bottles as well as with drinking spouts, already have been installed. New water coolers also have been placed at strategic locations at Oxbow Creek, he said.

A new assistant superintendent, Bristow Sanford, has been hired for Oxbow Creek, and is already fully operational as a seasoned maintenance and golf course worker with previous experience.

Maintaining full inmate work details remains a challenge, Brown said, with one full eight-man crew and one with only five inmates currently operating at Bull Creek.

The greens mower at Godwin Creek needs repair, and plans are to remove it to Bull Creek for the necessary work to be completed, he said.

Director of Golf Jim Arendt reported that Bull Creek has generated more than \$1.923 million through May, with some of May's proceeds yet to be included in the city's totals. Only \$79,000 remains to be collected before June 30 to meet the budget recorded for this fiscal year, with all of June's totals yet to be realized. "We totaled more than \$300,000 in May, which I believe should be a record month," he said, anticipating the final year's receipts should be "close to \$2.2 million."

Bull Creek is still awaiting delivery of two inmate vans paid for in recent budgets, but not yet available.

Oxbow Creek's revenues to date exceed \$559,260 and are expected to exceed the amount budgeted for the fiscal year, he said. That course also is awaiting delivery of an inmate van budgeted for its use.

Nikki Siter reported that a security camera has been put in place to monitor the second green, which has been the site of recent vandalism. She also reported that player traffic and range traffic at Oxbow are up, and more

ambassadors have been hired to assist in course operations.

Director Arendt reported that the reserve fund for Bull Creek as of this date is \$254,502 and at Oxbow Creek it is minus \$15,873, a figure that is expected to change soon to reflect positive amounts.

Recent activities at Bull Creek include outings by the Georgia Police and Fire Games, which were held on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and expected to return next year with even more participation. The annual Purple and Gold Tournament was held Saturday, with its leaders reporting raising more than \$22,000 for its causes.

A trophy case containing recent the trophies of recent golf contests at Bull Creek has been refurbished and placed in the lobby, complete with the new trophies.

Arendt reported that there has been concern about the pace of play on Bull Creek's courses, and efforts will be made to encourage golfers to play at a proper pace, including locating a person or persons to patrol the course to assist in encouraging groups to maintain a proper pace.

A check for \$5,250 has been received from the National Golf Course Owners' Association, reflecting rebates from recent golf cart purchases.

Arendt said he has hired golfer Adam Cooper of Columbus as assistant professional at Bull Creek. He is to begin July 10.

He also announced that part-time employee Ashley Morris has become a full-time grill manager at Bull Creek. She has not only worked food services, but has doubled as an accounting assistant and is a valuable asset, Arendt said.

Authority member Tommy Nobles made a motion to ask the city attorney to consider whether Authority Co-Chair Stephanie Callahan should be on the authority, due to a possible conflict of interest through her managing position at Fore Kids of Columbus.

After discussion and lack of a second, Nobles withdrew his motion.

Chairman Wright indicated a question will be put to the City Attorney reflection that concern and seeking a response.

Callahan said she was told when she was appointed that her position with the charity does not amount to a

conflict of interest. She said she does not intend to resign and will await that information.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ricky Wright, seconded by Ken Crumpler and passed by unanimous vote.

Present at the meeting were Ricky Wright, Stephanie Callahan, Jim Houston, Ken Crumpler, Tommy Nobles, Ken Davis, William Roundtree and Richard Mahone. Alonzo Jones was absent.