

Understanding the Irrigation Renovation Process

BY STEVE SAKURAI AND LLOYD VON SCHELIHA

A GOLF COURSE RENOVATION DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A COMPLICATED AND CONFUSING PROCESS. IT'S POSSIBLE TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE A RENOVATION PROJECT BY ASSEMBLING THE RIGHT TEAM.

A course can do a full course renovation which requires a total redesign of the layout and irrigation, or it can choose to do just one aspect of the course, such as bunkers, greens or tees.

The first step in the renovation process is to outline the expectations for the project. This is so the board can make an educated decision on how it wants the project to proceed. For example, the board must decide how much the renovation will impact play. If it's important to keep the course open during the renovation, it may choose to do the project a section at a time. This will extend the time horizon of the project.

If the goal is to have it done as quickly as possible, it may be necessary to close the course completely. It is also fundamental to understand that once the construction is done, the course will need time to recover and re-establish itself.

The expectations should be realistic and carefully considered because there are financial implications. It is unlikely a renovation can produce U.S. Open-type course conditions on a limited budget. Irrigation equipment manufacturers have financing programs available to assist with outlining the obligations and commitments of the club. For example, financing the irrigation renovation through traditional financing providers may require the club be used as collateral; however, some irrigation manufacturers provide non-collateralized financing for the entire project. (*Refer to the article "How Do You Pay for an Irrigation System Renovation?" The Boardroom (Volume VIII, Issue 70).*)

Financial considerations are only one aspect of a renovation. In order to set realistic goals, it's crucial to gather as much information as possible from the following sources:

- Peer courses and superintendents
- Irrigation equipment distributors
- Irrigation equipment manufacturers

It is critical to talk to sources that have experience with renovations. Distributors and irrigation equipment manufacturers participate in renovations on a daily basis, so they are a valuable

source of information on expected costs, time frames, potential roadblocks, distributor service and support levels, and product capabilities. The superintendent is also a key resource in a renovation project. The local superintendent association will allow you to connect with courses that have recently undergone renovations. Peer courses will be able to provide insights into the overall renovation experience. They'll also be able to provide references on product choice, irrigation consultants and contractors.

After doing the homework it may be necessary to revisit the outline of the renovation expectations and update it for a more realistic outcome.

Once the vision is clear, it's important to communicate it to the membership. Effective communication will help manage the membership's perception of the project.

The next step is to assemble a team consisting of an irrigation equipment manufacturer, local distributor, irrigation designer and contractor. Depending on the extent of the renovation, a golf course architect may already be involved. There are many things that are essential considerations when assembling your irrigation renovation team, including: history of local projects, list of references, experience, costs, and knowledge of local market conditions, regulation and practices.

Selecting an irrigation equipment manufacturer and local distributor is a crucial initial step. This is because the distributor and manufacturer will provide the products and services vital to the success of the project. You will want to select an irrigation equipment manufacturer based on the company's reputation and experience delivering quality golf irrigation products. The local distributor will be your key resource, providing service and information, long after the construction is complete. The club should be comfortable with these long-term relationships because it will rely on the distributor and manufacturer for the life of the system.

An irrigation design is a central building block of the renovation process. It will determine the scope of the project in terms of time and cost. It will also allow the club to determine if its expectations will be met with the design. Irrigation designs can be acquired from your local irrigation distributor when the design is very basic or from a professional irrigation designer for larger more complex designs.

It's also important to have a qualified golf irrigation installer. This will ensure the project is completed on time and on budget. It is vital that the club obtain a detailed history and list of references for the installer. This will increase comfort level with the installer and provide peace of mind that the project is completed to the satisfaction of the membership.

When it comes to irrigation, it's essential to educate and continually update the membership on the status of the project. Unlike a clubhouse renovation that's highly visible throughout its construction, the only thing members may experience with an irrigation renovation is the extent to which it inhibits course playability.

Make sure you communicate to the membership why the new irrigation system is needed and how it will impact them both negatively (in the short term) and positively (in the long run). Let the members know when milestones are reached and include pictures of the progress as much as possible. This allows the members to feel included in the project.

The level of communication has a direct correlation to members' opinion and perception of the success of the project. Much of the time and resources spent on a renovation project occurs prior to any construction work. Members can become frustrated when costs are incurred and no visible work is being done. If members understand what is happening behind the scenes, it can mitigate the discomfort. It is also important to invite mem-

bers to visit the site during construction so they can understand and appreciate the complexity of the undertaking.

It is essential to communicate to the membership that, after a renovation is completed it takes some time to optimize the system. Members often expect the course to be in optimal condition the day the renovation is completed. In reality it can take as long as a full season for the turf to fully recover/establish and for the irrigation system to be fine-tuned.

Setting realistic expectations, choosing the right team and communicating effectively throughout the process are the keys to a successful renovation. **BR**

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THE EIGHT THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN AN IRRIGATION CONSULTANT OR DESIGNER

1. The irrigation designer must have a stellar list of references. Talk to the former clients to determine their satisfaction with the designer; were they taken care of, was the designer responsive, was the time table met. Former clients experience will help you feel comfortable with the irrigation designer and their ability to manage the process.
2. It is important to find out if the irrigation designer is an Irrigation Association Certified Golf Course Irrigation Designer. This certification provides credibility that the irrigation designer has completed the extensive certification process and meets the standards of the Irrigation Association.
3. Determine what professional affiliations the irrigation consultant is involved with, such as: Irrigation Association, American Society of Irrigation Consultants, Golf Course Builders Association of America and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. This will tell you the level of involvement the irrigation designer has in the industry.
4. You pay for experience. Find out how long the irrigation designer has been in the industry and how many projects they have been involved in.
5. Does the irrigation designer embrace the latest technology on design and water management tools?
6. Is the irrigation designer going to provide you the time you need? If the irrigation designer is dealing with multiple projects, does he have the staff to support your project and respond to your needs? Consider how many clients the irrigation designer is managing to determine if you are comfortable with the amount of attention you will be provided.
7. Does the irrigation designer have a sufficient knowledge level of your market? Many irrigation professionals do work all over the country or world. Do they understand the specific market conditions, regulations and practices that affect your course?
8. You cannot make a reasonable decision without considering cost. It is vital the club is comfortable with the value it is going to receive from the irrigation designer. **BR**