

Why do clubs renovate their courses?

Jon Last of Sports & Leisure Research Group explains more about the findings of his firm's ASGCA-commissioned research into golf facility trends.

In the Spring 2018 issue of *By Design*, I provided some initial insights into the latest findings of *Golf Facility Market Trend Watch*, the annual proprietary insights program that we have developed with the American Society of Golf Course Architects. We surveyed individuals from a mix of roles within the golf industry, including owners/operators, general managers, superintendents

and golf course architects.

We saw that operators of both public and private golf clubs were interested in a golf course renovation above all other types of enhancement of their facility. For this second article, I will delve a little deeper into what respondents felt were the most important offerings for a golf facility, and the factors for operators to pull the trigger on a golf course renovation.

Figure 1 shows that it's all about the green complex! Almost all respondents (97%) ranked 'condition of the greens' as an extremely important factor, from a list of 27 that were presented to them. What's more, 92% considered 'consistency of greens' to be extremely important as well. This would seem to be a strong indication that much of the feedback that superintendents and other facility

operators receive from their customers relates to the putting surfaces.

Factors relating to the golf course feature strongly among the most important offerings, whereas many of the factors considered least important were related to off-course offerings such as quality and selection of merchandise and locker room service and attractiveness.

As well as the putting surfaces, overall golf course conditions and condition of the fairways ranked highly among the list of most important factors. When drilling down into course conditions and asking respondents to rank the conditioning priorities of golfers (see Figure 2), it was interesting to note that true, consistent greens ranked top, whereas fast greens ranked third at private facilities and fourth at public facilities—so fast greens are not the holy grail!

With such emphasis on the golf course itself, it's perhaps not surprising that a golf course renovation is the most coveted enhancement for golf facilities. But what would it take for a club to make the decision to go ahead with a renovation?

The results show some differences between public and private clubs

(Figure 3). At public facilities, the priority for management is to confirm the cost of the project, with 73% of respondents ranking this among the most important factors in pulling the trigger for a renovation or remodel. Other factors relating to cost also ranked highly, such as understanding the potential return on investment of the project (65%) and lowering maintenance costs (65%).

Cost factors are also important for public clubs, but their orientation is more around member retention, which ranked highest at 69%, and the ability to bring new members in, which was joint second highest (68%).

At both public and private facilities, the upgrading of infrastructure to increase its longevity was among the most important factors for facility management to make the decision to renovate or remodel the golf course, at 65% and 68% respectively.

On average, facility operators consider 3.2 years to be a reasonable time frame for which to achieve a positive return on a capital investment of \$20,000 or more. Public facilities (3.6 years) are slightly more patient than private facilities (3 years).

Marc Whitney, ASGCA Director of

Marketing, said: "Cost is clearly a major factor for golf clubs to consider before going ahead with a renovation. There is also increasing recognition of the cost of doing nothing, which may be in the form of increased maintenance requirements to cope with an ageing golf course infrastructure or the loss of revenues when golfers move elsewhere."

"We have a number of resources available via www.asgca.org for clubs that are weighing up these factors, including our *Life Cycle Chart*, which outlines how long various parts of the golf course should last, a flyer titled *The Cost Factor*, which includes tips and techniques for reducing annual maintenance costs and *The Golf Course Remodeling Process: Questions & Answers* for clubs that are considering renovation work."

My final article in this series, which will appear in the Fall 2018 issue of *By Design*, will look at the different types of projects that architects have been involved in. ●



Jon Last is founder and President of Sports & Leisure Research Group, a full-service marketing research consultancy.

Figure 1. It's all about the green complex!

Percentage of respondents ranking below factors as top three importance among customers

MOST IMPORTANT	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
Condition of the green	96%	97%
Overall golf course conditions	92%	94%
Consistency of the greens	93%	91%
Overall courtesy and friendliness of the golf staff	82%	79%
Condition of the fairways	58%	76%

Figure 2. Conditioning priorities for golfers

Percentage of respondents ranking below conditions as a top three importance among golfers

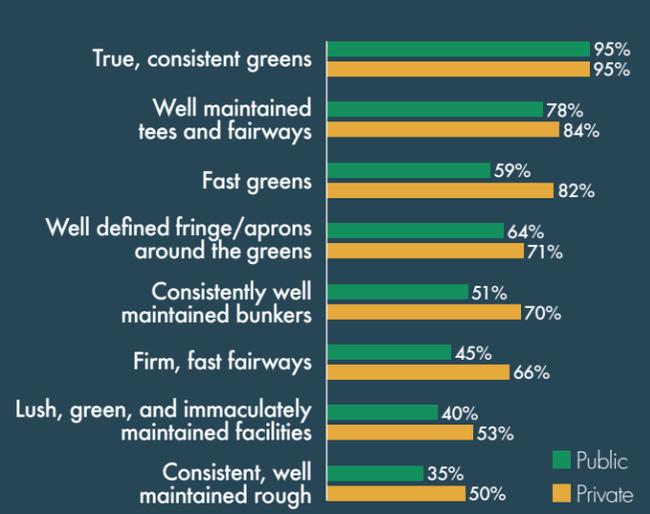


Figure 3. Most important factors for facility management to pull the trigger for a renovation or remodel

Importance of each of the following factors for facility management, in pulling the trigger for a renovation/remodel of a golf course(s)

