

Things To Do Before Contacting A Golf Course Architect

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ASKED MY VIEWS on the subject of things to do before contacting a golf course architect, I could think of no organization that over the last 10 years has had as much exposure to this topic as the Southern California Golf Association, through its own organizational objectives, and inquiries from many miscellaneous clients.

A week rarely goes by that we are not asked for advice or assistance in buying an existing golf course facility or building a new one.

The National Golf Foundation states its research shows we need to build one



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golf course a day for the next 11 years to meet the demand of the expected growth of golf in this country.

In considering the development of a golf facility, one should carefully analyze the reasons behind it. This is a very big business, and we have often seen emotion play a major part in someone's becoming involved in the operation and/or ownership of a golf facility. These people love the game, and they want to be associated with it in some way. It is unbelievable the number of people who get started through this emotion, and then make horrendous mistakes because they have no foun-

The 11th hole at the Captain's Course (Massachusetts). Before . . .



During



dation for making good business decisions.

I feel I can help save some future developer from making foolish mistakes. With careful planning and through sound fiscal management, the developer can produce a better product for the user of the golf course.

While each golf course project is unique, a thread of logical steps runs through the fabric of any sound project. Through our experience we've defined 10 logical steps to follow.

To analyze these 10 steps properly, you must realize that no single individual is capable of interpreting all the criteria that must be considered in developing a facility. In my opinion, it takes a team comprised of four types of individuals, each of whom contributes financial, legal, construction, or golf course operation knowledge.

Since this is a large project, it calls for many varied types of decisions. I once told my wife the development of a golf course creates many problems. She quickly informed me that you have no problems, you have challenges. Well, a

lot of challenges lie ahead when you analyze the golf course business.

First the committee must determine the type of facility to build. There are three kinds of facilities. The first is primarily a land development or housing project. It often begins with a public or semiprivate golf course that is eventually converted to a private course within a housing development. The second type of facility is a pure public course. The third type is a public golf course tied in with a lodge or hotel, which would place this facility in the category of a resort.

From these three types of facilities, I have focused on the pure public golf facility.

Second, the committee must determine the number of holes to build. This discussion will be limited to 18, 27, or 36 holes. Our financial analyses have shown that 27 holes is the most lucrative facility, considering land and maintenance. You will do better financially with 36 holes, but not that much better than you do with 27 holes. You must therefore evaluate land availability and

cost, and review what you wish to accomplish.

Third, the committee must evaluate the site. Various items must be addressed in deciding on a given site.

Some of the most prominent items to review:

- The access of water, in the form of domestic, well water, and effluent.
- The availability of utilities such as power, gas, and sewers.
- Access roads and secondary roads.
- Earth moving. This can be extremely expensive, and you must determine if you can balance the earth moving on site.
- The quality of the soil.
- Environmental concerns. This should be reviewed carefully to find sensitive areas such as marsh lands, coastal areas, and areas of exotic plants or animals.
- Other environmental factors, such as heat and wind.
- Climate concerns of the area.
- The source of players is important. Are players located in the immediate area, or is this site in an outlying area

And after, with superintendent Dave Robinson.



where development will eventually grow around it?

After reviewing all these considerations, the final step is to tie up the property. Do not negotiate for your site without some sort of a letter of intent that will protect you for a given period while you review the other challenges and decide if this is truly a viable project.

Fourth, and most important, develop a financial analysis. This to me is the key to the entire project. It should be created through the combined input of your four committee personnel. The financial analysis study should be placed on a computer, allowing easy updating of information and easy access for computations. Roughly 13 schedules should be included in the analysis. In brief, these schedules include cost of construction and financing charges, projected operating expenses, and projected income. The financial analysis study should be based from the first year through as many years as you wish to project. The financial analysis should indicate whether the project is a go or a no-go, and is a vital document for securing financing.

Fifth, select a legal firm. Before selecting one, you will be able to obtain some basic legal opinions from your legal committee representative. In selecting a legal firm, however, choose one that is easy to work with, that writes very simple and clear legal documents, and is involved with only the legal, not the business phases of your operation. Lawyers specialize in many areas. Select a firm with real estate law experience.

Sixth, it is very important to determine the type of course or courses you will build. We have selected the public golf course. Consider first and foremost a design that will lend itself to reasonable maintenance costs.

I am a big believer that your golf course superintendent should provide input in this area. Without unduly restricting the creative freedom of the golf course architect, the superintendent should be involved in the review of the design of the proposed facility.

The playing difficulty of the design is another feature that must be considered. It is no secret that a public golf

course must accommodate a maximum number of rounds, whatever that figure is, as determined by the financial feasibility study. Speed of play is very important, not only as it pertains to the number of rounds played in a day, but also for the personal satisfaction of the golfer. The playing difficulty and speed of play have a definite bearing on return play. In operating a public facility, you must count on return play.

In constructing 36 holes, or for that matter, 27 holes, I strongly recommend that the three nines — or the 18s in the case of a 36-hole facility — be designed for similar playing difficulty. You do not want a player to come in for his starting time and hear him say, "Oh no, you didn't put me on the South Course again." The facility should be so designed that it would make no difference to a player which combinations of courses he plays.

Cart paths must be considered in the design, and there's obviously a lot of controversy concerning mandatory use of cart paths. Pay attention to curbs around tees and greens to ease turf maintenance.

Seventh, obtain a good feasibility study or market analysis study. This study reviews information such as population trends, comparable facilities, and income trends. In brief, this study advises the developer of the potential market for the type of facility proposed.

The market analysis and the financial feasibility study are important in obtaining a source of financing. Select a reputable firm, one that is recognized by financial institutions, to perform the market feasibility study. In the hotel business, the firm of Laventhal & Horwath is such a company. A comparable type of firm should be sought in the golf course market.

Eighth, financing. Let's face it, golf courses are something of an enigma to financiers. They don't understand them, and they aren't sure how to appraise them. The market analysis and the financial feasibility study will help the potential lender. The governmental approval process places a high importance on your strength to finance the project. Governmental agencies frown on developments that are abandoned for lack of financing.

Ninth is what I term the governmental process. This centers primarily around the selection of an individual or an organization that will guide you through the process of filing the proper applications for the development, through the hearings, and through final approvals by the local governmental agencies. Select this individual or firm carefully. The selected party will in turn suggest the other consultants who will be needed, such as civil engineering and environmental consultants.

Tenth and last, select a building architect. The committee member who has construction experience, together with the committee member who has golf course operation experience, can determine the type of clubhouse and maintenance facility you should design. The key here is to build the type of clubhouse that is functional for both employees and players, and a maintenance facility that is efficient and functional.

The golf course superintendent must play a major role in advising the architect on the design of the maintenance facility. In addition to discussing the proposed building with the golf course superintendent, call on your regional office of the USGA Green Section for assistance. USGA agronomists have been extremely helpful in providing information from regional and national sources.

In preparing the design of the SCGA's proposed facilities, I have visited many new maintenance buildings. In most instances I was appalled by the lack of design efficiency. The superintendent should provide the building architect with the majority of the design concept. The clubhouse and maintenance facility costs should be included in the financial feasibility studies.

The golf course superintendent should also be asked to guide the committee on the size of the staff and the equipment needed to perform his operation.

Once the golf course committee has answered all of the ten challenges, and has determined that this is a feasible project, the next step is to select a golf course architect who fits the requirements of the project. Finally, be sure your golf course superintendent is on board before you begin construction.