

# PLANNING FOR NEW FIELD CONSTRUCTION

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**"If you don't know where you're going, you could end up someplace else." Yogi Berra**

Imagine you're enjoying a transatlantic flight. The intercom comes on and the pilot says, "Ladies and gentleman, we're almost there. We're still over water, but I expect to see land any time now." After a pause he continues, "Once we do, we'll probably start looking around for a big city, they almost always have airports."

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You need to plan to succeed. Over the years, we have had the opportunity to guide more than 50 collegiate playing fields to completion. All have become high quality facilities, but a few remain "hidden gems" whose potential as a campus showpiece has never been fully realized. A turf field can be a work of art, both functional and beautiful. Unfortunately, without a long-term plan to guide construction, many new fields get tucked away, or placed out of context in a way that does not do justice to the field or the campus as a whole.

The answer lies in starting out with an athletic facilities master plan. Generally speaking, a master plan is simply a "blueprint" that guides construction in a coherent and unified way. Commonly applied for long-term campus development as a whole, it also works beautifully on a smaller scale for athletic facilities. Given the way campus greens are disappearing, it is tempting to say an athletic facilities master plan is a must have for anyone who wants to preserve the traditional look of their campus. Proceeding without one will get you the facilities you needed, but you may lose the traditional "campus" look along the way, which is more important than it sounds. The aesthetics of the physical environment impact a school's ability to attract talented athlete/scholars.

A master plan can determine a school's present and future program needs, the available land, future property acquisitions, and the sequence of construction. This is especially important for schools and universities located in urban areas with little room for expansion. A master plan also helps get the development ball rolling by:

- ° Building consensus among campus stakeholders
- ° Establishing the proper sequence and phasing for improvements
- ° Integrating sports improvements into overall budget
- ° Establishing momentum for future phases
- ° Serving as an excellent marketing tool at fundraising events

From an engineering and landscape architecture point of view, the visible playing surface is just the tip of the iceberg. Before construction, a master plan allows your design consultant to consider the impact that installed drainage, utility, and other underground components will have on future construction. There is some flexibility in applied design solutions. Guided by a master plan, the design consultant can usually develop a solution that avoids limiting your construction options in the future.

Beyond preserving your options, a master plan allows you to explore novel funding



options. There is a new trend in athletic facility master planning whereby joint ventures are pursued between the public and private sectors with the intention of sharing a common facility. For example, a collegiate level team and professional team can share the same sports facility venue. The arrangement is attractive to schools because it brings in additional funding through rental income, can result in a higher quality (professional level) sports facility, and distributes ongoing maintenance costs across multiple parties.

We have had some experience with this. In the course of developing an athletic facilities master plan for Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) in upstate New York, we discovered the college's football field was under-used and out of step with the school's anticipated needs. In its place, a new baseball stadium that would be shared with the ValleyCats, a Houston Astros affiliate, was designed and installed. In return for use of the facility, the ValleyCats provides HVCC with a rental income that is used to run the stadium. In addition to renting the facility from the college, the ValleyCats donate money to the school's general fund.

Help from the ValleyCats allowed HVCC to redesign and rebuild all of their outdoor sports facilities, including six tennis courts, two football fields, a softball field, a soccer field, two clubhouses, maintenance facilities and parking areas. Between the potential for creating a showpiece facility, preserving future construction options, and uncovering novel funding opportunities, starting with an athletic facilities master plan is becoming a must for any school anticipating major investments in new sports facilities.

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