

Master Planning for Golf Courses

Questions & Answers



A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTS



Master Planning yields great returns for anyone managing a golf course or considering a remodeling project. The American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) has prepared this document to help superintendents, club owners, managers and leaders understand the benefits of Master Planning – and its important component, Life Cycle Planning – for golf courses.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MASTER PLANNING?

Master Planning allows a club to anticipate and schedule maintenance and renovation. Rather than reacting to emergencies, having a plan in place allows for budgeting of both time and money and keeps those enjoying the facility “in the loop” during the process.

WHO SHOULD BE ON THE MASTER PLANNING TEAM?

An experienced golf course architect has the skill set to lead the Master Planning team. Important members of the team include:

- Golf course owner
- Club manager
- Golf course superintendent
- Golf professional
- A small cross-section of club membership/leadership, such as green committee members, if the project is for a private club.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN MASTER PLANNING?

The Master Planning process looks at the entire scope of a facility to identify areas of possible improvement and maintenance:

- Demographic research and feasibility studies to determine the appropriateness of proceeding with the project.
- Hole-by-hole analysis of physical condition of layout from the standpoint of strategy, tree management, irrigation, etc.
- Review of golf maintenance staffing and expenses.

Once the facility has been analyzed, a Master Plan will detail implementation of recommendations:

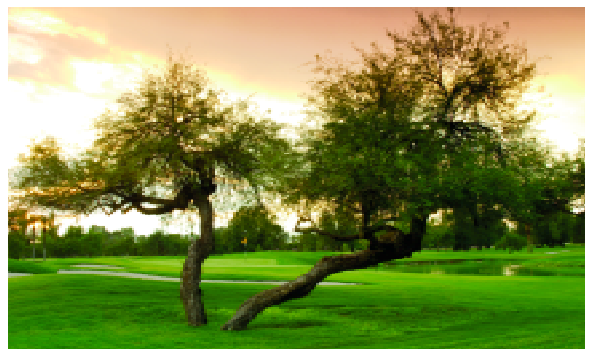
- Prioritization of the goals and objectives
- Club member and staff communication strategies — How to communicate the plan so that members and staff understand and support the implementation.
- Advice on bidding and supervision of maintenance and/or construction.
- Follow-through on grow-in and any other new programming.

A Master Plan may include a visual plan of the improvements. Equally important are the written details of budgets, costs, phasing considerations and impacts to the course. Impacts can include better course conditioning, strategy, playability, safety and pace of play.

IS A COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN ALWAYS NECESSARY?

No. Golf course architects recognize that while a Master Plan is a useful tool for overseeing all aspects of the health of a course, a more targeted approach may be appropriate. Budget, time, course condition and age...a myriad of reasons dictate the extent of planning that should be implemented.

The important concept to consider is that planning, whether in the form of a comprehensive Master Plan or a simple list of scheduled replacement of key components of a golf course, helps a course budget time, money and personnel to keep a facility in good condition.



“Items on a golf course simply wear out over time and will need periodic replacement to ensure optimum playing conditions.”

— TOM MARZOLF, ASGCA PAST PRESIDENT

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE TEAM MEMBERS?

The individuals listed should be included not only to help gather data and provide input for improvement, but to understand and help with the implementation of the plan and the “buy in” of the membership. Master Planning is best accomplished by a team of diverse individuals who each bring unique experience and expertise to the process.

Once the project is underway, the team needs to keep players informed about the benefits of the plan. A good communications program will help build enthusiasm and acceptance among the users of the facility.

HOW DOES THE TEAM EVALUATE THE COURSE?

The golf course undergoes a detailed hole-by-hole evaluation to determine what, if anything, needs renovation or maintenance. Here's what the evaluation typically includes:

- *Tees* – Tees are a prime target for improvement. Depending on the age of the course and the ability of players, tees may need to be rebuilt or added.
- *Fairways* – Fairway improvement may include adding or reshaping of mounds. Major grade work may be required to improve drainage, eliminate blind spots or to soften severe terrain. If tee boxes need to be added, fairway widths may need to be adjusted.
- *Bunkers* – Bunker evaluation can include review of placement, strategy, playability, the quality of sand and drainage, and also methods to minimize labor and other expenses.
- *Water hazards* – These features will be evaluated for visual impact, water quality and utility as storm water retention and irrigation sources.
- *Irrigation System* – This part of the course make-up will be closely scrutinized. Technology in the irrigation industry is constantly improving the efficiency and efficacy of systems, and the importance of responsible water use can't be overstated.
- *Greens* – The size, shape and cupping areas of each green will be evaluated. The age of the greens and the soil structure will be examined.
- *Landscape Treatment* – A long-range tree planting, pruning and removal schedule will be created. Proper tree placement results in more strategic shots, healthier turf and more pleasing aesthetics.

HOW DO I ESTABLISH A BUDGET FOR A MASTER PLAN?

A golf course architect will help develop budget options with the Planning Committee, and suggest the phasing schedule of the Master Plan with the available funds. Follow-up inspections are conducted during construction and at the completion of the project. This directs that capital outlays are spent wisely and that the work followed the Master Plan. At private clubs, remodeling programs are typically financed through borrowing, use of existing funds, capital funds, dues increases or special assessments. At municipal courses, funds can be generated with municipal bonds, a surcharge on daily green fees or existing revenue streams.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT BE PHASED?

Each course's plan should be phased according to individual circumstances. There is no rule of thumb to use when deciding whether to close a course and finish the work quickly, or to complete the required work over time. The preparation of the schedule is governed by budget and prioritization of problems which need immediate correction. If work is to be completed in phases, it will typically be confined to contiguous holes so that the construction area presents a minimum amount of inconvenience and interference.

WHAT ARE THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT?

The following services may be performed by a golf course architect during a Master Plan project:

- Site inspection
- Review the age and condition of course components
- Consultation with the Planning Committee to determine the scope of work, and develop budgets and timelines
- Preparation and presentation of preliminary Master Plan
- Preparation and presentation of final Master Plan
- Plans, specifications and instructions for all golf course construction work
- Bidding process and construction contract award
- Coordination of phasing of Master Plan

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

An experienced golf course architect can help you determine what kind of planning would benefit your course. The American Society of Golf Course Architects publishes a list of its members, all of whom have the experience to guide you through the planning process.

To obtain a list of ASGCA members, call (262) 786-5960, or visit the ASGCA website at www.asgca.org.

WHAT IS "LIFE CYCLE PLANNING?"

Life Cycle Planning is an important component of Master Planning which specifically looks at the components of a golf course and considers how long they will last. Having a time table in place for component replacement helps clubs budget and plan, not only for capital expenditures, but for disruption in play as well.

ASGCA has worked with a number of golf industry suppliers and experts from the Allied Associations of Golf to develop a timetable, included below, for clubs to consult when planning for replacement.

HOW LONG SHOULD VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF A GOLF COURSE LAST?

Following is a list of golf course components and a typical life span in years:

Item:	Life Expectancy / Years
Greens	15 to 30
Bunker Sand	5 to 7
Irrigation System (Varies by quality)	10 to 30
Irrigation Control System	10 to 15
P.V.C. Pipe (Under pressure)	10 to 30
Pump System	15 to 20
Cart Paths (Asphalt)	5 to 10 (Or longer)
Cart Paths (Concrete)	15 to 30 (Or longer)
Practice Range Tees	5 to 10
Tees	15 to 20
Corrugated Metal Pipes	15 to 30
Bunker Drainage Pipes	5 to 10
Mulch	1 to 3
Grass	Varies

Note: Component life spans can vary dramatically depending upon location of a golf course, quality of materials and many other factors. Golf courses are encouraged to work with their golf course architect, superintendent and others to assess the longevity of their particular course's components.

Resources:

Free ASGCA Publications:

- **The Golf Course Remodeling Process: Q&A**
- **Selecting Your Golf Course Architect: Q&A**
- **Golf Course Development Process: Q&A**
- **ASGCA Membership List**
- **Request for Proposal for Golf Course Architectural Services**

Other Books available from ASGCA:

Building a Practical Golf Facility

Michael Hurdzan, ASGCA
ASGCA (2005)

An Environmental Approach to Golf Course Development

Bill Love, ASGCA
ASGCA (2006)

ASGCA also offers the acclaimed educational symposium series, "Remodeling University: A Short Course to a Better Course." The series features an impressive panel of ASGCA member architects and other experts who offer insights into the planning and implementation of golf course remodeling projects.

For more information visit www.asgca.org or call ASGCA at 262-786-5960.



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