

# Blue Ash, Ohio Management Innovation

by Michael J. Hurdzan, Ph. D.



lem of rapid development and escalating land prices, to the extent that prospects for preserving significant open spaces in public ownership were becoming critically slim. Moreover, the City had been less than successful in encouraging private developers to preserve open spaces and to respect trees, hillsides, ravines and other natural features of the land.

## Development strategy

The development strategy involved a public/private partnership, and a private developer was selected in January of 1978. By acquiring this site, the City could through careful planning (1) assure preservation of a significant amount of public open space, (2) provide a golf course to serve recreation needs in the community and (3) show that development of homesites can be done profitably without destroying important natural features of the land, in hopes that this effort would serve as a model for future private developments in the area. In addition, the plan developed by the City allowed for upgrading the overall residential image of the community by intermingling expensive homesites with a golf course and naturally wooded areas on the site, thereby offsetting or balancing the current image of the community as being one having only very few high quality residential areas.

The City purchased the 273 acres for \$5,495 per acre and sold 103 acres to a private developer for \$21,845 per acre. With the land, the City sold an approved development plan, complete engineering drawings for streets and utilities and the amenity of an adjacent golf course. The return of \$2.25 million that the City received for the residential land offset 59.3% of the City's total project cost, without which the program would not have been feasible. The developer also bought with the land a legal obligation to implement the project totally in accordance with the City's approved plan, including a design guide, a design review process controlled by the City and development standards to assure environmental preservation. As a land owner rather than a review agency for private development proposals, the City can be and has been far more successful in environmental management and resources conservation. At this state both the City and the

developer believe that the cooperative or partnership approach taken in this program will mutually be beneficial to each and are hopeful that it may well serve as an incentive if not a model for future co-ventures between the public and private sectors.

## The plan

A quote from Vic Suhm in a presentation made at the October 20, 1977 public meeting during which this program plan was adopted is relevant. "In developing this plan, we viewed the site as a whole, in its entirety. Great concern was given to all of the natural features of the land; the goal of the plan is to allow development which disturbs very minimally the existing natural features of the land. There are topographical changes as great as 100 feet on the site; there are stream beds, ravines, rock outcroppings and tree groves on areas throughout the property.

We view all of these natural features of the land as assets which enhance site design and project amenity; we do not see them as obstacles which must be bulldozed away. Our goal is to encourage development which is sensitive to the natural surroundings. Creative building siting and innovative architectural design are possible and are encouraged by the site plan. The intent is for the end product to represent a more interesting and attractive appearance and actual living environment than are frequently found in typical residential subdivisions."

The plan achieves the results described above; the program is well into the implementation phase now and the end product will undoubtedly reflect these results. Especially for smaller communities and very likely for any community, this program represents an outstanding example of innovative environmental management and resource conservation.

It has resulted in an overall upgrading of community image by (1) receiving extensive, favorable publicity, (2) implementing an aesthetically pleasing land use plan and creating a superior living environment, (3) providing with the help of private funding a first rate public golf course and (4) upgrading the residential quality of the community.

The large amount of open spaces  
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For a city of 12,000 to win an international award for Management Innovation by providing a superior eighteen hole golf course, 15 acre nature preserve, tasteful clubhouse, outstanding maintenance facility and equipment, and have 60% of the cost paid by land sales to private developers requires perfection in planning and implementation. The credit for this perfection belongs to the City of Blue Ash, Ohio located just north of Cincinnati, and its youthful, dynamic City Manager Victor Suhm. Vic, as he is more commonly known, has a plaque in his office with a quote written by George Bernard Shaw but attributed to Robert Kennedy that says "Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not?" It was this philosophy that allowed him to convert a dream into reality by using a sound planning process. His process is no secret and it can be duplicated by any small town or city in a similar circumstance.

Before 1976, the City of Blue Ash found itself with the common prob-



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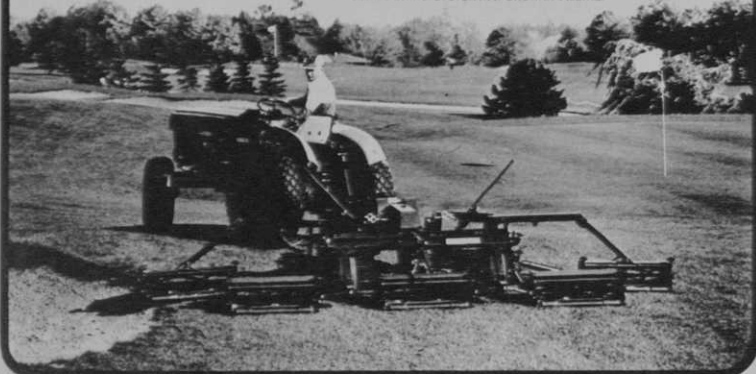
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preserved in permanent, public ownership represents a significant conservation of natural resources; certainly land is a finite resource, and that which has existed in open space is rapidly giving way to development. The program has represented a closing of the gap which previously existed in the community in unmet recreational opportunities, by providing for an outstanding golf course and a nature area for relaxing and picnicking. Finally the program provides a prime example of public/private cooperation which is mutually beneficial and which can serve as a model for future co-ventures.

### The golf course

The course has the look and feel of a fine country club. Golf Course Superintendent Charles Engster, who was hired before construction began because of his previous course building background, saw to it that every detail of the Golf Architects plan was followed.

Charlie literally lived on the job but very few times was he ever in an adversary situation with Mr. Charles Layton, job superintendent for Salyer's Golf Course Construction. Actually the harmony and communications established between the contractor and the superintendent permitted the job to progress despite very adverse weather conditions. "All I had to do was to mention areas that I thought were deficient and he saw to their completion."

The golf course superintendent was important as another inspector, for the course stretches for a mile in length as it traverses 150 acres of widely varying soil types, vegetative cover, topography and rock conditions. "We had a few unforeseen problems as does any project" states Engster, "but we just got together with the Architects and Layton to develop a workable solution."

The golf course is a par 72 with a middle yardage of 6211 that can be stretched to 6643 yards from the back tees to as short as 5125 yards from the front tees. Bill Mayer, formerly of nearby Kenwood Country Club, is now Head Pro at the Blue Ash golf course, and looked forward to the July opening. "We had some erosion over winter caused by excessive rains so we decided to let the course mature until mid-summer" says Mayer, "but when the course opens it should be enjoyable for every class of golfer. From the back tees it is as tough as any course in Southern Ohio and from the front tees it will provide the same enjoyment to the less accomplished player. □