Golf Clubhouse Design

Since the establishment of the world’s first purpose built Golf Clubhouse in Leith, Scotland (1768); clubhouses have had an integral identity to the game of golf and the course they serve. In 1786, the first American clubhouse was established at the South Carolina Golf Club in Charleston, South Carolina. Not only was this the first golf club outside of the United Kingdom, but it was also used as a public park in the heart of Charleston. Following shortly behind was the establishment of America’s first Country Club, The Country Club at Brookline, in Brookline, Massachusetts. Founded in 1882, the course has been host to several prestigious tournaments. In 1893 The Chicago Country Club in Wheaton, Illinois set roots as America’s oldest private golf club, and was also the first 18 hole course in the country. Today, Modern and Classic Golf Clubhouses typically fall into a few selected types dependent on the management and operations of the golf course.

With the ever changing demands of Golf Clubhouses, Municipal, Public, Private, Resort, and Destination facilities all require unique demands in planning and functionality of the facility. While there are a few golden rules to providing a successful Clubhouse, a well designed clubhouse should first reflect the character and personality of the place, the people, and its environment for which it’s located. Following the clubhouse architecture and planning guidelines will establish the foundation for a successful project.
Master Planning

A cohesive master plan is essential to setting a solid foundation for the entire project. Rather the project is an isolated private golf club, with residential lots, or a urban municipal facility, a comprehensive master plan will benefit the project. Accompanying the overall master plan; a clear vision of the project should be established, providing continuity throughout.

Master Planned communities often implement design standards or guidelines to the residential components. These standards are successful when properly enforced by a design review boards or HOA. An environmental or signage package typically provides a consistent detail throughout the community as well. These items typically include bridges, entry monuments, street signs, etc., defining the character of the street-scape and community image. Landscape components for a master plan are equally important and should be consistent throughout the entire project.

Projects, which do not encompass residential components also benefit from a master plan. Planning for future expansions of the facility is important for increasing the longevity of the project. In a stressed economy, it is often not feasible to construct the entire project as a single phase. Phasing options of a master plan provide flexibility for growth of the project as funds are available and for uses to be modified as demands may change over time. Providing flexibility within a master plan is essential for optimizing future needs and growth.
Site Planning

Every site is unique in its constraints and opportunities. These elements provide the driving forces behind planning the clubhouse. Properly planning the site, establishes the groundwork for a successful project. The clubhouse site is often determined by the routing of the golf course and the surrounding context. Site planning differs from master planning as there is more of an intense focus on the activities and flow of pedestrians, vehicles, and golf carts surrounding the golf clubhouse. Thoroughly understanding the process of how golfers enter the site in their vehicle, approach the clubhouse, and navigate to their carts is critical and often done incorrectly; adding risk to the property and individuals.

The type of clubhouse facility dictates the site design. The demands of municipal clubhouses vs. private clubhouses differentiate substantially. The traffic amount varies as does the level of desired customer service provided to golfers. The location of the service yard, front door and access to event rooms should be planned so the individuals are not crossing paths.

Separating the service yard access from the primary entrance of the site is not only important from a functional standpoint, but aesthetically as well. Additionally, golf cart access should never cross vehicle paths. Complete understanding the process of the golfer from the parking lot through the round of golf is important in the planning process.

A comprehensive analysis should be preformed regarding the flow of golf carts around the site. Understanding the flow of the golf carts from the cart storage area, to the staging area, and upon completion of the round is vital to providing efficiency for staff and guests.
Golf Clubhouse

The demands for golf clubhouses to become multifunctional facilities are more prevalent today than ever before. The ability for the facility to host a variety of non-golf related events has proven to be a successful recipe for increasing overall revenue. The solution is not always to increase square footage, rather more about flexibility and efficiency. Properly planned facilities can greatly reduce construction and operational costs while increasing revenue opportunities. Golf tournaments, weddings, and daily usage, are functions needing to coexist at a growing majority of the golf clubs throughout the country. Planned properly, it can work.

Successful golf clubhouses need to meet the basic program requirements. Typically, golf clubhouses have a pro shop, dining component, kitchen, and restroom/locker room facilities. It is essential to separate the golf functions from the dining components when planning the clubhouse. This principle applies to the (5) types of clubhouses- municipal, public, private, resort, and destination. While these types of clubhouses have the same objective, the planning and functions of the individual facility are quite different.

Municipal clubhouses are often representative of the most basic planning elements. This is largely driven by funding; however, there is always the exception. Municipal facilities are typically smaller and less elaborate than the other clubhouse types, but this doesn’t make properly designing the building any less important. The primary factor for designing the municipal clubhouse is having visual control, from the pro shop, over the primary site elements. These elements are the bag drop, cart staging area, practice area, 1st & 10th tee boxes, and 9th & 18th greens. Because every clubhouse project is unique, the site plan and routing of the course may not allow for visual control of all of these items.

Public clubhouses are often larger than municipal projects and often introduce the “guest service” element to the experience. Public clubhouses tend to rely heavily on the food/beverage component for additional revenue. In the majority of these clubhouses, emphasis is directed towards the bar and grill areas as it is not uncommon for patrons, other than golfers, to dine at the facility. Additionally, a larger meeting room or pavilion is programmed into the clubhouse;
providing a place for after tournament activities and private events, i.e. weddings and larger meetings. Critical to functionality, the event space should have direct access to the kitchen serving area as well as a separate entrance from the main clubhouse, when possible. A planned patio space for the public clubhouse is also important as this allows for overflow from the pavilion room and exterior dining.

Private clubhouse projects are planned differently from those facilities allowing public golfers. While the program components, of the facility, are similar; their relationships to one another are more flexible. The pro shop of the private clubhouse is often small and not as stringent to having visual control over the major site and golf elements, due to the limited amount of daily play. The primary focus of the club is towards member usage areas such as the bar, grill and locker rooms. The locker rooms of the private club are often designed with amenities such as poker rooms, saunas, and steam rooms. It is not uncommon for the locker rooms to have an attendant as well as food and beverage services. Private clubhouses range in size often dependent on location and the number of members. The draw to private clubs is the amount of service and attention given to the members. These services such as caddies, treatment rooms, and fitness components should be located adjacent to related program elements. Because of the unique amenities it is extremely important to separate the men and women usage components.

Resort clubhouses are a small amenity to the overall resort or hotel master plan. Golf courses at these project types are a supporting element to fill rooms at the main resort. The clubhouse component, at the resort, can range from a small area located within the resort to a standalone building on property. The clubhouse is often equipped with a large pro shop, upscale dining room and bar. The dining component often doubles as an additional restaurant space for the resort guests. Resort projects also have a large emphasis on “guest services”. While it is often an afterthought, the bag storage room and cart storage area should be properly planned. The bag storage of the resort facility should be designed to accommodate a large number of the guest’s golf and travel bags during their visit. Often, resort courses host several tournaments throughout the year. Golf carts need
to be easily accessible for the staff in order to accommodate tournament set-up needs as well as the needs of the daily golfer.

The most unique golf clubhouse is the destination facility. The destination clubhouse is often located miles from civilization and needs to be self-sustaining with entertainment and lodging. Additionally, these facilities are programmed with some of the more unique items in a clubhouse. Because the destination facility is primarily about the golf course, the clubhouse amenities are often minimal; however, theatre rooms, game rooms, and bowling allies may be included into the design of the clubhouse. The food and beverage component to the clubhouse is a primary staple to generating revenue for the project and is often priced accordingly. The clubhouse itself ranges in size depending on whether or not the facility is private or public and the projects proximity to larger communities. The lodging component is important as golfers will typically stay for a minimum of 2-3 nights. As a part of the clubhouse campus, the lodging is often provided as individual cabins, ranging in the number of bedrooms from one to four.

There are five primary components to the golf clubhouse- golf shop, dining, kitchen, rest rooms, and cart storage. Fundamental design of these program elements are important to the overall success of the
clubhouse plan. Quality and the size of the space is dependent on several variables and should be defined from the beginning. Secondary program elements of the clubhouse are implemented as supporting functions. Additional amenities may be incorporated into the planning as a means for increasing memberships or establishing social status. Following the basics of clubhouse planning set the foundation for a successful and functional design.

Beyond the necessity of clearly defining the clubhouse entrance, golfers typically gravitate toward the Pro Shop upon entrance. This component of the clubhouse is one of the primary clubhouse spaces. In addition to controlling the exterior site elements, the pro shop provides a means for collecting revenue through retail services and collecting greens fees. Effectively designed, the control desk should be clearly visible and opposite of the pro shop entrance with retail components in-between. This strategy encourages users to “shop” on their way towards checking in, thus providing opportunity for increasing retail sales.

Properly planned administration areas are most successful when located at one of two locations. Depending on the size of the clubhouse and whether the clubhouse is public or private, the administration areas may also be separated into two separate elements. The golf related administrative areas are most functional when planned with direct access to the pro shop. In smaller clubhouses, typically municipal, the administrative component is rather small and may consist of 1-2 offices. In larger facilities, typically private clubhouses, the administrative program is more extensive and is best served when located adjacent to the main entrance. Membership sales and member services need to be easily accessible. Typical spaces for the administrative component may include a variety of offices, work area, conference room, storage, and/or reception area.

The most important program element, to the clubhouse, is the food and beverage component. This will often include a bar/ grill, dining room, meeting/ banquet rooms, patio, and kitchen. Most successful facilities have a single kitchen serving the individual spaces. Reducing the conflict of service paths and
the main dining component provides a more “family friendly” dining experience. This is mostly seen in larger public and private clubhouses. The size of the dining component is determined by the feasible usage, often determined by the management of the facility. For courses offering returning 9’s, the food and beverage services should be readily accessible with a proximately close to the kitchen and rest room facilities as to not hinder the pace of play.

The meeting room or pavilion is becoming a necessary space for the golf clubhouse. Properly designed, these spaces can provide much needed flexibility for a variety of group sizes and functions. Most often, the meeting space is used to host after tournament activities, wedding receptions, and corporate meetings. The ability for the clubhouse to host a variety of event types and sizes increases revenue. This is not possible in clubhouses without the “pavilion” amenity. Typically, the room should be designed to accommodate approximate 200+ people. Additionally, the room should have the ability to be divided into 2-3 separate spaces. This allows for simultaneous use by multiple smaller groups. When possible, patio areas, adjacent to the room, provide excellent break out
spaces and allow for overflow usage. Existing municipal and smaller clubhouse facilities have begun to incorporate the pavilion space in order to accommodate after tournament activities. In most areas, these structures are an open air facility and a relatively inexpensive construction solution.

Most often found in larger public and private clubhouses, the locker room component is becoming more “spa like” than earlier designed facilities. Locker rooms are becoming a private club within the clubhouse itself. Amenities such as jacuzzis, saunas, treatment rooms, lounge/ bar, and attendants are common items provided to members of the private club. The upscale public clubhouse locker room isn’t as extravagant, but a well designed and properly planned locker and wet area, (showers & toilets) is essential to the privacy within. A majority of municipal and smaller public clubhouses have resorted to providing rest room components without the need for lockers, as their usage is minimal. Additionally, these clubhouse types are eliminating the need for a shower component in the rest room. This is largely due to a lack of usage and increased liability.

Fitness components are becoming more popular within the private clubhouse required program. The fitness room should be directly accessed from the individual locker rooms and should be separated from the main clubhouse dining and entry. Where applicable, providing a separate exterior entrance is beneficial as well. Because of the noise generated by the fitness area, the location is best served on the main or lower level of the clubhouse; however, if properly planned, a second level location can be successful.
The importance of adequate storage space is often overlooked in the planning of the clubhouse. Storage areas should be planned for and located adjacent to the needs being served. The meeting room space requires a relatively larger storage area in order to accommodate the tables and chairs used for events. Storage for the pro shop merchandise should be designed to be secured. Merchandise is often stored in a separate room with controlled access or within the pro shop cabinetry.

For the courses that offer caddy services, the “caddy shack” element of the clubhouse project can be very unique. Typically, found at older or private clubs, the caddy amenity offers a unique experience for golfers. The caddy shack requirements are relatively simple and often include a caddy master, small lounge room, rest room and bag storage area. Since the invention of the GPS system, the caddy component of the clubhouse plan is becoming obsolete.

When planning the clubhouse, it is important to not overbuild the amenities. While these special program elements of the clubhouse add a unique flavor to the building, they eventually lose their allure and the interest of the users as trends change. Amenities not requiring a long term financial commitment or single usage are more beneficial to the project over time.
to be successful for generating revenue. Facilities that have been over built are now scrambling to find new uses for the abandoned space. Smaller facilities are looking to become more flexible without becoming substantially larger in order to capture lost revenue opportunities. Additionally, a majority of the golf clubhouses built in the 1970’s and before have out lived their material life spans and are losing revenue in more way than one. The recipe for a successful

Springs, California may transform into a night club after golfing hours. Diverse spaces providing flexibility ensure longevity of the clubhouse as a social environment, thus generating revenue.

Regardless the size of the golf clubhouse, fundamental design and planning elements should be achieved. A properly planned clubhouse should maximize functionality and efficiency. Flexibility within the clubhouse and immediate site is important to meeting the demands of today’s facility. The needs of the golf clubhouse are ever changing, requiring “smarter” designs. The solution is becoming less of a grand design and more towards a modest facility that can accommodate a variety of functions. The ability to keep the clubhouse open after dark or provide non-golf events during the day are strategies that have proven

clubhouse project is simple. Rather the project is new construction, a remodel, or an expansion of existing facilities, the basic planning fundamentals need to be implemented from the beginning.
such as golf tournaments and weddings. Clubhouses are now required to be multifunctional facilities more than ever. Up to date facilities equal increased usage.

Assessing the existing condition of the facility often determines the recommend direction for improvement. However, the economics of the project need to be feasible. The decisions made during the initial process are critical and should be planned for as a long term solution. Phased options for renovation & remodel projects need to have a cohesive plan, while minimizing the impact of daily operations. Master plans for the clubhouse should be established addressing the immediate concerns and future planning for modifications and expansion.

The approach of a feasibility study for the golf clubhouse is broken down into the following steps.

**Step 1: Facility Conditions**

Prior to beginning the design phase of the project it is important to understand the conditions of the existing facility. Before determining the scope of work for the project, the primary components of the clubhouse must be explored. The primary components to the clubhouse can be broken down into the following categories:

**Repair, Renovate, Remodel, Redo**

What was once a place to relax and socialize has now become a toll both for playing golf. Many clubhouses have seemingly become a nuisance for checking into the course. Today we face many questions regarding the Golf Clubhouse and its existing conditions. The decision to Remodel, Repair, Renovate, or Redo existing facilities is becoming a necessity for increasing revenue opportunities. Studies reveal that a majority of clubhouses built in the 1970’s or before struggle to meet the demands of today’s social function requirements. Additionally, these facilities are nearing the end of their life expectancy requiring material, accessibility, and potential structure upgrades. Inefficient planning and lacking flexibility hinder opportunities for supporting additional revenue generating events.
Step 2: Functional Analysis

During the second phase of the work, comparisons of the functional characteristics of the facility with current design and code standards are explored. Additionally, an assessment for utilization of the existing program spaces is performed. These items are separated into five categories:

- Site Functions
  - Vehicular Access
    - Parking Issues
    - Entry Drive
    - Service Access
    - Banquet Access
    - Golf Access
    - Drop-Off
  - Building Orientation
    - Golf Course Views
    - Pro Shop Control
    - Approach from Entry Drive

- Social Functions
  - Banquets
  - Meetings
  - Dining
  - Bar / Grill
  - Outdoor Dining

- Support Functions
  - Kitchen
    - Al a Carte Line
    - Banquet Lines
    - Size
    - Locations / Adjacencies
    - Service Flow
  - Administration
  - Storage

Step 3: Program Analysis

Comparing the design and relationships of existing program components to the operational standards is key when applying any new planning alternatives.

The program solutions should be planned to accommodate future needs of the clubhouse as well as potential growth and expanded usage of the facility. Assessing the individual strengths and weakness of the program relationships are separated into the following categories:
• **Golf Functions**
  - Pro Shop/ Ski Shop
  - Visual Control
  - Merchandise Locations
  - Access to Course
  - Entry Presence

• **Banquet / Event Functions**
  - Exterior Access
  - Kitchen Service
  - Rest room Adjacencies
  - Exterior Patio

**Step 4: Financial Options**

Establishing the direction and amount of work to be completed is often budget driven. Appropriate budgets for the desired amount of work required is important as realistic goals need to be determined.

- **Repair**
  - Immediate needs expenses will occur over 7-10 years
  - Minimal efficiency savings

- **Renovate**
  - Modest gain in efficiency
  - Potential increase in facility usage

- **Remodel**
  - Increased efficiency savings
  - Increased usage = financial benefits

- **Redo**
  - Maximum efficiency savings
  - Increased usage = financial benefits

Golf performance centers or learning facilities are becoming a popular amenity for golf courses. As popularity of the game increases, the need for becoming a better golfer has also increased. In addition to providing a place where golfers can work on technique and skill, performance centers are also an additional means for increasing revenue. There are (3) typical models for the types of hitting bays- enclosed, indoor/ outdoor, and exterior.

The enclosed bay is contained within a single room or bay. The golfer typically hits off a mat into a ceiling...
mounted netting system. Most often, this type of hitting bay is retrofitted into an existing space and requires a minimum ceiling height of 10’-0”.

The indoor/outdoor bay allows for the golfer to stand inside the building while hitting golf balls to the exterior environment. These bay types are extremely popular in areas having climates with extreme temperatures. The golfer is able to hit balls from a controlled temperature environment, while getting the full effect of the ball flight. This type of bay requires a minimum opening of 10’ x 10’ and ceiling height of 10’-0”. Additionally, it is recommend that a coiling overhead door be used opposed to a standard overhead door as additional lighting is typically placed over head in the hitting area.

The exterior bay is typically an open air structure with a simple roof. This facility type is ideal for areas that have relatively consistent temperatures, offering the golfer shade while practicing. The electrical components are similar to the other bay types and need to be coordinated appropriately.

Performance/Learning centers can be a combination of these types of bays as well. Combinations of the different bay types within a single facility offer flexibility for the instructors and students. Often the hitting bay of the facility will double as a classroom setting for group instructions.

The size of the bay is dependent primarily on the types of camera & teaching equipment and related requirements to be incorporated. While the concept of the hitting bay is relatively simple, there are several key components that need to be planned appropriately in order for the facility to be successful. Proper coordination of the camera locations and lighting is a prime example. Adequate lighting for the camera
system is essential. The proper placement of cameras, monitors and additional training aids are crucial elements. Most importantly is properly planning the cable system for the electrical components of the bay.

While the hitting bay is the most important space of the teaching facility, additional program elements may be incorporated to complete the facility. Typical items such as offices, storage, indoor putting lab, fitness area, club fitting area, treatment rooms, and locker rooms are popular items that accompany the hitting bays.

**Starter Shack**

When the first tee is typically not visible from the clubhouse a starter shack may be incorporated to control starting times. This component may be a building or simple shade structure. Golf courses, where the first tee is a significant distance from the clubhouse, may contain food and beverage services as well.

**Halfway House**

Halfway houses are found on courses that don’t have returning nines to the clubhouse. Most often halfway houses provide food/ beverages and restroom facilities to golfers, mid round. Halfway houses are becoming less popular as most courses have beverage carts and requires added costs to staffing the building.
Cabins & Lodging

The lodging component of the golf course project is typically reserved for destination and resort facilities; however some municipal and public courses provide this amenity as well. Adequate lodging accommodations are important to certain various courses as they provide additional revenue. Careful planning of the lodging component is critical as over or under construction the facilities can have a negative impact on the project. Typically, there are (3) recommended room types for standalone facilities—single occupancy, double, and four plus bedroom plans.

The single occupancy design is the most private, but least economical. Single unit structures are often more expensive per square foot and limit the flexibility of the building. Most often, golfers travel in groups of four or more, but this is not always the case.

Double room facilities are more desirable as there are more options and also reduce costs to the guests. Double room amenities are typically designed in one of two ways, single beds per room or double beds. Additionally, a small common area accessed by both rooms is desired as this allows for social interaction with one another. Providing flexibility, this type of plan also allows for rooms to be locked off from each other and the common room.

The four plus bedroom option provides the most flexibility and is also the most efficient. Similar to the two bedroom option, the bedrooms can have single or multiple occupants. A larger common room is often found in these facilities, which may also contain a kitchen and small living area component. A typical four bedroom layout may accommodate between four and 8-10 individuals, with sleeping accommodations in the living area. Additionally, the individual bedrooms can be locked off from one another and the common area.
Maintenance Facility

The maintenance facility for the golf project is often tucked into the corner of the property as they are typically not very glamorous. These facilities are first and foremost designed for functional purposes. The maintenance facility is comprised of a maintenance yard, building, and exterior storage for materials such as sand and fertilizer. These facility types should not be an afterthought and should be designed efficiently.

The size of the project is often determined by the need of the golf course. The facility doesn’t need to be overly expansive, but should be designed efficiently.

The maintenance yard is most effective when designed large enough for machinery to adequately move around. Street access and golf course access should be separated to eliminate accidents. Access to the material storage areas for larger vehicles is important and should be separated from the employee parking area.

The maintenance building ranges in size, but should encompass the following program items at a minimum. Standard requirements often include, mechanics bay, work bay, administration, storage rooms, restrooms, and employee break room. Facilities design with through & though bays tend to be more efficient than those with a single bay entrance.

The material storage areas of the maintenance area often include sand, fertilizer, soils. Access for material deliveries should be simple as most often the material is brought to the site on large vehicles. Fertilizer type products should be stored in an explosion proof structure and away from the maintenance building. Materials storage bins are typically open air with a cover above. Covered areas should also be provided within the yard to protect equipment from the elements and inclement weather.
On Course Restroom

On course restrooms are simple structures that need proper locations. The structures are often located where several paths pass nearby at tee boxes or greens. The best location for pace of play and minimal disturbance is between the tee box and green.

Depending on the routing and whether or not there is a halfway house, there is typically one structure for each nine holes of golf. The doors of the rest rooms should face towards the cart path, or have a sign designation, as to not increase the pace-of-play by adding time looking for the proper rest room.

These facilities are most efficient when planned for natural ventilation and non-conditioned space. Proper day lighting will reduce the need for electrical power to light the interior. Where applicable, septic systems are typically favored over conventional sewer systems as there is a substantial cost savings. Additionally, there should be a single plumbing wall in the facility with the fixtures back-to-back at the wall. Lastly, these facilities need to be ADA compliant, no way around it.

Amenities

Adding special use programs increase the overall interest to the facility as well as provide an additional strategy for increasing overall revenue. Areas having ability to be multifunctional also provide opportunities for increased flexibility on the property.

Properly designed amenities provide space for weddings, tournaments, gatherings and increase overall character of the project. Amenities can be focal points of interest or supporting elements to the facilities primary functions.
**Cart Storage Facility**

Efficiently planning the cart storage facility is essential to daily operations. Cart storages areas are typically located beneath or adjacent to the clubhouse. Facilities located adjacent to the clubhouse are most effective when located near the bag drop and cart staging areas with visual control from the pro shop. Most often these facilities are non-conditioned spaces, but need to have ventilation providing fresh air, thus removing gasses from the batteries or gas carts.

The primary determining factor, when planning a cart storage facility, is the required number of carts. The wash bay, storage areas, and restrooms are supporting items that should typically be incorporated.

There are (2) basic types of cart storage facilities, single entrance and through & through. The through & through layout is the most efficient as it requires less space and is a simpler process when parking carts. A single entrance facility must allow for extra room to maneuver the carts. In either case, the locations of the cart chargers (for electric carts) should be planned accordingly. Cart flow within the cart barn is as important as the parking layout.

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**Pump house**

The pump house is a vital part to the success of the golf course and needs to be designed to accommodate the predetermined pump for the project. Proper clearances around the machinery are important and usually determined by the pump manufacturer. Most importantly, a removal hatch needs to be located directly above the heads of the pump to facilitate maintenance needs. Most often, pump houses are tucked away within the property, but should allow for easy access.