



“The Golf Fore-um”

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So the facility owners or members have made the decision to remodel the golf course and a golf architect has devised a Master Plan. Now, the question is how fast can or should we implement the plan?

An aggressive remodeling program usually describes an implementation phase consisting of one to two years of construction. In contrast, extended remodeling programs encompass longer periods of time, anywhere from three years and beyond, depending upon the complexity of the master plan. Many factors, in addition to the plan itself, require consideration when deciding how aggressively the remodeling program will be achieved. Below, I will discuss several of the most important variables.

First, there must be consideration of the facility’s financial resources. Many private clubs have an annual capital improvement fund. The advantage of such a fund is that the members have already set aside a certain amount of money each year dedicated to upgrading the facility. When such a fund is available, this may negate the need to seek additional financial support from the members. This in turn, lessens the possibility that the remodeling project will be sidelined by a negative membership vote. When financial resources for the remodeling project are based on the revenue from the improvement fund, this amount will dictate the speed of the remodeling project.

If there is no capital improvement fund or if the amount is considered insufficient to support the scope of the project, several revenue streams might be considered. If the facility is private, an additional source of revenue may be a special assessment or dues increase on the part of the membership. For public courses, and perhaps some semi-private facilities, increased greens fees may be an additional source of revenue. All of these are potential avenues to pursue, depending upon the enthusiasm of the membership or patrons for the remodeling project. Another consideration is the owner / club’s loan history and loan capability, which may provide suitable capital for the project. Obviously, the more working capital available, the more aggressively the project can be pursued.

A second important consideration when determining the speed of the remodeling project is revenue depletion. As a result of golf course reconstruction, play is often disrupted. In an aggressive plan, the course may be closed entirely or more likely, half the course is closed for a two-year period (outward nine the first year and inward nine the second year). Thus, the course that pursues an aggressive program faces decreased revenues (from fewer rounds) during a time when working capital is most necessary. In contrast, an extended program may allow the course to remain open (through the use of temporary greens and tee boxes), but the overall disruption (noise and inconvenience of construction equipment, detours and temporary features) will occur for a much

longer period of time. Sometimes, in order to maintain the number of rounds during construction, courses will offer reduced fees to offset the less than optimal playing conditions. Finally, it must be noted that decreased revenue refers not only to fewer greens fees but also the domino effect that fewer rounds has on the golf course support facilities. Fewer rounds of golf translates into less money spent in the lounge and the restaurant, as well as the pro shop. If these facilities provide substantial support to the overall operation and financial health of the facility, the long-term disruption of these revenue streams that would result from a more extended remodeling plan, may dictate the need for a more aggressive strategy.

As noted above, noise and inconvenience of construction illustrate a third important variable when deciding the speed of the reconstruction project. Disruption to the players was discussed above. Any time the course is shut down, there is a risk that patrons may find another course and never return, even when the facility re-opens. If only nine holes are available, players also may decide to go to a different course. For private clubs, which usually can acquire reciprocal agreements with other clubs, this may not be an issue. However, for public courses, closing down half the course or the entire course may not be possible, particularly in an area where there are attractive alternatives. Again, an extended plan may result in more minimal disruption at any one time, but yet be compounded over the sheer number of years that the course is under construction. Players may tire of yet another routing or another temporary tee.

Furthermore, disruption to the course's staff also merits some thought. Under an aggressive plan, the extensive scope of the work and the relatively short time constraints usually dictates awarding the entire project to outside contractors rather than having the work or portions of the work done by in-house personnel. Alternatively, when a plan is extended over a number of years and the scope of each yearly project is small, existing course personnel may be called upon to perform many of the reconstruction tasks. Thus, in addition to all the duties of keeping the course open and providing satisfactory playing conditions, personnel must often perform the additional duties of golf course reconstruction. If this extended project encompasses only several years, the burden to the staff may be manageable. However, as the number of years increases, the additional demands may create staff burnout and a higher rate of turnover.

A fourth consideration is whether the professional personnel involved in the program (golf architect, contractor) will remain available for an extended remodeling program. Major golf course construction companies may not be interested in an extended implementation program, even if each yearly construction phase is part of a larger master plan. For those companies, even small projects require major commitments of time, personnel, and equipment but yield a smaller profit margin. In contrast, an aggressive implementation takes on the scope of work usually associated with new course construction, and major companies have the equipment and personnel necessary to complete the project within the construction deadline. Larger companies, with their extensive resources, are the "insurance policy" for the course, having the knowledge and personnel necessary to fast-track the project. The real success of the project is re-opening on time and obviously, the more resources available, the more likely that this will happen.

If limited funds dictate an extended program, the best alternative may be to use an established, yet qualified local contractor who are comfortable working under the direct supervision of the golf architect. This requires the golf architect's commitment to provide frequent on-site consultation and direction. Furthermore, it requires securing a commitment from the golf architect to maintain involvement throughout the extended implementation program. Because the golf architect and

contractor will be working together over an extended period of time, a good working relationship is vital.

Accessibility to materials as well as other construction costs is a final area of consideration. If an extended implementation is being considered, there should be some assurance that the materials purchased will be uniform across the years of the project. Varying the rootzone mixes for tee boxes and greens, particle gradation of bunker sands, gravel backfill for drainage components will complicate maintenance practices, which in turn will be more costly. Varying the materials also will change the playing conditions across the holes of the course, which many players find unacceptable. Although variety in golf design and shot selection is a proper goal, variety in agronomic conditions is not considered a positive aspect of the course. Finally, extended implementation often is more costly in terms of contractor and construction costs than an aggressive plan. For example, contractor mobilization costs in an aggressive plan occur once. In an extended plan, they occur yearly. Thus, like paying interest on a loan, you end up paying more for the advantage of spreading your payments out over time.

In summary, among all of the variables discussed here, those related to project financing are probably paramount. Inconvenience to player and club / facility personnel is another important consideration. Similarly to taking off a band-aid, one quick pull produces a lot of discomfort but it is over in a short period of time. In contrast, the gradual removal results in less intense pain at any one moment but extends the band-aid removal process over a longer period of time. In the end however, both methods achieve the same result. It sometimes is just a matter of the individual's, or in this case, the facility's, tolerance level.

*For further information on Master Planning and golf architecture, contact Ed Beidel of Beidel Design Associates, Inc. at 410-707-5623 or email Ed at ed.beideldesign@att.net. Beidel Design Associates are golf architects, land planners and landscape architects. Additionally, please refer to the **ASGCA publication "Golf Course Items – Expected Life Cycle"** that appears in the Course Renovation drop-down menu in the Golf Architectural Services section of the Beidel Design Associates website [www.beideldesign.com].*

An earlier version of this article may have appeared in industry publications.