

Master Plan Introduction and Course History

Since 1894, when tin cans were first placed in the ground near the Fenwick Hall, golf has been played in Fenwick.

A full nine-hole golf course was opened in 1896 and, for over one hundred years, it has provided pleasure to golfers of all ages and abilities.

This Strategic Master Plan establishes a framework for maintenance and potential improvements consistent with the history, design and links-style nature of the course.

The Strategic Master Plan, as defined in the Mission Statement adopted by the Board of Warden and Burgesses, “will outline for each hole the purpose of the architectural design, highlighting where the current design promotes or occasionally conflicts with the links nature of the course and the other attributes described above. The Strategic Master Plan will also establish maintenance guidelines to ensure the health of the turf and playability of the golf course.”

The Board of Warden and Burgesses has requested that the Strategic Master Plan Narrative for Fenwick Golf Course “will include an overview of the golf course and the direction in which it should move forward, embracing its long history; a review of the course agronomics that includes ways to improve the health of the turf as well as methods to save money and a review of architectural alterations dating back to the early 1930s . . . including a hole-by-hole assessment that will provide suggested modifications to improve the Fenwick Golf Course and make the course more enjoyable and challenging for players across a broad spectrum of abilities.”

This Plan has two principal goals. The first is to help maintain and recapture the attributes that make Fenwick a historic links-style course and to prevent imprudent modifications, while ensuring the layout is fun and challenging for all levels of golfers. The second goal is to give the Board of Warden and Burgesses and the Fenwick Park Commission (present and future) a framework and philosophy for future maintenance, repair, upkeep and alterations; this Plan is meant to lay out a “to-do” list for coming years so that budgetary and other decisions can be made in keeping with an integrated plan and strategy.

It is imperative, for long-range goals to be met, that the superintendent be permitted to employ proper and proven methods to create and sustain healthy turf.

The superintendent must also be equipped with the proper machinery and manpower in order to accomplish the goals. Moreover, the Park Commission and the Golf Course Consultant will work very closely in regular consultation with the Superintendent about all aspects of the implementation of this Plan.

For work outside the normal maintenance practices, such as the rebuilding of bunkers and greens, a qualified golf course construction company must be engaged to perform the work.

The nature of play

“Bump-and-run,” or “the ground game,” is the method of running the golf ball along the terrain of the golf course. These phrases are most commonly used in reference to approach shots to green. The opposite of the bump-and-run is the “aerial game,” where shots are flown onto greens.

The ground game is the basis of all links golf courses. The turf on fairways and greens is maintained firm to allow for the bump-and-run. This is because links golf courses are built by the sea where wind, sometimes strong wind, is an integral part of golf. The best way to keep the wind from affecting a golf shot is to play below the wind.

As stated in the Mission Statement: “A links course is located near the sea and built on a sandy soil. The turf is maintained firm so golf shots can be played on the ground. The views from throughout the course are expansive, including water vistas.

“At the core of links style golf is the requirement that the turf on fairways, approaches and greens be maintained as firm. Golfers should be able to use the ground game, or bump-and-run, throughout the course. It is this method of play that allows golfers to manage the wind and firm turf that are an integral part of seaside golf.”

Since Fenwick is a links-style golf course, it is imperative to keep the course firm so the ground game can be used. This will require the use of proper agronomic techniques so that the approaches to greens are firm enough for players to bounce their approaches before the green, or to “run” their shots onto the greens.

The Park Commission and staff will have to develop an understanding that if these areas are slightly brown because they are watered less, that does not necessarily

mean they are unhealthy. Watering and turf care should be designed to have healthy and firm turf, not necessarily green turf.

History

To understand the Fenwick Golf Course of 2014, a brief history is helpful.

According to *Harper's Official Golf Guide* of 1900, the Fenwick course was 2,550 yards long, annual dues were \$10 and there were 85 members. F.E. Cooley held the amateur course record of 42. The president (and the individual who laid out the original golf course) was J.B. Moore, the secretary was M.B. Brainard, and the green-keeper was John Graveson.

By the end of 1900, golfers throughout the United States knew about Fenwick because the 1898 U.S. Amateur champion, Findlay Douglas, played in the first Fenwick Open in 1900.

Douglas, of Fairfield Country Club, now Greenwich Country Club, had won the U.S. Amateur in 1898 and finished second the next two years. In 1900 he lost to Walter Travis at Garden City Golf Club, before competing at Fenwick.

“The fact that Findlay S. Douglas played in a contest for the first time since the Amateur championship attracted attention to the tournament at Fenwick for members of the Connecticut State League clubs. The ex-champion, who showed that he was suffering from want of practice, nevertheless reached the finals, and won by 2 up and 1 to play in a thirty-six-hole match with J. T. Cheney,” read a story in the Hartford Courant.

After 1900, the members appeared to be content to just enjoy Fenwick and it never hosted a tournament of that caliber again.

The course Douglas and the members played in 1900 had many similarities to the Fenwick of today. Some greens and tees are where they were in 1900, and the current fifth and sixth holes are almost exactly as they were that year.

On the other hand, the greens were larger and had more square corners, and the grass on them was longer and less uniform than today.

In 1900, *Connecticut Magazine* described Fenwick this way: “Some of the hazards are wonderful country roads that have been built along the river and Sound and are

made of vast quantities of sand, four times as much as are necessary, with a variety of cacti along the sides. If this was not enough, sand dunes have been built, ditches have been dug and partly filled with sand and there are artificial bunkers.”

In her book, *The Fenwick Story*, Marion Hepburn Grant recounted a description of the early course:

“Initially the so-called fairways were mowed only twice a season, and scrubby wild blackberry bushes were allowed to proliferate as natural hazards.”

The condition of Fenwick has improved substantially since those days, but there are some traits that have been here since the course opened and are the defining characteristics of the course such as the berms on the second, fourth and sixth holes, small greens, wide hole corridors and firm fairways and greens.

With its seaside location, long vistas, firm fairway and lack of an irrigation system, Fenwick is without a doubt a links-like golf course, an American relative of the famous links designs of the British Isles.

Trees and bunkers were few on the course until the 1960s. Then, over the ensuing 30-plus years, nearly every hole had a sand hazard added and a number of trees planted. In some cases, such as the third and the ninth, the old berms and sand-filled tire tracks were removed and/or filled in.