



February 3, 2023

Ms. Amy Spong, Division Director &
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
State Historic Preservation Office
Administration Building #203
50 Sherburne Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Ms. Spong,

The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) strongly supports the nomination for listing Minneapolis, MN's Hiawatha Golf Course in the National Register of Historic Places and we respectfully ask the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to do so, as well.

The nomination, prepared by Hess Roise and Company on behalf of the Minneapolis-based Bronze Foundation, presents a thorough, compelling, and well-researched history of the Hiawatha Golf Course, an eighteen-hole course with significance for the African American community in the Twin Cities, and justification for its designation. The nomination establishes the context of the site within the Minneapolis park system, conceived by Horace Cleveland in 1872, and includes a history of golf in the Twin Cities and the United States. It addresses the important role of Park Superintendent Theodore Wirth who championed the acquisition of Lake Hiawatha Park and the park system's development. The areas of significance are "Entertainment/recreation; social history; ethnic heritage: Black" and the period of significance is 1952-72. Of the seven aspects of integrity, the Hiawatha Golf Course and Clubhouse display good overall integrity, particularly of location, setting, feeling, design, and association.

The nomination's strongest, most detailed, and utterly gripping sections address the racial inequality and discrimination African Americans and African American golfers faced at the Hiawatha Golf Course. As the document states: "Minneapolis's Black residents were concentrated in a few neighborhoods including Southside, near where the Hiawatha Golf Course opened in 1933-1935. The course became an important recreational and social amenity for that neighborhood. The course's history, though, illustrates the insidious ways that racial bias infected sports and social life in the city as well as the determined efforts of Black people and others in the community to counter it."

During that era, as the nomination details, "private clubs essentially controlled the clubhouses, including social areas, locker rooms, and toilet facilities, restricting use of these purportedly public facilities by nonmembers. While the governing regulations of the Hiawatha Golf Club did not explicitly discriminate, a new member had to be approved by a unanimous vote by the club's board. Hence, it was easy for clubs to deny Black applicants. While Black golfers were allowed to play on Minneapolis's municipal courses from the outset, they were denied access to the clubhouse and membership in the course's private club for decades."

Significantly, in 1952 Hiawatha became the first park board clubhouse to be integrated when professional African American golfer Solomon Hughes entered the clubhouse for the first time. This occurred as African American golfers across the nation were fighting for equal access to municipal courses, clubs, and professional tournaments, including Hughes's longtime friend Joe Louis, the famed prize fighter, who integrated the San Diego Open earlier that year.

The nomination also addresses the history of the tournament called the Upper Midwest Bronze Amateur Open (which began as the Minnesota Negro Open Golf Tournament in 1939). Known colloquially as “The Bronze,” it was first based at Armour (now Gross) and Wirth Park golf courses; it moved to Hiawatha in 1968. Hiawatha’s importance to African American golfers was underscored by a 1999 visit from 23-year-old Tiger Woods, who had become the first African American golfer and youngest ever to win the Masters Tournament in 1997. The significance of the Hiawatha course to the African American community is reinforced today by the regular Tuesday morning gathering of the ONGL—the Old Negro Golf League. This informal group started around 1990 and continues to maintain a 10:00 tee time all season. Moreover, in 2021 the clubhouse was named for Solomon Hughes.

This cursory summation does not do justice to the intellectual rigor and thorough research that underpins this excellent work of scholarship. As the nomination authoritatively notes, the foundation laid by African American golfers at Hiawatha throughout the twentieth century was cemented by the victories for integration won in the 1950s and 1960s, which has allowed new generations of African American golfers to experience the tradition and play a round at Hiawatha today.

We do wish to acknowledge some criticism of the nomination for not including the histories of Indigenous Peoples and pre-European contact stretching back several thousand years. While the nomination prepared by Hess Roise is focused principally on the history of the Hiawatha Golf Course, an entity that has *only* existed since the 1930s, it does briefly address some of the site’s pre-twentieth century history. That said, the scope of work is largely the history, significance, and worthiness of the Hiawatha Golf Course for designation, again with a period of significance of 1952-72. If others wish to prepare a nomination that more fully includes the histories of Indigenous Peoples and pre-European contact, they are welcome to do so (there is ample precedent for amendments to National Register designations). In fact, in March 2022, when TCLF designated the Hiawatha Golf Course as a *Landslide* threatened nationally significant cultural landscape, we urged the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to undertake a National Register nomination. To date, neither that body nor any other organization or individual has done so.

In closing, we enthusiastically support the nomination for listing the Hiawatha Golf Course in the National Register of Historic Places. We hope the Minnesota SHPO will support this nomination and forward it to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. with a recommendation that the site be listed.

Thank you for your attention and consideration and feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a smaller 'B' and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR
President & CEO