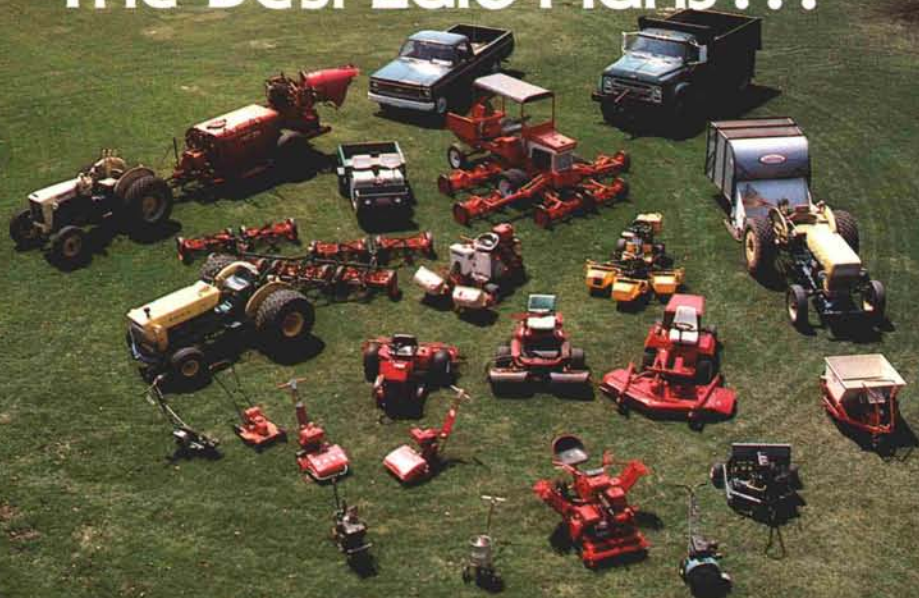


# The Best Laid Plans . . .



*Providing for an adequate supply of reliable, efficient equipment should be a major goal at every club, but it is one that is often found lacking.*

by **JAMES T. SNOW**, Agronomist, USGA Green Section

**I**MAGINE LIVING day to day with little regard for what may happen tomorrow, next year, or five years from now — a bleak existence, probably, with few alternatives to meet emergencies and no provisions made for maintaining your lifestyle.

Actually, however, we all strive to reach some goal. Can we say the same about golf clubs? It would probably be safe to say that most golf clubs do not have a satisfactory written plan or policy for running of the course and club. Very few successful businesses are developed or maintained without a complete long-range plan. Why should a club, with many employees and a significant budget, be different?

The plan should do much more than deal with capital improvements, although this aspect is certainly important. It should include equipment acquisition and replacement, architectural changes and specific plans for maintaining each area of the golf course. Even though the course may be in perfect shape, a written policy that outlines the successful operations of the program and which provides for future changes is necessary for continuity.

## THE PROBLEMS

There are many good reasons for developing a long-range plan. Consider the following problems which could occur unless provisions are made for dealing with them.

### Setting Standards

Perhaps the foremost problem is having members who agree about what kind of golf course they want and can afford. They give the superintendent hardly any direction for building a maintenance and development program, and yet when things go wrong the complaints roll in. This often results in unnecessary conflicts between the superintendent and the green committee which may ultimately cause the superintendent to lose interest. On the other hand, the average committee member has very little knowledge of what should be done to the course in terms of maintenance. He doesn't understand why things are done or what happens when problems occur. It is easy to see how frustration and conflict develop during difficult times as the members, by nature, begin to believe that the superintendent

doesn't know what he's doing. A long-range program could help resolve these problems, with the superintendent and committee combining to create a complete and comprehensive maintenance and development plan based on the wishes of the membership and the resources they have to offer. This is the first step in planning; it defines goals and sets financial guidelines.

**People Problems**

Most clubs go through a period when activities are presided over by a well-meaning but aggressive individual in a position of authority for a period and changes the course as a monument to his term. The changes may be new greens, tees, bunkers or plantings of trees that leave an indelible mark on the design of the course. Too often these changes don't fit the course theme and character. Design work is best left to a qualified architect, someone trained to protect the integrity of the original design and to bring out the best of what is available. Problems of this nature can be avoided with a long-range program which includes changes based on the advice of a golf course architect, with variations possible only upon the approval of the committee and/or architect.

**Changes in the Green Committee**

Many clubs have a policy that limits the green committee chairman to a brief term in office, usually two years. He then leaves the committee. As the new chairman takes office, he usually has little idea of what is involved in the total maintenance operation or what should be expected from the golf course superintendent. By the time he learns it is time to leave office, and the next fellow has to learn it all from scratch. This is difficult for both the superintendent and the green committee chairman.

On the other hand, the green committee chairman is responsible to the membership and therefore must be in frequent contact with the superintendent on course operations. Since usually he has no training in golf course management, friction may develop between him and the superintendent, who sometimes mistakenly believes the green com-

mittee chairman is questioning his knowledge and authority.

Here is where a long-range plan would benefit everyone. A comprehensive plan would list all course maintenance programs and their purpose. The green committee chairman, or any other member for that matter, could refer to the plan and immediately know what is being done and why. The superintendent would not have to spend so much time explaining and justifying his programs.

**Change of Superintendent**

The change of a golf course superintendent is something of a traumatic experience at many golf clubs. The selection committee, usually untrained in golf course operations, has nothing on which to base a decision except for intuition and seeing how each prospective superintendent sells himself. The successful applicant is not necessarily the most knowledgeable and the best qualified. With a comprehensive plan, however, the committee would be better able to determine the most qualified applicant. The committee would have a good idea of what to expect from the new superintendent, and with a complete record of past programs available to him, the new man would be in a good position to recommend positive changes based on past successes and failures.

**Serious Turf Problems**

Despite the excellence of their maintenance programs, even the best golf courses will suffer losses of turf under extreme conditions, usually because of the weather. This problem can be very frustrating for both the superintendent and for the golfers. Members can't understand how such a disaster can happen, and the superintendent is criticized, a sad commentary on the communications channels and public relations efforts at so many clubs today. This could be avoided with a long-range plan developed by the superintendent and the green committee. Such a plan, outlining the best steps to take to avoid such injury (and approved, of course, by the committee), would be of tremendous value if winter injury were to occur again.

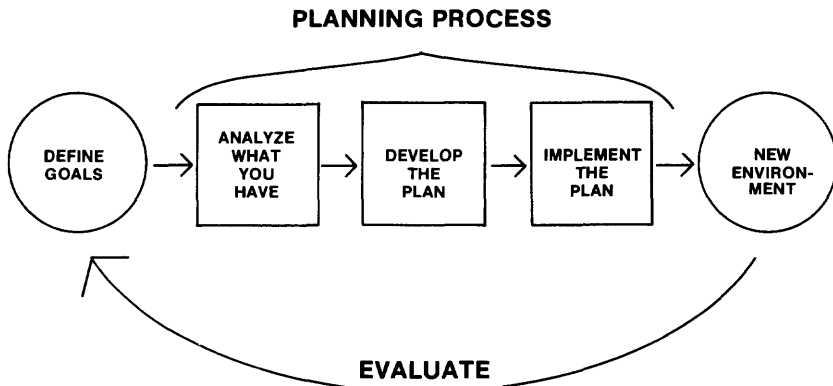


Figure 1. A schematic outline of the general planning process. It provides a systematic approach to problem solving and long-range planning.





*What kind of golf course does your membership want? A highly manicured, consistently uniform course will cost more than the "natural look."*

These are just a few of the problems golf courses throughout the country face each year that could be resolved with a long-range plan.

#### **THE PURPOSES OF A LONG-RANGE PLAN**

(A) To improve the physical facilities of the golf course in an orderly manner in order to make it more beautiful, functional, interesting and efficient.

(B) To promote the interests of the entire membership rather than of a few individuals or special groups within the club.

(C) To effect coordination and improve communications with regard to course development and maintenance, so as to avoid conflict, duplication and waste.

(D) To ensure that short-range actions are considered in the context of long-range goals.

(E) To bring professional and technical knowledge to bear on the decisions based on the wishes of the members. The professionals may be the superintendent, architect, agronomist or other consultants.

#### **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPING A PLAN?**

The responsibility for initiating and developing the plan may fall to the superintendent, green committee chairman, president, manager, golf professional or someone else in authority. Because the superintendent makes his living through the club and has perhaps the most to gain, he should pick up the ball and carry it. It must be stressed,

though, that input into the plan should come from many sources. The plan must represent the wishes of the entire membership.

Various clubs have different procedures for formulating the long-range plan. Often the superintendent and the green committee will work together, with the superintendent providing technical information and forming the basic plan based on desires and goals of the committee. Other clubs have a long-range planning committee, separate from the green committee. This L.R.P. committee may be more practical at clubs with a variety of activities, such as golf, swimming, tennis and platform tennis, where a long-range plan would include all these activities and the green committee would have only limited input.

Regardless of the mechanisms your club uses to form its plan, it will take hard work by many people to develop a comprehensive plan which will serve everyone's best interests. There must be committee members who are willing to sacrifice some time to provide the critical information on which the superintendent can base his program. The committee should be willing to invest some money so that the best technical information and evaluation can be provided. The superintendent will provide the bulk of this information, but others, such as architects, agronomists, engineers and other experts, should be consulted. No one person can be expert in every area of a long-range plan. Finally, there is no such thing as a complete and final plan; many changes will occur from day to day and year to year. Therefore, there must be a commitment by the superintendent and the green



committee to analyze and revise the plan on an annual basis, or else it will lose its value.

### THE BASICS OF A LONG-RANGE PLAN

A well-defined process has developed by which a plan is designed. It offers a systematic approach to meeting your long-range goals and needs, and it should act as a model for you as a long-range program is developed for your course.

Figure 1 shows the planning program broken down into several basic components. What this says is that (1) the goals and needs of the members are defined, (2) the planning process is carried out, and this results in (3), a new environment, the realization of your goals. The situation is then periodically evaluated, and this may lead to the development of new goals and plans. As you can see, the long-range plan is a continuous system which always provides for necessary changes.

#### Define Your Goals

This is a critical step in the planning program, for how can a plan be designed without knowing the members' goals and objectives? The superintendent may be of some assistance with this step, but here is where the members should provide the most input. After all, the club exists for their enjoyment, and they are paying the bill. The goals and objectives should be general in nature. For example, one goal might be "to produce tees which are adequately large, low cut, level and firm." Objectives should *not* be so specific as "the 7th and 16th tees should be rebuilt because they are too small." This specific problem will be picked up and resolved in the "Analysis" and "Design" steps.

As suggested in Figure 1, the planning process itself can be broken down into three general components:

#### Analyze What You Have

This is a time-consuming, step-by-step analysis of every phase of the operation. Included as general areas of interest are greens, tees, fairways, bunkers, landscape, equipment, buildings, irrigation, tennis courts, swimming pool, etc. Analyze each area and consider alternative solutions to the problems as you go along. For example, "the area over the irrigation line on the 12th tee is sunken and may be corrected by removing the sod, adding topsoil and replacing the sod so that it conforms to the remainder of the tee. Frequent topdressing would also resolve the problem but would take longer to complete."

The responsibility for the analysis phase should be shared by the superintendent and the committee, with the superintendent carrying the heavier load.

#### Develop The Plan

Based on your analysis of every phase of the golf course or club operation, the long-range plan should be developed. Specific plans for each project should be completed, along with comprehensive cost estimates and time schedules for their completion. An overall timetable for capital im-



provements and equipment acquisition must also be worked out, based on the resources of the club and allowing for who will be doing the work. Outside contractors often will do much of the construction work, though the superintendent and his crew may handle a large portion of this if time and labor allow.

Recommendations for regular maintenance procedures should be finalized and incorporated into the plan. If the members have been satisfied with the course to this point, these maintenance procedures will be nothing more than what has been done for years. However, now it will be written down as part of the long-range plan, to be referred to by the superintendent, committee members or others as the need arises.

#### Implement The Plan

The implementation phase simply involves following through with the plan as you have designed it.





*Strive for a dependable on-site supply of irrigation water to cope with drought or purchased water shortages.*

Regarding capital improvement work, details should be completed according to the time schedule, including the finalization of drawings, specifications, bids, etc. The decision as to who will do the work is again worth mentioning. Often the superintendent and his crew will be given the responsibility for such capital improvement work as building greens, tees, bunkers, bridges, installing cart paths, irrigation systems, etc. Too often they are expected to maintain the golf course in top condition and work on these projects at the same time, with no increase in the size of the crew. What often happens is that the appearance and playability of the golf course suffers, and the projects are not completed on schedule. This situation works out poorly for everyone involved, and so provisions must be made to increase the size of the crew during periods of capital improvement work, or else offer the work to contractors outside the club.

Some of the points which will be considered as you develop a long-range plan are illustrated below. This example of a long-range plan for greens is necessarily brief and omits many of the details which would ordinarily be included. However, it should give you the general idea of some of the points that have been discussed thus far. These goals could differ from club to club.

#### **A LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR GREENS**

##### **Goals**

- (1) To develop consistently fine greens with a high percentage of bentgrass, good density and fine texture.
- (2) To maintain uniform surfaces to the desired speed.
- (3) To maintain resilience in the soil so that a well hit golf shot will stay within a reasonable distance from the spot where it lands.

(4) To maintain the character of the architectural design in the mowing pattern of the surface outline.

### Analysis

- (1) All greens contain too much *Poa annua*.
- (2) Grain is a problem at certain times of the year.
- (3) There is no turf nursery for repair work.
- (4) Greens No. 3, 8, 9, 17 do not provide adequate surface drainage.
- (5) Shade and tree root competition result in weak turf on greens No. 7 and No. 17.
- (6) There is poor irrigation coverage on green No. 12.
- (7) Winter injury is an annual problem on green No. 17.

### Recommendations

- (1) As part of the routine maintenance program, the greens will be: (a) cut daily with the appropriate equipment at 3/16 inch, (b) aerated in the spring and fall to reduce soil compaction, (c) verticut lightly twice monthly, weather permitting, to prevent excessive grain, and (d) topdressed monthly with a material meeting USGA specs in order to produce a smooth, firm, resilient surface.
- (2) Overseed all greens with an appropriate bentgrass twice annually, at the time they are aerated, to increase the percentage of permanent grasses.
- (3) Establish a putting green nursery for the purpose of repairing the greens. It shall be maintained in the same manner as the other greens. Cost — \$1,000.
- (4) Provide adequate surface drainage on greens No. 3, 8, 9 by lifting sod, regrading subsurface and replacing sod.
- (5) Rebuild green No. 17 according to USGA specifications. Retain a golf course architect to redesign green. Approximate cost — \$13,500.
- (6) Relocate irrigation heads around No. 12 green to improve coverage.
- (7) Root-prune trees around greens every three years.

Again, this is only a brief outline of the type of plan you might develop for the greens. In addition, similar plans would then be designed for other areas of the course and other aspects of the total program. For example, you might have long-range plans for each of the following general topics:

Greens	Irrigation System
Tees	Drainage
Collars	Equipment
Fairways	Buildings
Roughs	Cart Paths and
Bunkers	Traffic Control
Trees and Landscape	Swimming Pool
Practice Areas	Tennis Courts

### THE BEST LAID PLANS . . .

Despite the best efforts of the superintendent and committee to bring everything together in a comprehensive plan, things will be left out and the

circumstances surrounding any particular situation may change with time. Therefore, the final and continuing phase of the long-range plan is to periodically evaluate the plan and see what it has produced. If things are not as they should be, new goals may need to be defined, new analyses made, and new recommendations incorporated into the plan. The evaluation phase is critical, and the best plan ever created would be worthless without it. A formal evaluation on an annual basis is a popular schedule, as this allows enough time for some progress to occur yet is frequent enough to keep the interest of the superintendent and committee.

Many things should be considered in the development of a long-range plan, and it certainly cannot be done overnight. It may take months or even years to create a comprehensive plan that serves the best interests of the club, its members and its staff. It gives the members the opportunity to set the standards for the maintenance and development of their course to best suit their skills and desires. It gives them a reference point as to what should be done on the course, but it also realistically limits their expectations according to what they can afford and what resources they provide for the superintendent and crew. The important point is that they understand the situation in advance so that disappointments and conflicts can be minimized. The long-range plan gives the superintendent a set of goals which seems real and definite, not an abstract cloud of complaints and compliments from several hundred individual members. It leaves the responsibility of setting standards and finding resources to the committee of members, where it should be. It eliminates many potential areas of conflict, some of which could find the superintendent's job on the line.

The long-range plan offers valuable dividends to everyone at a golf course. It takes a good deal of hard work to create, but what item of value doesn't? It is something that every club should develop.

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