

This Old

When it's time to renovate or rebuild your clubhouse, a planned approach and professional help can put you on the path to success

▶ BY ALEX CARTER

Clubhouse

Clothes and hair styles aren't the only things that need updating from time to time. So do clubhouses. If yours is one of the many built in the 1960s or '70s, it may be time to renovate or rebuild. That's because older clubhouses don't always appeal to younger golfers, who often prefer a more casual, family oriented atmosphere. In fact, clubs around the nation are now facing the renovate-or-rebuild dilemma.





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Whether or not you need to renovate or rebuild is an organizational decision; however, one thing is almost certain: A smooth transformation will likely require the help of an experienced club architect. Architects are trained to think abstractly and manipulate spaces and functions in their heads. With their help, you can expand your options, attract and retain customers, boost clubhouse usage, increase revenues and differentiate your facility from the competition.

If the time is right, here are a few tips for approaching the project in a systematic manner. Using these guidelines will help you avoid headaches, pre-empt problems and build a clubhouse that's just right for your customers.

User Surveys Identify Members' Wishes

In many situations, the best way to begin a renovation or rebuilding project is with a guest or patron survey. By polling guests, you determine how customers feel about the existing facility and discover changes they'd like made. However, rather than performing an in-house survey, many owners opt to outsource the process to a third-party to negate possible claims of bias or personal agendas. Experienced survey consultants generally ask the questions necessary to uncover customers' wishes.

“It's not enough to listen to the vocal minority of your players,” says Raymond Ferreira, Ph.D., president of the Ferreira Company, a consulting firm located in Alpharetta, Georgia. “You need to know what the silent majority wants as well. A survey lets you discover that.”

Focus groups that concentrate on entertainment, swimming, tennis, teen rooms, health clubs and other areas are very useful when conducting surveys. Including them shows customers that their opinions are valuable. It also fosters a greater sense of ownership in the resulting facility.

Once the survey team has collected the data, they analyze it, break each question down by demographics and present their findings in a final report. From this, course management can write a comprehensive program outlining all of the features they'd like to incorporate at the new facility.

Feasibility Studies: Examining Your Options

Using the recommended program as a guideline, the clubhouse architect works with golf course representatives to develop a feasibility study. He or she assembles the elements of the program and considers the aesthetics, budget and operational features such as traffic flow, service entrances and parking. From this, you can determine if your existing clubhouse can be renovated to incorporate the desired changes or if you need to build a new facility.

Unfortunately, land restrictions may make it impossible to integrate all desired features. If so, you may have to scale back your program, obtain additional land or add a second floor. You should also consider the economic feasibility of the proposed changes. Can you afford to make them and will they generate additional profits or increase user satisfaction? Don't forget to calculate how the changes will affect the club's financial performance. If you

plan to consolidate three kitchens into one, take those savings into account. Or, if you plan to expand the ballroom, determine the estimated revenues the new facility will generate.

Based on the findings of the feasibility study, as well as aesthetic considerations, the clubhouse architect will develop a schematic design for the new facility and present it for consideration. Once the schematic blueprint is approved, the architect will continue to work with owners—and, quite often, contractors—during design, construction and decorating. Keep in mind, however, the importance of involving your landscape architects early in the process. Their input can reinforce the architecture, provide soft screens for functional areas and enhance the new look of the club.

In any event, many course owners and operators find it beneficial to keep the club running while work is being done. This allows your facility to generate income and serve your players, while also retaining your staff. Some facilities elect to operate out of temporary trailers. Others build a new clubhouse while working out of the old facility, which they then renovate as a family, teen or learning center. Depending on the site, however, the latter option may call for course alterations.

Cases In Point

As with most construction-related endeavors, real-life examples offer the best sources of information. The following case histories detail how three clubs handled their renovate-or-rebuild dilemma.

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The Country Club of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia, operates two separate facilities: an in-town club (circa 1910) that offers golf, social functions, tennis and swimming, and an informal suburban golf club with 36 holes overlooking the James River about six miles away. The original James River clubhouse was a ground-hugging concrete structure (circa 1960s) of approximately 15,000 square feet. It had replaced an inadequate but charming farmhouse that still appealed to many of the club's members. Never comfortable with the modern facility, they decided to tear it down and build a new clubhouse that combined the smooth operations of a modern facility with the ambience of the old farmhouse.

Although the club is member-owned, management is not required to obtain member approval for capital projects. Therefore, they did not perform a survey. Instead, they developed plans and a budget for members to review. They then sent design specifications to several architectural firms and asked them to develop concepts. "Our architect understood our vision and designed a functional club with the aesthetics of the old farmhouse," says William C. Harris, general manager.

When complete, the elevated clubhouse will resemble the home of a Virginia planter, replete with sprawling wings that appear as though they were added over time. Its 17,800-square-foot lower level will be devoted to golf car, club and kitchen storage, as well as a loading dock and employee facilities. The 20,000-square-foot upper floor will include a 2,700-square-

foot members' grill, locker rooms, steam room, golf shop and a full-service kitchen and snack bar. Additionally, there will be a men's grill, a ladies' lounge and a bridal dressing room. A wide verandah overlooks the "River" course and a rural Virginia setting.

While the available building space was somewhat tight, the new clubhouse will nestle into the environment with plenty of space for efficient, out-of-sight service and additional paved parking. "We are extremely pleased with the simplicity, flexibility and flow of the architect's design and the way they have worked with us," Harris says.

Berkeley Hills Country Club in Duluth, Georgia, suffered from a growing membership and a club that no longer met its needs. Located in Gwinnett County, the nation's fastest-growing county, the 15,000-square-foot clubhouse was outdated and over-burdened. "Because of the growth of the county, we wanted to appeal to a younger, more family oriented group," says Barney Tyler, chairman of the clubhouse committee.

A survey revealed that members wanted larger locker rooms with lounges where they could play cards and socialize. They also requested separate entrances for social and private functions, so they could more easily host member-sponsored events. And the kitchen needed to be enlarged and positioned to service the club more efficiently.

"We decided to tear down the old facility and build a new, 30,000-square-foot clubhouse," Tyler says. "We're also building a new pool, a kiddie pool, tennis courts and a small clubhouse for

the tennis and pool area." To implement the program, the club bought and razed two homes on adjacent residential property.

At first, Berkeley Hills wanted to keep the existing clubhouse operational during construction by building the new facility in two phases; however, this would have prolonged construction to 17 months. Instead, the architects suggested erecting temporary trailers to house the pro shop and a small dining facility, then tear down the existing facility and rebuild in one phase. Construction would then take only 12 months, during which time the club could function as a golf and tennis club, but not as a full-service country club.

The board unanimously selected this option, which saved \$75,000 to \$100,000 in construction costs, allowed for better positioning of the building and made complicated construction phasing unnecessary. The schedule was moved forward to allow the club to be operational during the busy holiday season.

To help finance the project, the club increased its dues. "We thought we'd have a five percent cancellation due to this, but we only lost one member and already have 61 on our waiting list," Tyler says.

Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, North Carolina, wanted a face-lift. A third-party survey found that members were largely content with the existing 48,000-square-foot, traditional clubhouse built in the late 1960's. However, they decided to update the facility to make it even more accommodating and differentiate itself from new clubs in the area.

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uously benchmark,” says A.Graham McDeson, general manager. “They need to look toward the best practices at successful clubs and consider incorporating them into their own operation.”

To foster member involvement, Carmel formed 10 separate focus groups, which concentrated on everything from the clubhouse to tennis to swimming to entertainment. “We wanted to make sure that each group had absolutely everything they wanted in the new facility,” McDeson says.

Once the groups identified members’ wishes, a third-party consultant designed a questionnaire and completed a member survey. The club then developed a program and performed due diligence, which included visiting other clubs its members admired.

In response, the architect designed a renovation of the existing facility, including the kitchen, as well as a two-story addition. The 17,000-square-foot addition included a 4,000-square-foot fitness center. On the second floor, the club built an additional dining room and lounge. They also designed a new swim/tennis/teen facility near the existing pool to make the club more family friendly.

“Our changes have been very successful,” McDeson says. “On average, 110 people work out in the new fitness center every day. The architects were very accommodating to the building committee and great at ‘value engineering,’ or helping us get the most for our money.”

By taking a step-by-step approach, these clubs were able to navigate the renovation or rebuilding of their clubhouses with relative ease. With a planned approach and solid professional help, you can do the same. 🏌️

Alex Carter, AIA, is president of NCG Architects in Atlanta, Georgia. He can be reached at (404) 892-4510.



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