



By Bob Lohmann

Instead of creating a master plan for course renovations, a better approach is to compose smaller, more attainable projects to tackle.

Sometimes, maybe without trying, we stumble upon a bit of insight whose truth is reinforced over and over again by others who may have stumbled upon it at the same time.

This happened late last year when I wrote about renovation scheduling for GCI (Best Laid Plans, December 2012). In this article, I talked about the need for superintendents to formulate asset management plans, as opposed to master plans, so they might efficiently tackle small projects year to year, instead of saving/planning for big, overarching renovations that just aren't so feasible in today's golf economy.

Since that article, we've been approached by about half a dozen projects that are direct results of this kind of asset management planning. In some cases, superintendents and other management types have taken the master plans they have, or had, and simply chopped them up into more manageable pieces that can be scheduled over the course of years.

Maybe someone out there is listening. Or just maybe they independently recognized the same common-sense principals we did.

Either way, allow me to tick off three such projects in brief detail to provide some context. I'm confident their examples will strike superintendents as just the sort of efficient planning they can realize at their own facilities.



PINE VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB, FORT WAYNE, IND.

We had developed a master plan for this private club in the mid-1990s, and much of that plan was implemented. Since that time, however, there's been an ownership change at PVCC. It's a new ownership group, actually, consisting of 25 stakeholders, and there are naturally 25 different ideas about what renovation/upgrade work should be done going forward.

The superintendent asked us to help him organize a plan of attack. He didn't call it an asset management plan (AMP), but that's exactly what it was – a hit list of projects, some of which were never implemented from the old master plan and some which have become a priority in the 17 years since we last worked here. In fact, we're completing

the first of these AMP projects this winter: expanding a pond on the 4th hole and using the resulting fill to create bunkering and mounding where PVCC had lost some Ash and evergreen trees.

The funding here is worth noting. Each of these projects has a price tag ranging from less than \$10,000 up to \$100,000. These are good target figures for supers mulling an AMP. These smaller chunks of money can more easily be budgeted.

We now have five to 10 projects in the AMP pipeline at Pine Valley, many of which will be handled by in-house crews as a matter of extended maintenance services. It's hard to argue that this is a very practical way to target, tackle and fund a series of projects that, taken together, could not be tackled and funded in the foreseeable future.



MT. HAWLEY COUNTRY CLUB, PEORIA, ILL.

We have a long history working at this club, as well. We renovated all 18 greens back in 1997, based on a master plan we had done for the club in the early 1990s. Still, because



The 2nd hole of Lake Carroll Golf Course, Lake Carroll, Ill. before (left) and after the renovation (right).



The 9th hole of Lake Carroll Golf Course, Lake Carroll, Ill., before (left) and after the renovation (right).

of the catch-all nature of most master plans, there was plenty that never got done.

The new superintendent at Mt. Hawley, Josh Cull, has identified the need to upgrade the irrigation system, but he smartly came to us this winter so we might go through the old master plan, pluck the jobs that never got done, and create an asset management plan that prioritizes and integrates irrigation needs with other needs (bunker renovation and relocation foremost among them). The AMP we've devised is laid out like a giant menu, giving the club the choice to eat light (small projects) or dive into an entrée, depending on their budgetary appetite. Right now, the latter is appealing, but we're still working through the details.

Another word here about cost: At both PVCC and Mt. Hawley, we're working to keep costs low by enabling the client to execute big chunks of work in-house, where we essentially project manage the work. Back in the 1990s, course-construction firms rarely countenanced the sacrifice of revenue in this manner, mainly because money was abundant and they weren't asked to. But these are different times. Supers

should be sure to explore these options when they are pricing out AMP component projects. It can be a huge money-saver.



LAKE CARROLL GOLF COURSE, LAKE CARROLL, ILL.

Truth be told, a lot of our philosophy on AMPs was forged in doing work for this northwest Illinois club. We did a master plan for Lake Carroll GC in 2006, with the intention at one point of tackling the whole thing in three to six \$250,000 to \$1,000,000 phases. We completed Phase I, and then the downturn killed that idea (along with the master plan as a viable planning mechanism, in many cases). However, since that time, we have continued to phase a whole host of meaningful annual upgrades – 18 green-surrounds renovations, in three phases; a new 8th hole; a driving range expansion; two new greens.

Since Phase I, we've never spent more than \$125,000 in any one year, but the impact on the facility has been huge – while the footprint each fall (when we invariably tackle these projects) remains small and unobtrusive.

That's the beauty of the asset management plan. Each year the superintendent can adjust his or her priorities according to need and available funding.

LCGC also proved, to us anyway, that the in-house construction model was viable (with the right crews and oversight). Superintendent Tim Throop and his crews do their own rototilling, tree clearing and they buy their own materials, including installation of some of them. This saves them money and they're so good at it now, it's made our work pretty darned efficient: We come in later in the fall and get all our work done in three to four weeks.

There's one thing that has remained utterly constant from the old Master Plan Era through to today's emerging Asset Management Plan Era: Plans change. You'll notice that all three of the AMPs cited here include projects from previous master plans that never got done. The clients at Lake Carroll have long wanted to improve their 17th hole; our original idea was to lengthen it to a par 5 and shorten the 18th.

We held on to that idea as long as possible but realized this fall that it would never get done. So we elected to update the surrounds of the existing 17th green instead, and will look to improve the fairway and tee layout as a future phase of the AMP.

That's the beauty of the asset management plan. Each year the superintendent can adjust his or her priorities according to need and available funding. Hell, he or she can revisit those every day, if need be. We all recognize that courses need to reinvest to protect and enhance course value. The AMP lends some much needed flexibility to this process. **GCI**

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