

Meeting Minutes

Town of East Haddam

Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee

Special Meeting

Date: April 7, 2026

Location: Municipal Office Complex, Meeting Room #3

1. Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance, & Attendance

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Alan Ponanski at 7:00 PM in Meeting Room #3. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Study Committee Members Present:

Steven Longobardi, Donald Lorusso, Jeff Miller, Mike Morris, Alan Ponanski, John “Jef” Wolter, Daniel Zimmerman

Study Committee Members Absent:

None

Additional Attendees:

Michael Callahan (resident and member of Banner HOA)

2. Approval of Agenda

The Meeting Agenda prepared by Chairman Ponanski was reviewed by the Committee and a motion to approve was made by Miller, seconded by Morris and approved unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes for Tuesday, March 31, 2026 Special Meeting

Minutes were distributed by Secretary Miller and reviewed by the Committee. No corrections or additions were proposed by the Members. Lorusso moved to approve the minutes, second by Morris and approved unanimously.

4. Old Business

a. Discussion of Steps for Completion of Feasibility Study by June 16, 2026

Chairman Ponanski reviewed the steps proposed for completion of the Committee's report by June. To address the water/irrigation issues he plans to invite a representative of DEEP to an upcoming meeting to discuss water availability and cost for irrigation.

Jef Wolter suggested that an interim report be compiled from the various notes taken on the Black Birch discussions by members. We want to capture as much information from meetings to date as possible. Secretary Miller offered to compile and edit the members' notes into a summary document.

Miller updated the Committee on the private owner/operators that he has reached out to generate interest in Black Birch

- **Jon Hoenig, Managing Partner, Atlantic Equity Partners** – Jon was out of the U.S. last week and Miller will try to connect with him this week. AEP acquired the Thompson Speedway and Golf Course and invested millions in the upgrading of both facilities and operations/events. They have purchased other courses in the Northeast as well.
- **Jim Leach, Partner, FCG Associates** – FCG has invested millions into and operates Triggs Memorial Golf Course, owned by the City of Providence, under a 10-year net lease. FCG restored Triggs back in 1990-91 and has been managing it for the past 35+ years. Jim is away in Florida for two weeks, but is interested in visiting Black Birch on his return.
- **Josh McKim, Managing Partner, Alliance Golf Northeast** – Josh and partners has purchased and improved six golf courses in CT and MA and manages them as a membership “club. He agreed to meet with the Committee at Black Birch on April 11 to tour the course and share his thoughts on feasibility. The meeting was confirmed for 10:00 am on Saturday, April 11.

Secretary Miller suggested that “Determine Funding Sources” be added as a separate step prior to “Prepare Revenue Projections...” in order to locate potential private and public (local, state, federal) sources for capital improvements and operations. Miller offered to take the lead on that step and Chairman Ponanski agreed.

5. Public Comment

Mike Callahan, representing the Banner Estates HOA, share info on the water/irrigation issue from Bernie Miller, the prior Course Superintendent at Black Birch. His hand-out covered the following points:

- DEEP Regulations – The course is allowed 50,000 gallons per day, or 1.5 million gallons per month during the nine-month golf season from April to November. That totals 13.5 million gallons per season.
- Water pumps are metered and provide weekly and monthly usage reports to DEEP.
- Water usage for irrigation from the upper pond (behind maintenance shed) is not metered and cannot track daily usage in season. The lower pond has a 4-week water supply during peak season.
- The pump tests of the four wells indicates a potential 121,104 gallons per day, which is twice the 43,617 gallons per day needed. The 2014 testing indicates more than enough water for irrigation is available on-site.
- The former Black Birch golf operation utilized a water saving program using a special chemical to reduce use during the peak season. Data indicates the course only used an average of 1.67 million gallons per season in the six years from 2015 to 2020.

6. New Business

Chairman Ponanski will invite Crary Brownell, Chair of the Planning & Zoning Commission and Randy Dill, Chair of the Inland Wetlands Commission to meet with the Committee at the April 21st meeting.

7. Executive Session

The Committee went into Executive Session at 7:35 pm on a motion by Miller, second by Lorusso, and a unanimous vote. The purpose was to discuss confidential financial information, feasibility studies, engineering inspections and previous discussions with the Black Birch owners with Bob Casner, Chair of the Economic Development Commission.

Chairman Ponanski asked for a motion to exit Executive Session at 9:00 pm, noting that no motions were introduced or voted on while in Executive Session. It was so moved by Lorusso and seconded by Wolters with unanimous Committee approval.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 pm on a motion by Lorusso, second by Miller and a unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Miller

Secretary, Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee