



# SWANSEA TENNIS CLUB

## President's Report 2017-2019

### Summary:

Since community clubs are purely a voluntary construct--we don't exist except for the willingness of members to pay fees and a few of those members to contribute extra to a management board—we, collectively, always need professional, competent, ethical and enthusiastic people to step forward to manage the assets and affairs of the Club. The most important function of the AGM is for members to select those volunteers who will manage the Club, based on an assessment of the reports presented and conditions experienced throughout the past year(s).

My overall summary is that, despite the shiny new courts, there are many unresolved issues and uncompleted tasks, most of which are the result of board dysfunction. Board dysfunction is never only one person's or one faction's fault (it's always a dynamic), but there are deeply-held differences of opinion about the appropriate ways and means to manage the affairs of the Club. In the spirit of moving forward and not dwelling on who did or said what, this report will outline facts and options and describe general decisions or lack of decisions. It focuses on what is left to accomplish next year in the hopes that when seeing the list, those interested in contributing in a management capacity will be motivated to join the Board.

Under normal conditions, the primary purpose of the Club's management board is straightforward:

- Establish a membership registration process to collect fees from interested tennis players from the neighbourhood area
- Manage those funds appropriately, on things that relate to “good” tennis, in a not-for-profit manner
- Allocate courts and court time (granted by City permit) among the various competing interests
  - Any allocation other than open court time involves some sort of organizing or coordinating by either contractors or volunteers. Contractors have to be managed or directed by the Club executive, which takes a lot of time and effort
- Maintain the courts in playable condition
- Ensure that the public can access the courts during the designated public hours

The complete court reconstruction, including attempts to accelerate it, was a special process that thankfully should only occur once every two or three decades.

The overall performance of the Board, unfortunately, deserves at best a mixed grade:

**POSITIVES:**

- The board worked through the interim Club closure period to attempt to influence the City to do a good quality reconstruction and to put in place all the permits and programs that were required to make this past 2019 year a possibility and a reality

**NEGATIVES:**

- Few strategic issues were dealt with due to board member disagreements or lack of interest from majority of board—punting all of these to the next board
- Input sought via an extensive membership survey designed to inform a wide range of strategic issues was dismissed and ignored
- Attempts to supplement the inadequate Board (5 people) were stymied, despite an extremely long “to-do” list that was not being addressed (and still exists)
- More time spent on debating rules and regulations as justifications to not act or restrict options instead of getting things done—none of the rules or regulations actually prevents any reasonable activities

**The key issues that should have been dealt with, at least in some manner, include:**

**Reserve fund**

- Club had about \$150,000 in the bank prior to the poor-conditions dormancy period (before the courts were reconstructed)
- The 2019 season ends with about \$150,000 in the bank
- Essentially, the revenues from membership for 2019 covered the costs of the court resurfacing (coloured surface) and small expenditures like the sign-up board and gate locks (details following in Treasurer’s report)
- What needs to be decided is whether we build a reserve fund sufficient to ensure we are not stuck waiting for the City to re-do our courts (as we did from about 2014 onward, which is when they should have been reconstructed)
- It is not acceptable to sit on \$150K (and it will grow substantially since in normal years there are only small expenditures versus significant membership fees revenue)

- The Club either needs to have a plan to spend that money wisely, or, get rid of it in a controlled manner over a period of years because a not-for-profit Club should not be systematically collecting more revenue than it needs or leaving large sums undesignated
- Depending on the determined size of the reserve required, annual fees could need to rise or drop, which needs to be considered and communicated
- The 2020 Board must make these determinations

### **Key court allocation issues**

- Community tennis clubs typically face factions and interests squabbling over who should be first in the queue for courts—Swansea experienced this issue in past years with regards to inter-county teams that resulted in major conflicts
- An extensive, secure (members could only respond once) and user-responsive (i.e., you only had to answer things you were interested in) survey covering a whole range of issues was prepared and administered last winter in anticipation of the 2019 operating year
  - The response rate was phenomenal (considering we were not even operating at the time) suggesting significant and sincere interest—many readers will have participated in it
  - The board chose to dismiss the results and findings of the survey completely (the details of the survey results are nevertheless on the Club website)
- Next year will be a “normal operating year,” with more members, so the relative calm and quiet on the courts this year is highly unlikely to be repeated
- The 2020 Board can either use an updated survey to poll opinions, or rely on Board members to decide what is best based on their own preferences

### **Lighting, fencing, signage**

- The City was contacted in October of last year about the inadequacy of the new lighting (the problems were very apparent from the moment it was installed)
- City position is that the lighting meets its specifications
  - Translation: the wrong specifications were used, but we will not do anything to fix it
  - If any solution is to be pursued, it will undoubtedly be at Club expense and it will not be cheap
- Competitive bids for a 4’ fence extension acquired by June (along with a more sophisticated gate lock system and wind screens—all-in-one bid)
  - Board chose to ignore
- Wind screens, probably a heavier gauge than normal, are essential to deal with the too-stiff fence construction described in the status update
  - Will prevent most ball splaying

- Will provide a strong visual barrier to help avoid accidents
- Will also work for what they are intended—reducing the effect from wind
- Club signage is completely absent
  - The etiquette/rules about how priority access works when there are groups waiting is not clear—and in fact has not even been formally established (ask five board members how it works, and you will get at least three different answers)
  - Sign-up board usage and etiquette is not clear—derives from rules mentioned above, but people often do not erase their markings, wait when they do not need to, sign-up for multiple courts using different group members, etc.
  - Other signage pertaining to general Club rules, expectations, safety issues, etc., missing due to inability to agree to sign language and content (sign printer has digital designs ready and is standing by awaiting instructions from Club)
- The 2020 Board now has to deal with these re-opening season issues

### **Gate locks and public access**

- The initial gate code was quickly spread around the community, so a policy decision will be needed whether the locks are required for membership integrity purposes or just as a random-vandalism deterrent
  - Locked gates certainly prevent some degree of vandalism, but also engender negative community pushback
    - No communications plan or effort occurred to explain the “new reality” to the community (or members for that matter)
  - Enforcement of membership status on courts can really only be done by the membership as a collective in a Club that has no staff or clubhouse facilities—whether there are locked gates or not
    - No etiquette, rules or suggestions were distributed to help people understand how to deal with non-members using the courts
    - Club rules versus City policy is not even clear among Board members
- The City did not heed the Club’s request to provide electrical connections at the gates so at least consideration of the use of an electronic gate system could occur
  - Electronic gates can be programmed:
    - to open during public hours with no presence required
    - to operate in conjunction with a court booking system
    - to make use of a deposit-secured fob or pass card that is much less likely to be shared
    - to track usage in case of disputes or theft
- The Club could expend its own funds to install such a system, or go the opposite direction and remove locks in favour of the honour system and the collective following of clearly posted rules that all members have a responsibility to enforce (since we have no club house or staff/manager as some others do)
- There was misunderstanding about Club requirements to provide public access

- The 6-hours per week minimum has strings attached related to how it is provided
  - Board spent time arguing about which hours (it is Saturday 5 to 11 pm) instead of how those hours could be provided given that the Club now has locked gates
- Complaints about lack of access and issues revolving around the inappropriate use of the vehicle service gate for public (hours) access led to the implementation of a temporary (and test) court monitoring function to be staffed by club juniors
- A dispute among the Board arose about whether the use of the gate was appropriate or not, so based on feedback from the City and the Ontario Tennis Association, the President organized a temporary scheme (permanent scheme to be determined by Board) to provide supervision for the courts during public hours while simultaneously addressing other unmet needs:
  - Let non-members in and out of the courts without revealing the gate code
  - Clean the courts and court waiting/seating area (the area outside the courts had not been cleaned for the entire season up to that point in late August)
  - Prevent further damage to the courts from the inappropriate use of the service gate (it has gouged a hole in the court surface that may be expelling subsurface material during heavy rains—if so, this will lead to serious weakening of the courts as happened prior to the reconstruction)
  - Ensure members and non-members followed proper access procedures (not clear due to complete lack of signage)
  - Act as Club ambassador to inform public how to find out about the Club; join (next year) the Club; provide a hitting partner, as-required
  - One of the two temporary monitors was President's daughter, which while not an abrogation of any City policy, was a point of contention
  - Payment for the total of 18 hours of supervision and cleaning services has not been paid by the Club
- The 2020 board will have to deal with all of the locks policies and public access issues

## **Good governance**

The board did not follow good business practices in a number of key areas:

- Court resurfacing (largest expenditure of the Club that happens infrequently)
  - Expert advice was refused (inspection of City-provided court surface; help with technical requirements to seek bids)
  - Bids were sought in a haphazard manner and no clear summary of pros and cons of various options was generated prior to a decision
  - Contractor was rushed to get work done despite poor weather

- Programs (lessons, camps) contractor (the most important annual decision in terms of court time allocation)
  - All three bidders were known to the Club (either past relationship with the Club or known in the tennis community), so it is essential to follow a process that will result in two losers and one winner agreeing that a fair process was followed
  - Selection criteria to ensure a transparent decision-making process should have been utilized, but were refused
  - Even if all agree that the best choice was selected, the result is reputational damage that prevents a competitive bidding process from being credibly run again in the near-term
- Gate locks
  - Only two bids were sought for the gate lock system, which is not a big problem in and of itself given the scale of the expenditure
  - The larger concern is that policy issues and considerations of cost versus value (durability and features) were not discussed
- Member input into decision-making
  - Formally sought and received via an extensive online member survey—ignored
  - No other (better) mechanism used instead
- Court maintenance
  - Board ignored getting a contractor, or, the only viable alternative, organizing some volunteers to undertake regularly scheduled and periodic maintenance that any tennis club requires
  - Left to the good will of the programs contractor over the summer, who needed to provide a safe surface for their operations, and a certain overly-generous member the rest of the time
  - Not reasonable to expect contractors or individuals to take on this responsibility in an unorganized manner—and no surprise if they are not available every time something is needed suddenly disappear or stop performing the free labour that we have funds to deal with professionally/properly
- Membership registration system
  - Board knowingly chose an administratively user-unfriendly (feedback from our peer clubs) membership registration system; then those responsible failed to spend the time slogging through the complexities of using and configuring it
    - Proper registration welcome letter not created, causing much confusion regarding gate codes and other expectations
    - Issues with message distribution that are not immediately apparent (though reports from Family Day and the AGM notices caused us to learn about them)
    - Some automated and/or manual (no clarity yet) functions related to membership registrations and payments are not being completed properly and causing membership status for a small number to be incorrectly logged
    - Shoe tag numbers not connected to membership registration



- Late season fee switch-over enacted prematurely (week of July 15<sup>th</sup>)
  - No agreement from Board sought as to how or when this should occur
    - It will naturally annoy members who signed-up recently prior to switch-over
  - No analysis or opinion as to whether the Club's (low) membership numbers were affected by membership fee versus total lack of marketing and almost total lack of communications
  - No communications plan or effort to promote new reduced fee levels
  - Result, not surprisingly, was either minimal or no change from what would have happened without the early fee drop

It was necessary to ask hard questions about the issues outlined above, as it still is going forward not next year. That is the key job requirement of any responsible board member.

Marc Collins  
President  
Swansea Community Tennis Club

October 28, 2019