



Making The Right Renovation Decisions?

The dictionary defines renovation as "a restoration to an earlier condition or to impart new vigor to; to revive." This is precisely what is sweeping the nation, as more golf courses undergo a complete or partial renovation in an attempt to meet the expectations of today's golfers. These expectations may include but are not limited to faster green speeds, lower mowing heights, and better playability.

The planning process can get very exciting. It is easy to become enamored of grandiose proposals, but be especially wary of that. The infrastructure of the entire facility must be carefully considered before deciding how quickly to implement a renovation program. Too often the money needed for a new maintenance facility, equipment replacement, or irrigation and drainage systems is used to finance the renovation. This can have disastrous long-term effects on the financial health of the course.

In the case of multi-year programs, it is usually advisable to begin the implementation phase slowly to aid in golfer acceptance. "Don't bite off more than you can chew," is sound advice. Similarly, choose the easiest and least controversial projects for the initial phase in order to get the clientele excited about the program and to garner their support. Success breeds success, and a failure in the initial phase can compromise future projects.

In cases where the plan is not controversial and the need for the work is well understood, often the best course of action is to implement the plan more quickly. Biting the bullet and performing the work in one or two phases causes more disruption in the short term, but far less in the long term. It is best to perform all putting green and/or regrassing work in the same season so that all of the turf is at the same stage. Building or regrassing greens piecemeal complicates the maintenance program because different sets of greens are at different stages in development and require different maintenance programs. This also causes greater inconsistencies in playability. Furthermore, putting green construction work tends to be more controversial in nature. Few courses ever complete a putting green reconstruction project on a piecemeal basis. Generally, it is far more economical to do all putting green construction work at the same time. Once the green light is given, many decisions must

be made. Regardless of the scope of work, these decisions must be made with careful thought and precise planning.

In today's golfing market, many renovations take place every year. To aid in the decision making process, a survey was taken of 17 area Golf Course Superintendents who have recently completed a renovation. They were asked about many of the decisions made during their renovation. As one would expect, there were numerous good decisions, some not so good, and some valuable numbers on what grass varieties were used. The following is what they reported:

When asked to **describe three of the most interesting or beneficial things one has seen or experienced in a renovation**, the three most popular responses were as follows:

- 1) The overwhelming positive responses from the golfers has been one of the most interesting and beneficial things. The golfers enjoyed the new look of the golf course. More respect was given to those who maintain the course after the members were able to see the hard work and perseverance necessary to complete a project of such magnitude.
- 2) The use of covers on seeded greens helped control seed movement from heavy rain. In cases of cold weather, the cover acted as a greenhouse and absorbed heat from the sun allowing the grass seed to germinate better.
- 3) The ability to make improvements to drainage, irrigation, and other traditionally problem areas was a great benefit. Since the course was under construction anyway, it was the perfect time to make other corrections as well.

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Covers can only do so much against a heavy rain on this green. This picture shows the uncontrollable aspects of a renovation that weather created – washing away and exposing irrigation pipes and gravel layers.

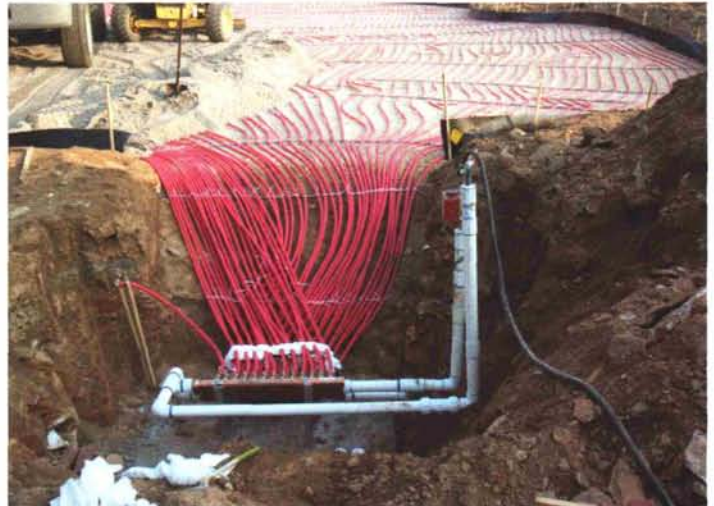
As we all know, hindsight is 20/20. Referred to as mistakes by some, this article will refer to decisions gone bad as things you would do differently the second time around.

When asked to **list three of the most significant changes you would make the second time around**, the three most popular responses were:

- 1) As in the previous response, those who missed the opportunity to make any corrections in drainage and irrigation reported this as the biggest mistake. Many times this was

ascribed to “tunnel vision.”

- 2) Having too many individuals involved in the overall decision making. Many times work was complicated and planning became inconsistent due to input from more than just the key decision makers.
- 3) Poor Planning – contingency budgets were either non-existent or not adequately planned. Seeding dates and opening dates were also juggled due to the golfing calendar, thus providing less than optimal dates for a successful renovation.



Extensive planning goes into a hydronics system such as the one show in the picture



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When a Golf Course Superintendent takes on the task of a golf course renovation, one of the most studied and researched decisions is what varieties of grass to introduce. With television putting high expectations in the minds of most golfers, the decision about grass varieties is of major importance. The choice must insure that the grass can withstand demanding playing conditions. Rolling and mowing at lower heights than ever before puts a great deal of stress on any grass plant. One must be sure the grass selected can withstand the stress applied.

The chart below illustrates which grasses the surveyed superintendents chose for different areas of the golf course. Keep in mind, that growing conditions may differ due to many factors (sand/soil, trees, lakeside, etc.), but the overall growing region remains the same.

AREA	VARIETY	% CHOOSING THIS VARIETY
Greens	A Series (A1/A4)	98%
	G Series	2%
Tees	Penneagle/Pennlinks	75%
	Penncross	20%
	Others	5%
Fairways	Penneagle/Pennlinks	70%
	L-93	20%
	Others	10%

("Others" include *low mow blues* and other bentgrass varieties)

In the Chicagoland area, a Golf Course Superintendent managing a renovation can usually complete a project in eight to ten months. This of course is if the club is willing and able to close for the entire period. In some cases, closing the doors is not feasible or is simply unwanted. Doing a project in phases, so the golfers have minimal inconvenience, is an option, but it comes with side effects, most notably inconsistency.

More times than not, a common sense approach to any renovation project will help you achieve great results. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the existing golf course and determining if the proposed changes will solve those problems is a great starting point. A few stakes, some paint, and a creative imagination can help provide a clearer picture of the proposal.

The Chicagoland area boasts some of the greatest Golf Course Superintendents in the Nation. The information presented above is backed up by countless years of experience and knowledge in the turf grass industry. Whether you are planning a renovation or have completed a renovation, now you know how your decisions compare.. **-OC**

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