Golf Club At

Heather Ridge

Long Range Planning Report

April 26, 2011

Phelps - Atkinson

GOLF COURSE DESIGN

P.O. BOX 3295, EVERGREEN, COLORADO 80437
TEL: (303) 670-0478 FAX: (303) 670-3518
WWW.PHELPSGOLFDESIGN.COM

THE GOLF CLUB AT HEATHER RIDGE
AURORA, COLORADO

GOLF COURSE IMPROVEMENT REPORT
PHELPS-ATKINSON GOLF COURSE DESIGN – 4-26-2011

General Comments –

The scope of work for this study essentially included the observation and preliminary analysis of the Golf Club at Heather Ridge golf course and practice facilities. The report is a summary of those observations and is intended to be a "starting point" for further design study, project scheduling and budgeting. At this point, the comments shared in this report are essentially "food for thought" and would certainly need further study before accurate estimates of costs, construction timing and disruption to play could be provided.

The comments will be provided on a "hole-by-hole" basis, covering the entire golf course property. To begin with, the following general comments apply to the entire golf course. Rather than repeat the same issue on every hole, the general issues will be mentioned in this section as they apply to every hole or the overall golf course.

- **Tees** – Every tee on the golf course needs some form of improvement. In most cases, this work entails leveling. However, in some instances new tees could be built or existing tees expanded, combined, etc. The red and gold tees are the same on many holes. New tees will be suggested to shorten the course from the red tees and get the overall length near or slightly below 5000 yards. The report will address individual tee situations in cases where something other than leveling is being suggested. Leveling is most typically accomplished by stripping the sod off of the tee surface, adding some additional rootzone mix (depending on the amount of old top-dressing on the tee), laser-leveling the tee surface and laying new sod. In most cases, the old sod is not worth saving due to the large number of divots and the difficulty in getting the sod to hold together when it is removed. In the end, the cost to strip, save and re-lay the existing sod is almost the same as buying new sod.
- **Bunkers** – All of the bunkers on the golf course need to be rebuilt. The extent of the rebuild will vary, but at the very least every bunker needs to have the sand removed, new drainage installed and new sand replaced. Nearly every bunker will also need some degree of reshaping of the edges, but that is really a case by case issue for each bunker. Again, the hole-by-hole analysis will address special circumstances where a bunker could be added, relocated, removed or completely reshaped, but not the simple sand and drainage comments.
- **Greens** – The greens on the golf course are generally in good condition. My only comment here is that many of them have become very small over the years. This is completely "normal" on a golf course of this age. At this point, it would be valuable to go back and try to recover as much square footage as possible on the green surfaces without going to the cost of rebuilding any of them. In some instances, as much as 25% could be added to the size of certain greens. These will be noted in the hole-by-hole analysis that follows. The intent of recapturing green sizes is two-fold. First, larger greens will allow the maintenance crew more flexibility to move hole locations, reducing

the concentrated wear on certain parts of the greens. Second, there are many "strategic" hole locations that have been lost due to green shrinkage – these hole locations can add a new dimension of interest in terms of shot value that is not currently a factor at the golf course.

- **Trees** – In general, the trees look very good! As is typical for a course of this age, there are a number of trees that are in declining health that should be removed or planned for removal soon. There are a few trees, mostly newer plantings, which are in the wrong place. By the time one were to account for the full growth of that tree, it would severely encroach on the play of the golf hole.
- **Cart Path** – The cart path system on the entire golf course needs work. The asphalt surfaces are in very poor condition and in many cases they are too narrow. I would strongly encourage the staff to consider removing as much path as is practical – leaving path from the green approach to the next tee box, but eliminating the paths along most fairways. Then, as money becomes available, the remaining paths should be replaced, with some minor relocation, widening and perhaps a change in material to concrete.
- **Drainage** – In general, the drainage seemed to be decent throughout most of the golf course. However, due to the analysis occurring so early in the season, it was difficult to observe some areas that may drain poorly during the main "irrigation season." In any case, there are undoubtedly some areas where drainage should be improved. Again, this is "normal" and is something that will need to be done after the new irrigation system is installed, used for a season and fine-tuned.
- **Fairways** – In general, the fairways are in decent shape. Again, it was difficult to observe turf conditions, drainage, etc. due to it being so early in the season. However, the one overall comment to make is that there could be minor mowing changes on most holes to highlight subtle ground contours, accent strategic elements of some holes and generally give the golf course a nicer aesthetic appeal.
- **Ponds** – A good deal of discussion regarding the ponds has already occurred due to the current irrigation project that is underway. However, I would add that there are a few opportunities to expand certain ponds on the golf course. Each of these would present a great chance to make some other improvements while the soil is available. However, they would also each be a significant project in terms of disruption and cost. In general, it appears that most of the pond walls are in pretty good shape – particularly considering their age. These timber walls typically have a life-span of 30-40 years before they will need replacement. The walls look like they may last at least another 5-10 years. However, sometimes once they start to go bad, they go very quickly. Replacing the walls will be a significant expense and is something that should be "budgeted" for now.
- **Clubhouse/practice facilities** – The clubhouse is difficult to see from Iliff. When the facility was a private club, this was a non-issue. However, as a public golf course, the exposure along Iliff can be invaluable. New signage and perhaps some pruning or removal of some of the vegetation should be explored in order to improve the visibility of the clubhouse and highlight the access points to the parking lot from Iliff. It cannot be overstated how many courses we have consulted with that have indicated that a significant portion of their golfer traffic is simply attracted by "drive-by" advertising.

  The practice facilities appear to be heavily used, which is a good problem to have. Lowering the range tee would allow for increased tee surface area, but the ultimate

design solution should be carefully planned to maintain good access to the tee from the pro shop/cart staging area. Target greens would be a great addition to the hitting zone, giving golfers a realistic green to improve the practice experience. The putting green seems to be adequate at this point. However, consideration should be given to the long term use of the pool area and perhaps this would provide a great opportunity to expand the putting green or possibly include a short-game practice area. The post and chain fence around the existing putting green is not very attractive. It also concentrates wear in the areas where the openings are. Understanding the need to control cart traffic and keep carts off of the practice green, an alternative solution would be to add a low curb and remove the fence entirely.

Hole-by-hole:

- **#1** – A good starting hole. The "mostly dead" tree at the back-right of the tee box should be removed and not replaced. This tree only competes with the turf-grass for nutrients and water and creates shade issues for healthy turf growth (root problems, also). A new forward tee should be added to differentiate between the red and gold tees. The general fairway bunker location is good, but, as noted in the "General Comments" section, it should be rebuilt. Strategically, it makes more sense to move the green-side bunker to the left side, building it into the slope below the green. At the same time, the cart path should be moved to the right side. There appears to be plenty of room behind the green for the path to be built over to #2 tees. This improvement would also eliminate the possibility of a ball hitting the cart path and going into the lake.
- **#2 –** The newer "blue" tee makes this a very good hole. It is also nice throughout the golf course to keep a balance between the "tight" holes and the open holes. The start on number one and two provides that experience early on – GREAT! In other words, don't plant more trees on the right side – leave that area open for a nice change of aesthetic from the tighter portions of the course. In fact, there are two mostly dead trees in the rough between 2 and 3 that should be removed and not replaced. This green could benefit from some restoration of surface area to the back and right.
- **#3** – Add a new fairway bunker on the right side at a point approximately 110 to 120 yards from the green. This bunker will be out of play for most golfers, but will cause the longer hitter to select a club a bit more carefully. It will also add a great deal to the aesthetic from the tee. This green should also be "restored" by capturing lost surface area along the entire left side (in some places as much as 10-12 feet!). The left side bunker could be removed, but at the least it should be rebuilt. The right bunker should also be rebuilt.
- **#4** – Remove the steps and juniper shrubs at the blue/white tee. The slope is not steep enough to require them and they simply concentrate traffic onto a portion of the tee and present an unnecessary tripping hazard. This tee could be lowered as much as 15", which will alleviate the side slope issue even more -- it will also increase the surface area of the tee significantly. The red tee should be relocated and moved up approximately 30 yards. The forced carry in front of the green is a substantial challenge for the high handicap player. The average woman player hits her tee shot approximately 140-150 yards.

Moving the tee up will allow that player to hit over the hazard with a shot of 90-110 yards. Remove the pine tree from along the pond edge -- it only blocks the view into this green. Consider moving the bridge to the right to reduce the possibility of having it in the player's line. The 2nd fairway bunker could be removed and replaced by a low mound and perhaps a tree or two, providing more room to access the relocated bridge. Continue to recapture more of the green surface area (Bob had started expansion on this green already at the time of my visit).

- **#5** – It may be necessary to provide more feedback on this hole once the irrigation project is complete and the pond edges are all healed. In any case, the back bunker should be rebuilt and made significantly smaller. The tee could and should be lowered approximately 12-18". Lowering the tee will also increase the surface area, spreading out wear. The ultimate goal will be to maximize the surface are available in this location. Another suggestion worthy of additional study would be to move the "cul-de-sac" on the cart path back to where it turns onto the bridge. Then, the tee could be expanded to the right to where the path turns around now. This change would make the walk to #4 green a bit longer, but the need for surface area on the tee of #5 is paramount.
- **#6** – This is probably the worst hole on the golf course. From a playability and aesthetic standpoint, the tee shot is awful. At the very least, the following improvements should be made. Replace and modify the fence/netting at the tee. Install the new netting in three or four "panels," off-set to each other like a venetian blind, to allow multiple access points onto the tee surface. The netting should be on the inside of the poles closest to the tee to help prevent a ricochet back toward the golfer. All bunkers should be rebuilt, with some consideration to creating a narrow approach to the green from the right side instead of having the entire front of the green blocked by bunkers. Plant additional "screen" trees behind the green (preferably a medium height coniferous species).
- **#6, Alternate** – One alternative to consider on #6 is to shorten the hole into a medium length par 3. The tees could be rebuilt immediately adjacent to the maintenance access road, creating a back tee length of about 160 yards. This would allow room to rebuild #5 green just south of the existing #6 tees (making 5 play about 130 yards), which, in turn, allows room to expand the irrigation pond on #5. This change would result in losing a stroke to the "par" of the course – the marketability of the golf course needs to be considered carefully here.
- **#7** – Lower and level the tees to create more surface area – this may require the removal of the tree from the right-rear of the tee. Consider removing the fairway bunkers on the left. Yes, they serve some purpose to "scare" golfers away from the property boundary and perhaps stop a ball that is heading OB, but they also cause a maintenance issue and a "double-jeopardy" situation where the golfer is in a bunker and behind a tree at the same time. This hole provides a great illustration of the cart path issues at Heather Ridge. The cart path on this hole should end about 40 yards in front of the forward tee. The path could pick up again about 40 yards in front of the bridge crossing. At the same time, the

bridge crossing should be moved about 30 feet east on the south bank and 15 feet east on the north bank to get it out of the "line of sight" of the golfer on the approach to the green. The front greenside bunker should be rebuilt and the back bunker should be removed. This green is another candidate to recapture lost surface area.

- **#8** – Level and re-orient the tees. The red tee should also be rebuilt, leveled and re-oriented. The wall to the right of the tee should be removed. The storm drain crossing in front of the green should be lowered, or additional fill should be added to increase the cover over the pipe. Green surface should be restored to maximize surface area.
- **#9** – Tees need to be leveled and a new forward tee added. The continuous path is very questionable again on this hole as it is very visible and distracting to the aesthetic of the hole. A new "target" bunker should be added to the right side approximately 60 yards from the green. This bunker will only come into play for the longer hitters, but will serve as a good aiming point for all players off the tee. Remove the timber walkways from the tee approaches. They only focus the traffic into one place. Again, rebuild all bunkers and recapture surface area on the green.

- **#10** – The main tee could be expanded by lowering and leveling the surface. The timber "step" onto the white tee should be removed. The willow tree in the corner of the pond should be pruned and/or removed. It is encroaching on the line of play just enough to cause golfers to aim a bit left of the green, towards the boundary. Add a curb or "valley" gutter to the right side of the cart path along the red tee to prevent run-off from crossing the tee surface. The red tee also needs to be leveled. The foot-bridge crossing the drainage-way should be rebuilt. I like the "low profile" nature of the existing bridge, but the timbers are starting to rot and it should be planned for replacement in the next few years. There is room to "restore" green surface to the back and right of the existing

green. The left side bunker should be removed. It could be replaced by a shallow chipping hollow, mown at fairway height. This would still provide some "containment" for shots that miss the green to the left, but would alleviate existing traffic problems from the cart path access. It would also eliminate a "blind" hazard – again, not a big deal on a private course, but now that the GC at Heather Ridge is public, this type of hazard should be avoided as much as possible.

- **#11** – Level/expand tee surfaces by combining them all into one level. Remove the concrete "gutter" down the left side and replace with a pipe and series of inlets. Another instance where it would be great if the cart path could be eliminated through the main fairway area. It could end about where the retaining wall ends on the right side and begin again behind the bunker. Both bunkers should be rebuilt and both should be moved in. The cart path could slide along with the bunker, making the tee shot on #12 much safer. The right side bunker could come in as much as 20 feet and left bunker could slide about 35 feet in. The dying trees behind the green should be replaced – taking care to select species that won't cause shade/root problems once they have matured.
- **#12** – See note on #11 about moving the cart path. The red and white tees should be split apart and each should move in opposite directions resulting in a red tee length of about 310 yards and a white tee length of about 360 yards. The right side fairway bunker should be moved about 25 feet left from its current location. The left fairway bunker (blind) should be removed. By moving the left green-side bunker closer to the green and slightly more in front, the strategy on the tee shot is to favor the right side. Add a new fairway bunker to the right side at about 130 yards out to further reinforce the strategy. Another green to "restore" surface area!
- **#13** – This is probably the second worst hole on the golf course in terms of the tee shot (safety, aesthetics, playability). The approach to the green is very pretty. However, the pond is not visible from the tee and is certainly within reach for many players. This hole would make for a very nice par 3 if the tees were moved up to around 140-180 yards and the green was expanded. At the same time, the pond could be significantly expanded (nearly doubled in size) to add more water storage.
- **#14** – Level the tees and add an "intermediate" tee between the existing white and red markers. The whites should play from about 185 to 195 on this uphill hole. Again, the green surface could be expanded back to something closer to its original size.
- **#15** – Lower and expand the tees by removing the wall on the left side. Remove five trees from the right side of the fairway and replace with one or two bunkers. By the time you have mature growth on the newly planted trees on the right, this hole will be unplayable. This green looks quite steep and would be a candidate for a rebuild. At the very least, it should be expanded back to original size.

- **#16** – Expand the red tee. Rebuild the bunker complex on the right so players can see the sand. This will involve some earthwork in order to properly tie the grades back into the surroundings, but the result will be well worth the effort. The fairway should be widened to the right as well, to tie the whole complex together. Study the left bunker further to determine if it could be rebuilt to make it visible. If not, it should be removed. The leaning spruce tree and wall should be removed from the right side of 13 tees, regardless of whether those tees are relocated or not. Use the excess soil from the bunker project on 16 to fill in the slope below the tees on 13.
- **#17** – Expand the tees and add a new one further forward – at about 270 yards or less. Rebuild the fairway bunker and change the fairway mowing to "lead" into it. Plan on removing the first two or three trees on the left within the next 5-10 years. Again, they are okay now, but by the time they get more mature, they will make the hole way too narrow. New trees could be added well behind these trees, right along the boundary. The back left bunker should be removed and relocated to the front left, built into the low mound. Restore green surface.
- **#18** – Lower/level tees. Remove the conifer tree from the back right corner of the tee – it is causing severe shade and root issues on the tee surface. Expand and reorient the red tee. The locations of the fairway bunkers look pretty good on this hole, but they still need to be rebuilt in place. The green-side bunkers also need to be rebuilt, with the far left bunker being removed. The pond could be expanded a bit toward the landing area – approximately 40 feet, or to about the 100 yard marker. This would bring it into play for the longest hitters, but it would not really affect the short player any more than it does already.

Summary:

The Golf Club at Heather Ridge is a very typical example of a golf course with a significant amount of deferred capital expenditures. Hopefully, the Club will be able to turn the corner financially and get to a point where money can be reinvested in the primary asset – the golf course!! The new irrigation system will certainly help, as it will improve turf conditions and save money on power and water at the same time.

The marketing of the golf course needs to be carefully analyzed and a solid, consistent marketing campaign should be undertaken. Based on the clientele that this golf course attracts and the future potential of the golf course in terms of maximized quality of the playing experience, our recommendation would be to target those golfers who are looking for a fun, faster-to-play golf experience. It is unnecessary and perhaps detrimental to "sell" the "country club atmosphere" when the clients that are playing there are just looking for a shorter, faster, fun golf experience.

Granted, you have a clubhouse that has a tremendous amount of room for "country club" type events (weddings, banquets, etc.). However, the building is in need of an upgrade, too, in order to really attract that type of business. The near term (at least the next five years) focus should be on the golf course.

The next big challenge will be to work through the items outlined in this report and attempt to prioritize them based on return on investment (ROI). Our firm would be happy to assist in that analysis when the time comes.