



# The Five Year Plan

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

One of our projects this past winter was to develop a five year plan for this golf course. Hey!!! What a wonderful idea!!! A written plan to help us achieve our goals. A veritable blueprint for short term operations and long term strategies!! On the surface...a really good idea! A five year plan...oh great!!

Now, don't get me wrong...written reports are a great way to exercise the mind and help organize lots of interrelated thoughts. These reports usually fall into the category of 'necessary evil'...sort of like toilet paper...with the paper being critically necessary to do the job...but with the distinct possibility that this paper could be used for a better purpose?? So, suffice it to say that I had some doubts as I headed down the road of writing a five year plan for this place.

Hmmm...would this be...could this be... the same type of five year plan that gets forgotten after six months? Or maybe...the kind of 'sixty month plan' that

is never taken seriously...never funded properly...and too often changed at a whim?

When it was first suggested, it must be admitted that there was a bit of 'eye rolling' going on...as in...the kind that used to happen when you were getting lectured by your seventh grade English teacher for being artistically creative with your workbook.

When these sorts of things are first suggested...everybody and their brother jumps on the bandwagon...with the first question pertaining as to why don't we have this sort of thing already?? To which I mentally reply...to our always correct consultant... "*you are so right...how have we ever survived??*"

The second question usually revolves around the idea that we need this document...immediately!!!...and how many hours will be needed to research this and get back to our illustrious committee with a full-blown



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report?? To which I mentally reply... *"later today, of course...no problem...what a crock...!"*

The last question is always one I ask myself... *"I think that I've been here before, but I'm not sure! Haven't I been through this sort of planning session before...in some past life?"*

Anybody with any golf course experience whatsoever knows that planning...short term planning, long term planning, business planning, budget planning, or whatever type of planning...is absolutely necessary...but usually absolutely frustrating!

The initial frustration comes with the fact that past planning sessions and reports by this superintendent have born relatively little fruit...as evidenced by the occasional discovery of old written reports or recommendations that didn't even come close to the implementation stage.

I find it very humorous to scan back and open up old computer files that are still installed...especially if you've inherited someone else's computer. Then, the chuckles come down both ways...rereading old reports from a younger self or some other dude who had the same enthusiastic intentions and really did expect to be taken seriously! Lots of information in there prepared by yours truly in days gone by...good now for only the laughs as a guy rereads with a touch more wisdom those items for which he was once so ardent and enthusiastic!

The computer unit that I'm typing on today also has a C: file mixed full of memos, reports, and recommendations from long departed managers...sort of an echo from their days here. Lots of good information and recommendations in these files also...depending on the quality of the author. There are also lots of unfulfilled and forgotten items...as are the managers who worked so hard in preparing them.

Annual operating budget planning is usually our best blueprint here at NCCC...is the easiest to prepare...and is the most relevant. So, this form of short term planning is essential and not the focus of this diatribe. Like any small business...this golf course depends heavily on our short term budget planning.

Long range business growth planning is something with which I'm pretty unfamiliar. I've never been a full-time small business owner...but can somewhat imagine that a good, long term business plan is essential to the survival of any business. The differences between simple employed managers and business owners are many...with one of the most telling being that business owners are 100% responsible for the success or failure of their plan/business...while superintendents/managers usually are in a position to recommend and implement only.

What captures my attention and makes me chuckle are the requests for **long range planning reports** usually entitled "Everything That You Can Think Of That

Needs To Be Accomplished At This Golf Course Over The Next Five Years" or some such similar title! Guys like us get caught in the middle at times. Most of us don't own these golf courses that we tend so lovingly...and almost all of are very creative. It's easy then...to get caught up in the frenzy of letting our BOD's, owners, Park Boards, etc. get at our innermost thoughts concerning this big piece of land known as a golf course! We pour out our ideas and our opinions with almost no guidance or limitation...and delude ourselves into believing that this report is going to be taken seriously!

Typically...November is the likely jumpoff month for reports of this nature. Everybody has just finished another long season out on the course...with problems and solutions being fresh in the mind. It's also budget time...and a natural opportunity exists to bring into focus what the future should hold.

Prepping the annual operations budget is a piece of cake...then the discussion turns to capital items, capital projects...of a long term nature. Man, I can just feel this floor turning into a quagmire! At this facility it's fortunately not a question of the Long Range Planning Committee holding all of the cards. It seems to be more a question of turning the cards over...and dealing with the cards as they're dealt to us.

In a single owner facility like this the committee really consists of one guy who owns all of the stock...trying really diligently...or sometimes not very diligently...to listen as the senior management corps tries to prepare, explain and educate as to our long term needs. Selective



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listening kicks in all too frequently, however, and lots of information falls on deaf ears.

In that sense, a true committee would be most helpful from the standpoint of having a diverse, informed committee chairman and committee members who are all hopefully on the same page.

It also doesn't help matters that here at NCCC...these long range reports are forwarded down to Florida and basically parked for the winter as the 'committee of II(owner and wife) enjoy their snowbirding for three months. Upon their return in April...the opening of the course and all of the spring activity deflect any action or discussion about long term matters!

So, thank God for this computer! Our long range, five year plan sits in its file...waiting patiently to be opened someday...and is kept company in there by all of the other inactive, unopened files just waiting for their day in the sun!

Actually, Wednesday next is our first major management meeting for this spring...at which I am definitely going to present everybody with their second copy of this long range report. Will I be prepared to explain it, defend it, educate with it, and deal with all of the little witicisms that are sure to accompany the reading of it?

Probably not...I'll more than likely get a little ticked off when it's not taken seriously enough...which is the ultimate irony threading through it all. First the 'powers' ask for this sort of thing...then are surprised and unknowing when such a complete and expensive listing of future projects and needs is presented to them.

What do they really expect...that maybe I'll just say that everything is just so peachy...that our future needs are essentially non-existent...that we'll just keep waiting patiently while the price of everything in the report just continues to rise?

What usually happens then is that the little plan gets shuffled down to the bottom of the priority list as the committee moves on to discuss other matters. The plan never really gets endorsed as a plan for the future...but will be vaguely referred to in another eight months when budget time rolls around again.

The plan is then dusted off...and the request comes down the line to...maybe revise and update the report? Because this time they really intend...and understand...and realize the need...to endorse and begin implementing the darn thing!

Wouldn't it be great if any of that were true? ♻

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