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## ALLOWANCES AND CONTINGENCIES

Long ago, a contractor turned in a bid that included an additional line item for \$50,000. He labeled it “stuff I probably forgot.” I liked his honesty, even if his high-price and non-conforming bid cost him that project.

Even if your architect draws detailed plans, you can expect field changes in your renovation.

There are many different ways to get a golf course built – the main methods are using plans and specifications to design or designing in the field. Generally, detailed plans closely quantify most work items, including green size, bunker size, etc. before construction. Field design firms try to predict quantities based on past projects.

Most projects follow the proverbial desire for “champagne on a beer budget.” Thirty six years of experience has taught me to be smart and plan on spending 10-20 percent more than the client really wants to get the product they really want and need.

Depending on how unique the final design and your site conditions are, there is greater potential for inaccurate scope of work.

I once saw a field designed project that had estimated 100,000 square feet of sand bunkers. A field decision to add a massive fairway bunker between two holes used 120,000 sq. ft. of the 100,000 sq. ft. sand allowance. Despite an attempt to reduce sand by the addition of several turf islands, the

owner had to find money for about twice the sand originally budgeted.

But, no matter how much prior planning your architect puts in, there are always field changes for a variety of reasons. While we attempt horse trading among items to balance budgets, many field changes require more money. Causes include:

- Inaccurate topo or base maps, making accurate, detailed design nearly impossible.
  - Inaccurate “As-Builts” are the exception rather than the rule. Most courses seem to have “a guy” who knows where everything is, but no maps confirming it, so unknown conditions are very common on renovations, where we often find old and forgotten infrastructure, resulting additional work the Contractor couldn’t possibly have bid.
  - Many field “additions” are really “put backs” resulting from overly optimistic “value engineering” in the design process to meet a specific budget.
  - Most clients don’t fully understand plans or budgets, and things always look different to them in the field in summer than on a spreadsheet in winter.
  - Some clients expect (or add) non construction items like equipment, tee signs, etc. to the established construction budget, effectively reducing it below what was anticipated.
- So, it is always wise to:
- Include a contingency fund of at least 10 percent. 15 percent is better, and 5 percent is too skinny.
  - Don’t publicize the contingency. Architects and contractors tend to find ways to spend it...
  - Save as much as possible until the end of the project, when potential for unexpected costs seem unlikely, and use it for more sod to ease the grow in process.

It is also wise to include small allowance items in the base budget. For instance, years of small change orders for drainage additions make me include a standard \$5,000-\$10,000 drainage allowance line item in the bid form. It is used mostly around cart paths, planned on grade, but often built even one inch too high or low, causing drainage issues.

I have had clients “prioritize” drainage problems that are all equally unacceptable. Once a contractor is on site, it is a great time to do more, since the unit prices for additional work are lower than bringing a contractor back for many little projects.

Other typical over runs include:

**Irrigation.** Some typical problems include:

- You can’t grow grass without irrigation, and any time holes are relocated, it usually takes more heads to get new areas cover and sometimes more heads to maintain perfect triangular spacing.
- When trying to reuse existing heads to save money, we find 10-25 percent of them will be unsuitable to re-use, but never know for sure until they are dug out.

**Cart paths.** We usually want more cart path (and curb) in the field, whether to get golfers closer to tees and greens, provide maintenance and beverage cart short cuts, or connections to restrooms. As with drainage, it is always tempting to add more... and more... no matter how many lineal feet are called for.

And, it often seems like the last section of existing path we tie into is in poor condition, or not perfectly located. It often becomes obvious when installing connecting dowels

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based and the block zoning of the small sprinklers watered the tees top and a great deal of surrounding tee area that was both sloped and a heavy soil all together. The tees were mostly elevated and therefore windy. The trees were very dry from a combination of poor sprinkler spacing and small nozzles that allows the water to be easily blown around.

Lastly, we visited a small practice facility operated by the Columbia Federation of Golf. This inexpensive public facility consisted of several practice putting greens, a driving range, a golf school and a par-3 course. The facility was also being used as an educational facility to teach several interns about golf course maintenance. The irrigation on this facility was very rudimentary, consisting of residential products with some automatic (not working) and manual irrigation. There was a small pump system and not enough water. But again with the kikuyugrass it was in pretty good shape.

Like most countries, golf in Columbia is very diverse with old established clubs and new resort courses. Qualified help is an issue and maintenance practices are behind the times. The use of chemicals and drainage and irrigation systems are rare due to availability and cost, but the golf course superintendents and foreman are eager to learn. During the seminars there were lots of questions both in the classroom and out in the field.

I have been to a lot of high end golf courses in the United States over the years and many private country clubs with lots of amenities. The Lagartus Club in Bogota where the seminar was held is very high end and with your typical country club services including: golf, swimming, tennis, squash, bowling, fitness center, practice area, short game area and several restaurants. However, Lagartus had an amenity I had never seen attached to a country club before. That was competitive water skiing on their irrigation lake, complete with a marked out course and a scoring building on the shore. Something to bring up as a possibility at your next board meeting? **GCI**



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from new path to the old, when the old section breaks up, so we try the next section... and sometimes the next section, etc.

**Turf.** On most renovations, we try to minimize turf destruction and replanting. This cuts cost, but leaves noticeable seams between old to new turf. Once seen, many prefer new turf be taken out to logical stopping points for consistency. Also, I can't recall a project where everyone didn't want more sod than was specified.

Most projects follow the proverbial desire for "champagne on a beer budget." Thirty six years of experience has taught me to be smart and plan on spending 10-20 percent more than the client really wants to get the product they really want and need. Very few projects get built exactly as per plan, and most changes increase costs over causing "pleasant" budget surprises.

Conscientious project teams continually balance between construction cost, project quality, and future maintenance or additional construction costs. They also realize that things just tend to come up and plan for the unplanned. **GCI**

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2013, according to the Census and Department of Commerce statistics.

Consider two additional important impacts on golf:

- Golf participation will increase in areas with a growing concentration of homebuyers above the age of 50.
- Market radials (the distance radius that feeds a facility) are shrinking due to over-supply of courses.

How should those of us in the golf business react to the changes in the housing market?

- Monitor housing trends that favor new construction and neighborhood resurgence in your area and market to new residents.
- Because of the shorter drive-time to the nearest course, loyalty programs that reward repeat business have new importance. Evaluate yours to make sure it's appealing to new customers and rewarding to your business.
- Research your close-in market to understand its demographics and see where your facility makes the strongest connection with residents. Identify your facility's strengths and most attractive features. Then focus your communications to take best advantage of your marketing budget.

The rising tide of a stronger housing economy may not lift all boats, but it can lift yours if you plan ahead. **GCI**