



TOWN of BROOKLINE  
*Massachusetts*  
Recreation Department

## Memo

To: Select Board  
From: Leigh Jackson, Recreation Director  
Re: Recreation – WA 39 & 40  
Date: 10/4/22

This memorandum is intended to inform you of the impacts of WA 39 & 40 if they were to pass. In consideration of Warrant 39. If Warrant 39 passed, the Town would want to consider the following information.

The Robert T. Lynch “RTL” Golf Course is a recreational activity that promotes social engagement, sport, fitness, and general camaraderie in a socially distance way. Golf is a great example of recreation activity that can take place on our natural uneven and wet surface.

The popularity of organized athletics at the high school level is supported here at the RTL Golf Course. We are currently home to Brookline High School Boys and Girls Varsity & JV Golf Teams, Beaver Country Day Golf Team, and the Dexter Southfield Golf Team. Additionally, Catholic Memorial Girls Golf Team also practices at the golf course. In matches they play nine holes, but we’d need to utilize the other nine holes to support other golfers.

The Landscape Master Plan is three-quarters complete as is looking at the feasibility of adding other recreational activities on to the property, while maintaining an 18-hole golf course.

The Design Team has looked and discussed the concepts of adding trails, multiuse pond, event pavilion, cross country ski and Nordic trails, dog parks, racquet sports and athletic fields. Based on the feasibility of the land and established financial resources, they have preliminary designed and are considering;

- Trails and connectivity to other local parks
- Dog Park
- Racquet Center
- Ice Skating Pond
- Event Pavilion

The RTL Golf Course is a property that doesn’t feature a single crosswalk or sidewalk for pedestrians or non-vehicle traffic to use to safely access the golf course. The Landscape Master

Plan is looking at ways to include a walking trail that provides an opportunity for pedestrians to safely walk in a designated trail during the golf season. It is not typical to combine biking and golf, though a bike path has been brought up by petitioners.

WA 39 calls for a location for an outdoor pool on the property.

The RTL Golf Course land is a very challenging piece of property that features multiple constraints that have been well documented by our design team. The golf course is essentially a peat bog, highlighted by major ledge formations upon which forested areas exist. Peat is an environmental asset for carbon sequestration and removing the peat could release a tremendous amount of carbon back into the environment. Unfortunately, due to peat's soil properties, I have learned that it could not be compressed by adding fill on top of it. The peat will collapse or extrude in areas jeopardizing structural integrity. Peat also drastically shifts with the varying rainfall and creates an ever-changing surface, which does not impact the ability for the game of golf to be played, but would absolutely prevent any other sport/recreation from playing, as most require a uniform playing surface. This will be exacerbated by heavy rains, more common now with climate change, resulting in a flooding situation. With the increasing threat of climate change every year, the Town of Brookline should consider whether a significant investment of tax dollars in building fields, swimming pools, and other assets which could be adversely impacted by these soil conditions, when there is a flourishing recreation activity that is already well suited for this changing environment. If the Town of Brookline determined that it did want to make that investment, there are more considerations.

>>>>> See next page

The property is quite complex. There is either a large amount of Swansea muck (peat), ledge in forested areas, and wetland buffer zones that would need to be accounted for in the town's consideration of the cost and feasibility of the request



*USDA Soil Survey identifying Swansea Muck (PEAT) shaded in Grey.*



*Wetland Jurisdictional Buffer Zones per the Wetlands Protection Act. Areas highlighted in red shading.*





*Glacier ledge formations highlighted in dark grey on the property. There is additional ledge under the current driving range, highlighted in a light grey.*

### **Community Garden.**

The RTL Golf Course is in the process of building a series of gardens next to the clubhouse with a goal of growing vegetables and herbs that can be utilized for food service at the golf course and/or donated to the local food bank. Unfortunately, non-golf land, vehicle traffic access and parking are limited and accommodating a community garden is not part of the current plan. There is potential here for educational component with our plan.

### **Pesticides/Herbicide Use/Organics/Electric Moers/Solar Panel charging**

The limited use of pre-emergent (preventative measure) and post emergent (after weeds are seen) pesticides and herbicides are used on high value assets, mostly roughs, tees, and fairways. The use of these chemicals is highly regulated by MA State Law and follow our Integrated Pest Management program, which has a higher threshold for weeds and invasives than most golf courses. We use the least amount in specified concentration ratios per the manufactures recommendations to protect our capital assets. Our IPM program requires that we train and adhere to all regulations, following label instructions when making an application. We do not spray near water ways. We have a state licensed pesticide applicator in Superintendent, Mike Murphy, who adheres to state regulations, our IPM, and he stays in touch with what they are doing at The Country Club as well. Maintaining a state license for application of pesticides requires significant continuing education requirements and detailed logs for annual reporting.

- The Master Plan does contain the provisions for an Agronomy Plan (Addendum) that would provide additional guidance on agricultural practices that would best create a more stable growing environment leading to a healthier turf grass environment with the purpose to reduce any dependency of pesticides and herbicides in the future. Healthy turf grass is more resilient to pests, and creates less opportunity for unwanted weeds to grow.
- Additionally, the golf course has pivoted several years ago to using more organic treatments and soil amendments. We are constantly researching and trying to stay as forward thinking as possible to reduce use of inorganic pesticides and moving toward trends. Not only are we using more organics, we are also pioneering the use of robotic mowers at golf courses.
- We were the first golf course in the region to implement electric autonomous robotic mowers. We purchased two mowers this year and will grow the fleet in subsequent years. Combining this with solar power charging stations (future plan) located on the golf course will be key to multiplying this effect and getting off the grid.

### **Information about work on Hole 1 & Hole 2**

The Robert T Lynch staff have been diligently improving the aesthetics and playability of holes 1 and 2 through operational budgets and efficiencies achieved.

- Replaced all the irrigation heads to ensure wall to wall coverage of the system, previous to this upgrade, our irrigation system in that area didn't provide enough coverage.
- Installed a gravel cart path to provide a defined path for all golf cart traffic

- Aerated, top dressed and seeded both fairways for the past 2 falls and will do it again this fall to increase the amount of playable grassed surfaced.
- Have cleaned out and are maintaining the native areas in front of 1<sup>st</sup> tee.

The Landscape Master Plan Design Review Committee was tasked with creating a Landscape Master Plan. It doesn't full cover the entire site of the property. For instance, the Landscape Master Plan doesn't look at the clubhouse, parking lot, entry sequence or access, or driving range grill areas.

**STATEMENTS FROM MICHAEL TOO HILL, RTL Environmental Consultant, CONECO Engineers & Scientists, Inc.**

*Mr. Toohill specializes in ecological restoration, environmental impact assessment, ecological mitigation, ecology, limnology, wetlands, wetland creation, wetland restoration, environmental consulting, permitting and negotiations, project management, and public speaking.*

“A lot of ideas were mentioned in the warrant article for alternative uses of at least a portion of the golf course for other recreational uses. One thing that is valuable to mention is that only approximately 69 of the 120 acres is managed turf, the remainder is secondary rough (unmanaged open grassed areas, woodland edges, and shrub areas), wetlands, and forested areas. Unlike some of the other potential uses mentioned (in particular pickleball courts, swimming pools, turf [grass or artificial] athletic fields, dog parks) golf courses, because of their low density of use, serve as valuable wildlife habitat. Golf courses provide a large percentage of ecotonal area (edge habitat) which benefits amphibians, small mammals, songbirds, and raptors. Golf courses consist of primarily pervious surfaces and contribute to groundwater recharge and flood control. Study after study have shown that the fertilizer and pesticide use on modern golf courses does not contribute to ground or surface water pollution. Pollution from properly managed golf courses is a myth that just refuses to die. The other uses mentioned have virtually no habitat value and, in fact, some of them (dog parks in particular) concentrate waste and negatively impact surrounding habitat by bringing non-indigenous species into the habitat. These other recreational uses have a place in a community, but they contribute to noise pollution, traffic (human and vehicular) congestion, and (if lit) light pollution, so they should be carefully sited.

**Wetland restoration is also mentioned in WA 39.**

This can be accomplished in concert with keeping the golf course, in fact properly designed wetland restoration areas enhance the look and strategy on a golf course. They also add additional habitat variety to the course and can be marked as environmentally sensitive (out of bounds) areas. Perimeter walking paths (trails, not paved sidewalks and bike paths) in out of play areas (for safety) are also a low impact and appropriate use of community open space that can co-exist with a public golf course. I've never seen community gardens on a golf course but I suppose it might be possible to integrate an accessible garden area in an out-of-bounds location.”

Currently, the Preliminary Landscape Master Plan has over 200 additional tree plantings planned to coincide with selective removals. We have scheduled about 250 tree plantings and about 115 trees that are high risk (damaged, distressed and need to come down). This plan may change, by that would be a *net gain* of 135 trees.

### Resident vs Non-resident Use

The Golf Course does feature a high percentage of non-residents that enjoy playing golf at the golf course. These non-residents offset the cost that would otherwise need to be covered by the general fund (if it were a designated a Park and Open Space). These non-residents pay a premium for their round of golf and do not get as much advanced time to book their reservation. These non-residents come into the town from neighboring towns, with many of them being former residents, family of residents, or golfers looking for a course to play. Many people who frequent the golf course will also visit other local business while visiting Brookline.

Robert T. Lynch operates a bit differently than other local golf courses whom feature a higher resident round rates and this is intentional. With the effort to provide an inclusive atmosphere, RTL does not offer resident memberships. Other local golf courses provide season permits or memberships for golf. These golf courses see a higher percentage of resident rounds because those individual members play many rounds. A golf course could have a couple hundred members versus a lower percentage of resident rounds but a larger number of residents. There are currently 4,339 residents who have validated their residency to create reservation access.

The RTL is a municipal golf course in a major metropolitan area with close proximity to mass public transportation or a reasonable ride share fee. There is currently a supply shortage of *affordable public* golf options for the Boston metro area.

Surrounding Town/City	Population (Approximate)	Number of Affordable Public Golf Courses
Brookline	59,000	1
Boston	600,000	2
Newton	88,000	1
Cambridge	117,000	.5
Quincy	95,000	1.5
Total	959,000	108 holes of golf

### Outstanding Bond/Debt Service

The Bond we currently have is for Golf Course Improvements, and not for the Clubhouse or any other study. If the Town wants to see an additional study at our course, the Town would need to identify funding for that project.

The RTL Golf Course does have a FY21 year-end balance of approximately \$775,000, with approximately \$475,000 being used in FY23 to fund the purchase of equipment for the maintenance of the property, support the development of a Clubhouse Master Plan, as well as \$350,000 worth of Clubhouse improvements. That would leave the retained earnings with approximately \$300,000. This is an amount that is needed to reduce any liability to the General Fund for operations in the event of extreme weather, catastrophic damage to the property or



buildings. I have been told by the Finance Team going below \$300,000 would be against the Town's interest and may be considered financially irresponsible as well.

**The warrant article may be positioned to imply that the current plan does not address the needs expressed by the Parks & Rec Commission.**

This is implicitly not the case. The Park and Recreation Commission approved a Master Plan at the Golf Course (4-1). The December 2019 meeting minutes show the vote as N. O'Connor moved to approve a master plan for the golf course and a master plan for the club house totaling 120,000. Seconded by W.Sheridan. A. Bellalta and D. Lyons approved. J. Bain voted against. The vote passed 4-1. (Addendum)

The Park and Recreation Commission tasked the Recreation Staff with undertaking two master plans in December of 2019: a Landscape Master Plan for the Golf Course and a separate Master Plan for the Clubhouse. In the vote, there was not a clause added that to ask for a feasibility study looking at other options for the property, instead it was voted by the Park and Recreation Commission and Town Meeting to provide a capital investment road map for the golf course and the clubhouse so that efficient use of financial resources could provide productive return on investments.

Approximately one year later a Park and Recreation Commissioner inquired about adding an athletic field feasibility study, the vote for the Golf Course Master Plan did not include a statement to that effect. I inquired with the sixth floor about potentially doing a feasibility study during the Landscape Master Plan, we referenced the vote and determined that it wasn't approved by the Park and Recreation Commission or Town Meeting. We *did* include in the Landscape Master Plan RFP to minimize the land for the 18-hole golf course, with playability intact, and look for options to add other recreational opportunities. That is exactly what the Landscape Master Plan Design Review Committee is doing at this time.

The Robert T. Lynch Golf Course is currently an 18-hole municipal golf course with a historical clubhouse, driving range, putting green, forested areas and open space. It is a Town of Brookline Recreation asset that serves both the local and regional community. It operates on an Enterprise Fund and is not supported by tax revenues. This community asset is largely supported by non-residents, and is an open green space that is beneficial local wildlife, eco-system, Putterham neighborhood, local South Brookline Residents, and local businesses.

Comparing the golf course to Pine Meadows Golf Course in Lexington, may not be a good comparison because the two golf courses could not be more different from one another. Pine Meadows is a for profit golf course supporting the general fund and is run by a management company. The golf course employees are not employees of the town. The town of Lexington is responsible for funding all capital improvements. While it's convenient to show the difference in net income for the past several years, they were operating with different philosophies than Robert T Lynch was during that same period.

The Robert T. Lynch Golf Course has a long list of worthy projects on our long-term CIP; If the Robert T. Lynch Golf Course in the long run is determined not to be an 18-hole golf course, it will likely create a tax payer burden when there is a long line of General Fund projects already

designed or conceptualized and that are awaiting funding (example: ice skating rink) including many for our partner The DPW/Parks and Open Space Division.

The Golf Course Landscape Master Plan is a contractual service agreement that was made with the Town of Brookline and Mungeam Golf Design. Stopping or pausing this process may have financial and legal issues that would need closer examination. It is my professional opinion that any proposed feasibility study would be best suited as a separate procurement process that is organized by an RFP and approved through the Capital Improvement Process.

A shift in the overall offering of the golf course from 18 holes to 9 holes will dramatically reduce the revenue generated by RTL, which is currently set up as a self-sustaining break even operation on an Enterprise Fund (not dependent on local taxes).

Robert T. Lynch was not designed to operate for profit and operates on a break-even basis, resulting in no fiscal burden to the town and assures affordable rates for use. It would need to be further studied as to whether or not the Robert T. Lynch Golf Course will continue to be financially viable as a 9-hole golf course. Conversely, the development and maintenance of large assets such as a community pool or playing fields will require a significant investment that will ultimately fall to Brookline residents as a tax burden, as the fees collected from a 9-hole course would not likely be able to support those expenses. Reducing the golf course to a 9-hole course would negatively impact the many local nonprofit charities who depend on an 18-hole golf course to use for fundraising. Reducing the golf course to 9 holes would greatly impact the ability to host golfer development programs and high school golf. It could also jeopardize the ability to honor agreements with local private schools who use the golf course in exchange for the town to use private school fields to supplement recreation programs and school use within the Town.

If the Town decided to move to a 9-hole golf course, we wouldn't be able to meet our vision described above to be more inclusive and offer other recreation events at little to no cost, including: movie nights on the lawn, concert series, recreational therapy, 1K and 5K's, Harvest Fest event, weddings and gatherings that serve the community as a whole.

***Analysis of consolidating 18-hole operations to a 9 hole facility***

	<b>Pre Pandemic Revenue</b>	<b>Post Pandemic Revenue</b>
9 Hole Facility (Including F&B)	600k to 850k	900k to 1.2m
Brookline Golf Course, w/ Range	1.4m to 1.7m	1.9m to 2.4m
Brookline Golf Course, w/o Range	1.1m to 1.3m	
<b>FY23 EXPENSES</b>		
Full Time Employee Payroll	\$372,006.00	
Seasonal Staff	\$340,000.00	

Transfer to General Fund ( <i>Benefits, UE, General Fund Loan</i> )	\$235,519.00	
Turf Equipment Lease	\$96,500.00	
Golf Cart Lease	\$82,500.00	
Debt Service	\$156,135.00	
<i>2012 Golf Course Improvements</i>	\$5,000.00	
<i>2014 Golf Course Improvements</i>	\$25,000.00	
<i>2015 Golf Course Improvements</i>	\$10,000.00	
<i>Driving Range</i>	\$30,000.00	
<i>Clubhouse HVAC</i>	\$5,000.00	
<i>Refinanced Golf Improvements</i>	\$15,722.00	
<i>Landscape MP Phase 1</i>	\$17,500.00	
<i>Interest</i>	\$47,913.00	
Credit Card Services	\$60,000.00	
Building Maintenance	\$17,000.00	
Supply Budget	\$382,500.00	
Utilities Budget	\$135,880.00	
<b>Minimum Expenses to Operate FY23</b>	<b>\$1,878,040.00</b>	

### **Landscape Master Plan Design Review Committee**

Additionally, the Landscape Master Plan Design Review Committee has worked extensively for ten months looking at many of the concepts and others that have been brought forth in this warrant article to the design team. This resolution is not in support of the committee's efforts to date and does not support the volunteer's service to their community.

Even so, the Design Review has incorporated and continues to incorporate public input, including Warrant 39 as much as possible keeping the safety of the public and original RFP criterion in mind.

In conclusion, supporting the operation of the golf course and the completion of the Landscape Master Plan will allow the golf course to invest much needed capital for golf course improvements, which then can increase current revenue streams to allow for future property improvements, including many if not all the recommendations of the Landscape Master Plan.

When the final version of the Landscape Master Plan is presented to the Park and Recreation Commission, the community will fully understand what a treasure this golf course and surrounding property could become. *All of these improvements can be realized without one dollar of tax payer money from the General Fund and meet many of the interests of Warrant 39.*

**In consideration of Warrant 40.**

The impact would be that the Town would need to identify funding and a location. That feedback was given to petitioners at 9/27/22 Public Hearing by the Park and Recreation Commission. Our hope is that petitioners meet with a couple members of Park and Recreation Commission and consider implementing their feedback to revise the warrant.

On September's Park and Recreation Commission Meeting, I presented FY 23 – 29 Draft Recreation CIP. I presented for their consideration an idea to complete a Feasibility Study for Recreation Complex that would include concept for an outdoor/indoor pool, as well as other recreational sports. The Park and Recreation will discuss and vote on FY23 – Future Year's Recreation CIP on 10/12/22.

Thank you for your consideration, and feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,

*Leigh Jackson*

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