

**WORTHINGTON CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING - WORK SESSION- AUGUST 25, 2015**

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. in City Hall Council Chambers by Mayor Mike Kuhle with the following Council Members present: Scott Nelson, Diane Graber, Larry Janssen, Mike Harmon, Rod Sankey.

Staff present: Steve Robinson, City Administrator; Brian Kolander, Finance Director; Janice Oberloh, City Clerk.

Others present: Justine Wettschreck, KWOA; Kristin Kirtz, Daily Globe; Jeanene and Maynard Townswick; Michelle and Makayla Ebbers; Amy Ernst; Pat McCoy.

**DISCUSSION - PRAIRIE VIEW GOLF LINKS**

Steve Robinson, City Administrator, presented and read an executive summary based on the result of the work of the Prairie View Golf Course Long Range Planning Committee. The Committee was established at the January 12, 2015 City Council meeting, and has met on five different occasions, and identified six potential options for the golf course:

1. Sell to a private party for the purpose of a housing development;
2. Selling to a private party for the purpose of returning the grounds to agriculture production;
3. Do nothing, with the City continuing to operate the golf course in its current manner;
4. City retains ownership, establish a 9-hole course and convert the remaining acres into a nature area, and amenities added with the intent to improve water quality of Lake Okabena;
5. City retains ownership and converts the entire area into a nature area with the intent to improve water quality of Lake Okabena; and
6. City sells the entire site to a private party for either continued operation as a golf course or converting to a nature area with the stipulation that specific areas would be set aside for the purpose of improving water quality in Lake Okabena.

Items 1 and 2 were deemed to be unacceptable by the Committee. On a 5-3 vote at the August 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Committee voted to recommend that City Council decommission the entire golf course in general conformance to option 5.

A financial review of the six-year period from 2009-2014, and year to date through July, 2015 showed that total revenue declined each year during this period while operating losses increased. Total losses over the six-year period were \$968,631, or an average of \$161,439 per year. Rounds of golf tracked over a four-year period also showed a decline of 27%.

Mayor Kuhle stated he had three goals in mind for the course:

1. See the course off the City books
2. Protect the water quality coming into Worthington
3. Establish 9 holes of golf out there - a balance between a private developer and DNR or

### Pheasants Forever

Council Member Nelson felt the course should be decommissioned. The lake and the former Country Club are the two biggest assets in town, and the club has been opened up to the public. He would like to see the subsidy go more towards a sports complex some day but also put some of the funds into ponding at Prairie View to protect the water quality of our lake.

Council Member Graber said in the three years she has been on City Council we have agonized at every budget meeting over the cost of Prairie View and what to do about it. She just learned that the course was planned as a nine hole course, but was change to 18 holes at the last minute that was supposed to be self-sustaining. Three reasons she would like to see something happen:

1. As a Council we have not made any significant improvement in Lake Okabena - if we can reduce the phosphorous we should put money into that - feels strongly that this has to be a priority
2. Wants to be able to come to a meeting without the dilemma of the golf course.
3. The possibility of a nine hole course where somebody leases it from us would be acceptable as long as we have some certainty that keeping the other acres and making them into ponds and maintaining water cleanliness areas - it would be big enough and strong enough to actually, significantly improve Lake Okabena. - We should not sell it.

Council Member Janssen said the course does not have a good track record - but go with #3 and leave it for now - investigate some other uses. He can't go along with taking away an amenity in a town this size. He would like to see the course stay and incorporate something else into it - Wounded Warriors, DNR, something like that. Water quality is very important to him - but every lake in Minnesota has algae. Spend money to do the ponds if needed, but Prairie View did not get a fair shot with advertising and promoting it as a links course. Leave it for now.

Council Member Harmon noted the committee tried to be open minded and he commended them. Hiring Dakota Golf was to promote and manage the course, but we've still seen losses over the years. As a committee member, he voted to decommission the course. He would like to see the Wenk report carried further to help water quality - it took a long time for the lake to get in this shape. Now we have a public course under private ownership and we're competing against them. He did not support the motion for a nine hole course at Prairie View but he has no problem with someone leasing the course and having nine holes. We should work with the Okabena / Ocheda Board.

Council Member Sankey stated it is beautiful course - the maintenance crew did an excellent job. He also cited the following:

- The City should not compete with a private course
- The town is not big enough to support two courses

- He agrees with Mike - it is a business opportunity gone bad
- With the number of rounds played it is hard to justify the numbers
- We tried the best we could to promote the course
- He would favor putting it on a hiatus for two years - put in a 50 foot buffer strip, pull out the culverts and put it back into nature
- Don't sell it - put the sports complex out there if we can't find someone to lease and manage a nine hole course - maybe soccer fields

Mayor Kuhle opened up the floor for comment from those in attendance:

Maynard Townswick - Talk to the school - his granddaughter plays on the golf team at school - Tuesdays and Thursdays are sacred at the Country Club - what will happen to the golf program? Also the cross country program - the Country Club won't let them run there - and Prairie View is a better course for it. Think beyond what you're thinking. Keep a nine hole course - it'd take 25-30 years to see any change in water quality - your still going to have the expense of cleaning the ponds, mowing costs with the trails - we have more parks than we really need. Vogt Park has become a place where there is nothing but drinking, drugs and people having sex. There are two parks south of St. Matthews - sell one! Prairie View is a beautiful and challenging course - sit back and take a long hard look at it!

Makayla Ebbers - Prairie View is a lot better than the Country Club - you can have more sports there. It's open in nature. They split the front and back nine there which lets them get done faster. Now, half meets at the Country Club and half meets at Prairie View.

Michelle Ebbers - She supports her daughter in everything she does. Hearing the other coaches, listening to them and the players - Prairie View has much more positive feedback from them. Marketing was a big problem - there were not enough people out there. It can't be marketed that way. She's seen a lot of wasted money in this town. She told her daughter that she would be leaving in two years. Cutting Prairie View is not the way to change it. Nine holes would be acceptable. It will take a long time to change the lake - yes it's an amenity. But the swimming pool is gone - is soccer our only goal? Great - put money into it but I'll be gone. Other communities have golf tournaments and bring in a lot of money -we haven't done that. There are a lot of places here where money is mis-managed. Continuing to take away amenities will not draw families here.

Jeanene Townswick - Why not offer the club house at Prairie View for other uses - Turkey Day? Can't it be more than golfing?

Mayor Kuhle said we need to work at 2 to 3 directions for staff. Consensus was to not sell the land. Steve Robinson, City Administrator, said that Great Life has expressed an interest in running a course there, but they've not gotten far enough in visiting to determine if they would only be interested in purchasing the land. It might be possible to have a nine hole regulation course and a

nine hole par three course but the committee recommendation was for water quality. He will try to get a definite answer from them. We would not start ponding until the funds were in place, probably the summer of 2017 - the 18 hole course could operate in 2016. Whatever the process, it is unlikely that anything will occur in 2016. Council Member Graber asked if we were committed not to take a loss. Mr. Robinson replied that he would urge Council to look seriously at the direction we could go not to continue with a financial loss - that money could be directed to finance other amenities in town. The course is fully budgeted for in 2016 - we have an asset that we need to protect and everything we've talked, ponding and looking at funding, will take some time. We need a short term and along term plan.

Consensus was to have staff do some investigating and bring some options back to Council.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The motion was made by Council Member Sankey, seconded by Council Member Graber and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

Janice Oberloh, MCMC  
City Clerk