

RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC GOLF COURSE

FEASIBILITY STUDY

Ridgefield, Connecticut

Submitted by Golf Course Committee:

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Originally submitted to the
Board of Finance
October 22, 1971

Revised
November 29, 1971

18-HOLE PUBLIC GOLF COURSE PROPOSAL

This report has been written to set forth the desirability, feasibility and perhaps need for an 18-hole public golf course for Ridgefield residents.

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

About four years ago the Selectmen appointed a committee to pursue a site suitable for a golf course. In about six months the committee surveyed dozens of possibilities and finally settled on approximately 175 acres off Ridgebury Road about five miles north of the center of Town.

Eventually, about 120 acres were purchased by the Town for about \$150,000 from three land owners. Fifty-one acres in the center of the 120 acre was purchased for about \$60,000 by Hans P. Kraus from Dr. Robert Dubois and held by him until later purchased by the Town.

Mr. Kraus held an option on the acreage in the event construction of a golf course had not started by July 31, 1971, a two year period from the time of sale. Obviously, construction did not start by this date.

However, the committee was stymied in its efforts to formulate any specific plans for construction for two reasons:

1. 120 acres was not enough land to build a course.
2. Funds for construction were not readily available.

With regard to the latter, the committee labored over several options:

1. Ask for a general obligation bond issue - which most members on the committee were against.
2. Seek Federal and State funds - which the committee opposed in general, but also because this would require that the golf course be opened for unlimited play to anyone and therefore not a facility that Ridgefield residents could enjoy exclusively. Incidentally, the Selectmen expressed opposition to this also.
3. The remaining option left was to float revenue bonds or borrow the construction funds from local banks.

The third option became the choice of the committee. The Selectmen were briefed informally of this plan.

Still, until a year ago, the committee was stymied because of insufficient land until it learned that approximately 22 acres could be available from the bordering subdivision established by Lewis Finch. Mr. Finch expressed a willingness to deed these 22 acres to the Town for open space and it seemed feasible that the golf course project would qualify for this acreage.

About the time the committee began work in earnest again, two more roadblocks appeared.

1. Mr. Kraus sent a letter to the Town giving notice to exercise his option to repurchase the 51 acres he originally sold.
2. The Finch subdivision land is now impractical because of property lines and the legal aspects could take much too long to settle.

Upon meeting with Mr. Kraus' legal representatives, the Selectmen and the committee learned he was willing to extend the time until September, 1972, but now demanded new options - these were:

1. Construction must be started by Sept. 1, 1972 and the funds must be available to complete the project.
2. If these two requirements were not met, he would have the option of purchasing the other two parcels of land, thereby leaving the Town with no golf course site.

The committee vehemently opposed these stipulations. A committee meeting with the Selectmen, Planning and Zoning Committee Chairman, and Town Counsel was called to formulate a plan to meet these options, but to insure either construction of the course or retention of the land never owned by Mr. Kraus. The result was:

1. To ask for a Town meeting to purchase 51 additional acres of land from Mrs. Joseph Dlhly. Not all of this would be used for the golf course, but the land is so desirable many other recreational projects could result - ball fields, tennis courts, riding trails, nature studies, hiking, and a series of winter sports. (A minimum of 35 acres is needed for the golf course). This land would then eliminate the need for the Finch subdivision property. The cost would be borne from the general fund.

(Mrs. Dlhly has since agreed to a sale price of \$76,500.)

(3)

Additionally, this land is much better for the golf course. It was wanted by the committee originally, but not enough money was appropriated to purchase it. The land is relatively open and there is no doubt its inclusion in the design of a golf course will pay for itself in lower construction costs. It will allow a better designed course, help create speedier play and thereby increase the revenues of the course.

It should be noted the Park and Recreation Commission went on record earlier this year as asking the Selectmen to purchase this land for use by the golf course and other recreational purposes.

2. Ask for funds of \$650,000 to finance construction costs. These funds would be repaid solely through the revenue realized from the golf course.

3. Ask for approval to sign the new agreement with Mr. Kraus in order to extend the time for construction another year.

The consensus at this meeting was that if these proposals should fail at the Town meeting the whole project would be lost forever since Mr. Kraus would repurchase his land by February 1972.

IS THE GOLF COURSE AND THIS PLAN FEASIBLE?

Yes! The committee has been hard at work the past four months to set the plan in motion. We are prepared to hire Mr. George Fazio as the golf course architect. He is a former nationally-known professional golfer who has been an architect for over 12 years. His courses have become nationally known.

Three members of the committee recently played the Moselem Springs (Pa.) Golf Club designed by Mr. Fazio and site of the 1968 United States Women's Open Championship, and found the course to be outstanding.

Construction of a golf course should be done in one year to save costs. Mr. Fazio has been adamant in demanding this be done. Action is of utmost urgency.

We must sign a contract with him December, 1971 - calling for \$25,000 initially and another \$20-25,000 during construction and completion - in order to have a design and specifications for construction ready by February, 1972 A call for bids and a contract would be awarded by March and construction started as soon as weather permitted.

Construction would be completed by August and seeding by Labor Day. It could be open for play by June, 1973.

WHAT ABOUT THE ECONOMICS?

Listed below is an estimate of potential income, using a formula established by the National Golf Foundation, the country's clearing house of information for new golf course facilities.

ESTIMATED POTENTIAL INCOME AND EXPENSES

1.	Potential Golfers	1,170
	National Average: 60 golfers per 1,000 population. 19,500 population in Ridgefield 1973	
II	Projected Income for 18 hole Course	
	Green Fee Income April 15 - October	
	28 weeks with 28 Saturdays,	
	28 Sundays and three holidays	
	59 peak days at 300 players per day	
	59 x 300 equals 17,700 players	
	17,700 players at \$6.00 each	\$ 106,200.00
	137 weekdays @150 players per day	
	137 x 150 equals 20,550 players	
	20,550 players \$4.00	\$ 82,000.00
	Estimated income during early April, November. 2,000 players pro-rated at \$4.00 and \$6.00 fees.	\$ 10,000.00
	Peak Play Total	\$ 198,200.00
	At 75% of Peak Play	\$ 148,650.00
III.	Estimated Maintenance Cost	
	Materials, labor, maintenance of equipment	\$75,000.00

These projected figures of income were computed using a formula established by the National Golf Foundation with adjustments for our locale. However, these are basically conservative estimates.

The National Golf Foundation figures 200 players per day as peak on weekdays. We used 150 in figuring our formula.

NGF also suggests computing additional income from winter play. We are not yet ready to determine if Ridgefield's course will be open for winter play - December through March and if so, under what conditions, i.e., temporary greens, etc.

This formula does not include other sources of income. After the first year of operation, motorized carts will no doubt be in operation, in all probability demanded by the players. Fees for carts in the area are \$10 or more. No doubt Ridgefield's carts would be leased at \$5 from the lessee. Another \$1 would go to the "pro-manager" leaving \$4 possible income against expenses, battery changes, tires and other costs.

Conservatively, \$5-7,000 a year profit could be realized. An average year after two or three years operation - will more than likely realize \$15,000, perhaps \$20,000.

Other sources of potential income exist, but are purposely omitted from this report because plans are incomplete at this time.

CAN A GOLF COURSE BE BUILT FOR \$650,000?

Again, yes.

Unfortunately many people believe such a project will cost \$1,000,000 or more because they read of a new Laurence Rockefeller project of that amount, or some other resort type facility, or a private club.

What is not realized is that these projects usually include high land costs, extensive and elaborate clubhouses, swimming pools, tennis courts, etc.

The following report illustrates several very recent case histories of nearby communities that have been successful. What is perhaps just as important, Mr. Fazio has inspected our site, read our reports, looked at aerial photos, maps, etc. and says it can be done.

Timberlin Golf Club, Berlin, Conn.; constructed 1970; cost of golf course only, including maintenance equipment \$492,601.00. Berlin originally estimated it could realize revenues of \$60,000 in the first full year of operation. It took in \$57,000 between July 1, 1970 to October 15, this was on 21,000 rounds of golf.

Simsbury Farms Golf and Recreation Complex, Simsbury, Conn.; cost of golf course only \$658,000.00; course will open in May, 1972. Simsbury's Complex includes many extras, among them a completely automatic water system.

Town of Fairfield, Connecticut, Hoydens Hill Golf Course; scheduled to open May 1972; cost of golf course only (including automatic irrigation system, paths, roads, water supply, maintenance equipment, equipment building and architects' fees) \$707,475.00.

Sterling Farms Golf Club,, Stamford, Conn.; Cost of golf course only \$700,000.00; First nine opened 1971; second nine scheduled to open 1972.

Williamsport, Pa. Opened a course earlier this year. Construction costs were \$550,000. A recent report noted they are logging 1800 to 2200 rounds of golf per week and the course is about saturated.

IS A GOLF COURSE DESIRABLE AND NEEDED?

The committee naturally favors the project. The Selectmen have given us complete cooperation and encouragement. Obviously Town residents feel it is desirable or they would have never approved the original tax funds to buy the land which was bought specifically for a golf course, no other purpose.

Moreover, not one single good 18-hole public golf course with unlimited restrictions is closer than 45 minutes to Ridgefield residents. An attractive course for the public fee player does not exist.

HOW AND WHO WILL OPERATE THE GOLF COURSE?

The committee will recommend that the Selectmen appoint a separate Volunteer, unpaid commission to be responsible for the operation of the course and to oversee the debt reduction.

The committee, upon the advice of the National Golf Foundation and working committee members from other nearby towns who have established new municipal facilities, have recommended this procedure.

Golf courses are unique operations. They require day to day, minute to minute full-time attention. A separate commission whose only duty is to operate the golf course is best equipped to handle these chores.

At the start of construction, the committee expects to hire either a pro-golfer manager, or a grounds superintendent who will be on the job during the construction. This is strongly recommended by both the National Golf Foundation and Mr. Fazio. He will report to the present committee during this period.

It is this committee's opinion that at least three of the present five member committee be appointed to the first commission. Provided all would be willing to serve, we will recommend all five be appointed during the first year of operation. We would recommend three year staggering terms for commission members thereafter. The Selectmen have passed a motion calling for a seven member commission.

WHAT ARE THE PLANS FOR THE COURSE?

A design is not on paper but a full championship 18-holes with room for various tee locations is planned. The course will probably measure from a minimum of 6,000 yards to 6,700 or 6,800.

A complete irrigation system will be installed for tees, greens and fairways. It is expected that the design will lend itself to a late-evening nine-hole round with holes one, nine, ten and eighteen in close proximity.

While of a championship nature, the course will be very appealing to beginning players, women and juniors. Many holes will be designed so that the latter will be able to keep their place on the course and not slow down play appreciably.

The most desirable grasses for good turf and easier maintenance will be used. Greens will probably be of moderate but adequate size while many tees will be large in order to preserve them. Traps will be used strategically, but sparingly.

There will not be a clubhouse at the beginning. Something will be worked out from the \$650,000 appropriation to house a starter, golf equipment, balls, etc. It will not be elaborate, but improvements are intended. Ample parking space is intended. Plans for these facilities will be more detailed once the final design is approved and bids are taken for the course itself.

WHAT ARE THE PLANS FOR REPAYING THE CONSTRUCTION COSTS?

The profits from the revenue of course will be used for this purpose. Debt retirement would not start until June, 1975, after the course has been in operation about two years.

Revenue bonds will not be used as once planned. Rather, the bonds proposed will be based on using the Towns credit, but the revenue will be strictly that of the golf course. This was done because funds or time were not available for the revenue bond approach and municipal bond interest rates are much cheaper.

The Board of Finance has determined that a sinking fund of revenue from the golf course be established and that no capital improvements be made until two years of operation experience has passed. The committee supports this plan.

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