



COURSE CONSULTING SERVICE

# Onsite Visit Report

## **Hershey's Mill Golf Club West Chester, Pennsylvania**

Visit Date: June 19, 2018

Present:

Mr. Jerred Golden, CGCS, Director of Grounds

Mr. Joe Owsik, Golf Course Superintendent

Mr. Neil Anderson, Assistant Superintendent

Mr. Ed McFalls, Vice President

Mr. Scott Martin, Assistant General Manager

Mr. Gene Blessing, Green Chair

Mr. Roger Carr

Ms. Pricilla Burt

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### **United States Golf Association**

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The USGA Green Section develops and disseminates sustainable management practices that produce better playing conditions for better golf.

# Background

It was a pleasure to return to Hershey’s Mill Golf Club on Tuesday June 19, 2018. As per our customary CCS visit, we toured the golf course examining current conditions and discussing future improvements. Fortunately, the golf course was in very good condition on the day of our visit, which provided us plenty of time to discuss which golf holes to consider first for future improvements. That said, we started the visit by discussing weather implications and how this excessively wet spring and at times cloudy weather could lead to weaker plans and perhaps some turfgrass issues this summer.

# Executive Summary

Overall, the golf course was in very good condition on the day of our visit. Specifically, I thought the putting greens were in as good of condition as I have ever seen them. The texture and density of the greens was fantastic, which does not mean that they have been poor in the past, but for some reason the condition really stuck out to me as exceptional this visit.

The annual bunker renovation work and teeing complex renovations, including better positioned forward tees has really improved the playability and aesthetic appeal of the golf course. As long as resources are available, continue to renovate bunkers and tees each season. Once all the golf holes are completed, they will have a nice uniform appearance and be as close to consistent in terms of playability as possible. In conjunction with bunker and tee renovations, continue to remove trees that are limiting factors to turfgrass health, affect playability or aesthetic appeal.

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# Primary Rough

## Observations

- 1. The primary rough was healthy and thick during our visit. It was evident that Hershey's Mill Golf Club is in the same boat (pun intended) as every other facility that I have visited this spring; frequent heavy rain events have not allowed for regular rough mowing.**
  - Much of the Northeast region has experienced an excessively wet spring therefore, the rough is experiencing a more than normal spring flush of growth and more importantly, superintendents and their teams have not been able to perform regular rough mowing because of the heavy rainfall events.
  - Because of the inconsistent rough mowing in conjunction with rapid growth, clippings and debris are common after mowing. Once the weather becomes consistently warmer and dryer the natural growth rate of the rough should slow down. Thus, the need for frequent mowing and the amount of clippings should be reduced.
- 2. Selecting turf-type tall fescue for the renovated bunkers is an excellent decision.**
  - Turf-type tall fescue is more heat, drought, and disease tolerant than the other common cool season rough varieties which is why it is so popular throughout the Northeast region.
  - Tall fescue will provide a more aesthetically appealing, uniform and playable surface for more of the summer than either Kentucky bluegrass or perennial ryegrass.

The updated bunkers are an excellent improvement. Also, notice the color difference between the tall fescue sod and the right rough. Tall fescue is a great choice for the rough.



## Recommendations

- 1. The only way to reduce the volume of clippings and maintain a relatively uniform and consistent rough height is to mow the rough as often as possible.**
  - Mowing the rough more often assumes two things: staff is available to cut the rough more often and the weather allows. Both of these points have been limiting factors on golf courses throughout the region, which is why rough complaints have been higher than normal this spring.

- If clippings continue to be a problem, use a pull behind blower (if available) to disperse clippings. Again, this assumes that staff is available and that there are enough turbine blowers to make a difference on the golf course.
- 2. We briefly discussed the potential for weeds to be problematic this summer, similar to last summer. I have no way to definitively know if weeds will be a problem, but I fear that because of the heavy rainfall this spring, pre-emergence herbicides could be prematurely broken down and moved through the soil where they are less active.**
    - Ensure that proper post-emergent chemicals are on site in case weed populations are higher than expected. If so, controlling them post emergently is the only way to eradicate them.
  - 3. Newly laid turf-type tall fescue sod requires 1.5 – 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in the fall.**
    - Research from University of Maryland, and my field observations both conclusively agree that turf-type tall fescue is healthier in the spring with fall applications of nitrogen. If not, tall fescue does not have the density and vigor that is customary with appropriate fall fertility.

## Future Projects

### Observations

- 1. The bunker and tee renovations that occurred in the last several years has really transformed those golf holes and are starting to transform the golf facility.**
  - Renovating bunkers to improve drainage, reduce washouts and maintenance and ultimately improve playability is an excellent infrastructure investment.
  - Enlarging the primary teeing surfaces to better disperse traffic and repositioning forward tees at a more appropriate distance is excellent. During our visit, everyone agreed that the new tees are an excellent enhancement to the golf course, particularly the new forward tee on the seventh hole.

The new forward tee on Seven is appropriately positioned, providing players a better opportunity to reach the green with their tee shot.



## Recommendations

### 1. Really, the only recommendation as it pertains to future enhancements is to continue the program. Clearly, the results are paying off. Everyone on the visit agreed that the new bunkers and tees are tremendous improvements.

- Mr. Golden will once again put together a “wish list” for 2018 improvements. This list is contingent upon available funds, but he certainly has an idea of which holes he would like to improve first.
- One hole that would be relatively inexpensive to improve and can hopefully be budgeted for this fall is number 15. There are only two bunkers on the hole, which is why it would be relatively inexpensive compared to some of the other holes that have four or more bunkers.
- Consider removing several of the trees on the right side of the fifteenth fairway to improve the growing environment and allow for a wider fairway. As we discussed during our visit, the fairway landing zone is much narrower than the other golf holes. Yes, this hole is relatively simple compared to the rest but is still a narrow shoot that will only get narrower as the trees grow wider.
- Leaving the first one or two trees on the right side of the fairway will provide the same look that is currently there but with fewer trees behind. Ultimately, the visual from the tee will not change, but improvements to the growing environment will occur.

Leave one or two trees on the corner (blue box) to keep the appearance of a narrow landing zone and remove all trees behind them. Visually, the shot will look the same but with a wider fairway and better growing environment.



### 2. A good improvement down the road would be installing sand channel drainage into slow to drain putting greens.

- Installing subsurface drainage into push-up greens is an excellent way to improve turfgrass health and playability and extend the life expectancy of older putting greens.
- Mr. Golden and his team were not very concerned about any of the greens during our visit, but just know that if putting green performance starts to fail because of slow drainage, sand channel drainage is a quick and uncomplicated way to help restore the health and playability of those putting greens.

# Putting Greens

## Observations

- 1. Honestly, the health and appearance of the putting greens was the best that I have ever observed at Hershey's Mill Golf Club.**
  - The texture and density of the putting greens was exceptional. Mr. Owsik and Mr. Anderson indicated that a few changes were made to mowing height and seedhead control applications, which could be leading to the current health of the greens.
- 2. Mr. Owsik indicated that seedhead control was not very good this spring, but there wasn't much effect on playability.**
  - Golf course superintendents throughout the region commented that seedhead control appeared to be very good in early spring, but with the first bout of warmer weather seedheads exploded. This has been a common trend throughout the region and interestingly, most golf course superintendents noticed the same thing as Mr. Owsik. Although seedhead emergence appeared to be high, the ultimate effect on playability was low.
- 3. Some minor annual bluegrass weevil (ABW) damage was found on putting greens.**
  - I rarely see ABW damage directly to putting surfaces. Rather, the damage is generally found on putting green collars, fairway edges and teeing surfaces.
  - Obviously, damage on putting greens is always concerning. Fortunately, the damage was not very distinct or widespread during our visit, which hopefully indicates that the overall ABW population is low on putting greens, but frequent monitoring is important.
  - Knowing that ABW are affecting putting greens, regular scouting is extremely critical. Off-color patches can no longer be dismissed as traffic or moisture stress and need to be visually inspected, often with removing a plug for closer identification to ensure that ABW damage is not occurring.

## Recommendations

- 1. Consider applying one or two sequential applications of the growth regulator, Proxy® in late fall and winter.**
  - Research from Virginia Tech University started about four years ago concluded that late fall and winter applications of Proxy® help preload *Poa annua* with product before the first spring seedhead control application. Since the initial research, golf course superintendents throughout the region have used the early applications to their advantage.
  - The actual timing and number of applications varies from course to course. In other words, some superintendents choose to apply one application during winter at a rate of three to five ounces of actual product per 1,000 square feet. On the other hand, several golf course superintendents apply two applications sometime in December through March again at a rate of three to five ounces of product per 1,000 square feet. Ultimately, experimenting with application rates and timing will be the best way to determine what is appropriate at Hershey's Mill Golf Club.
  - Despite the variability in application rates and timing, I can conclusively say that golf courses who apply Proxy® early have better seedhead control than those that do not. Bear in mind

this does not mean that seedheads will be nonexistent with winter applications rather, it simply adds a little more product to the system to preload plants to further enhance seedhead control.

## Summary

Job well done thus far maintaining excellent playing conditions during a very challenging spring. Despite the rainy and cloudy conditions, I really was impressed with the health of the putting greens. Continue to make agronomic adjustments with seedhead control timing to further enhance the overall quality of the putting surfaces.

I highly encourage the decision-makers at Hershey's Mill Golf Club to invest whatever resources possible to continue improving the bunkers and teeing surfaces. Mr. Golden indicated that the clubhouse also needs some improvements which I have no doubt are necessary but investing in the primary asset will drive other enhancements.

## Additional Considerations

### *USGA Green Section Record*

If you would like to receive the USGA's electronic publication, the *Green Section Record*, [click here](#). It is free, informative and sent directly to you via email every two weeks.

Respectfully submitted;



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# About the USGA Course Consulting Service

As a not-for-profit agency that is free from commercial connections, the USGA Course Consulting Service is dedicated to providing impartial, expert guidance on decisions that can affect the playing quality, operational efficiency and sustainability of your course.

First started in 1953, the USGA Course Consulting Service permits individual facilities to reap the benefits of on-site visits by highly skilled USGA agronomists located in Green Section offices throughout the country.



For questions regarding this report or any other aspect of the USGA Course Consulting Service, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

