



*Leading a*  
**Master Plan  
Process?**

*Don't Forget the*  
**Condition  
Audit!**

By Tim Carey



**M**y first day on the job as Ithaca College (IC) associate vice president and chief facilities officer was March 24, 2014—a date to which I have since referred (with apologies to Franklin Delano Roosevelt) as “A date which will live in infamy.” Obviously, the parallels are greatly exaggerated. I whimsically refer to this significant date in U.S. history only because the events on that typically snowy day and the initial weeks of my tenure at IC began a transformation in the way Ithaca College understood, responded to, and funded its deferred renewal (maintenance) backlog and facility modernization needs.

## MASTER PLAN KICKOFF PERIOD

The Ithaca College Master Planning process kicked off on my first day on campus. Although the master planning firm had been selected before my arrival, my new colleagues and I were about to chart a course that would enable our campus to complete a comprehensive plan in just over a year’s time. Our planning process was far more than simply setting some aspirational goals for building and modifying the campus for the next one to two decades—our approach resulted in a clear blueprint to effectively address a significant backlog of deferred maintenance, while simultaneously pursuing the larger Master Plan.

The journey began similarly to most institution’s forays into the master planning process: a New York City consulting firm was hired to collaboratively develop the plan for the future of our physical campus. Reviews of existing programs, enrollment projections, and space evaluations (academic, residential, athletic, recreational, and administrative)—and their relevance to the college’s strategic direction—were the focal point during the early stages of the process.

We placed a high value upon the active involvement of campus constituents during all phases of that process. To ensure a transparent and inclusive initiative, a Master Plan kickoff day was held, and school/department interview sessions, town hall meetings, and surveys allowed the plan to emerge with the input of all concerned parties. Feedback was critical—the feedback loop ensured input from the entire campus throughout the process.

Planning the future of our physical campus was an exciting and thought-provoking task for me.

Leading the undertaking as a first-time senior facilities officer was daunting; however, after a few weeks, I felt much better about it. I felt supported by my colleagues, who were passionate about the college’s history and the wonderful potential we all saw for our campus. Nevertheless, there was a significant issue to deal with.

## “BOSS, WE HAVE SOME PROBLEMS”

In the midst of the master plan kick-off and the accompanying activities, I was also holding initial “Shop Meetings with Tim” with each of the trades, grounds, and custodial teams. These meetings, which I continue to hold regularly, enabled me to share updates from the larger campus (regarding everything



A student offers some feedback during one of the Master Planning Town Hall meetings.

The feedback loop

# "Boss, we have some problems."



2015 photo of a mechanical system that has since been replaced.

from budget development parameters and human resources-related initiatives to upcoming cultural and athletic events). They also allowed me to hear directly from frontline team members about ideas for process improvements, suggestions for equipment purchases, or thoughts on how our department might reduce costs to minimize tuition increases for our valued students and their families.

From the outset of these meetings, I was hearing a familiar theme: Ithaca College had a significant deferred renewal problem; major portions of our envelope systems, building mechanical systems, and grounds infrastructure were in need of repairs and/or replacement. I recall during one meeting that as the list of deteriorating systems grew longer, one of the managers said, "Boss, we

have some problems," to which I replied with a smile, "I don't recall you mentioning this during my interview!"

Nearly 70 percent of our campus was constructed during the 1960s and '70s, and was reaching or exceeding its life expectancy. This reality, coupled with the fact that the college had recently allocated most of its capital construction funds to new buildings, resulted in the original campus portfolio not receiving the resources necessary to keep it up to date.

At this juncture, I had the challenge of leading a comprehensive master planning process, while simultaneously collecting and sorting through a significant list of deferred renewal issues. It then occurred to me that I could not proceed in good conscience without ensuring that the senior administration—indeed the entire campus—completely understood the renewal backlog we faced, one that would certainly continue to grow if not strategically addressed. A master plan without this critical data would have been incomplete and misleading at best.

## MERGING TWO MONUMENTAL PROCESSES: A SOLUTION FOR SUCCESS

As the process gained momentum, I added a second major analysis to the mix: I engaged a nationally recognized higher education condition audit firm to assess the magnitude of our deferred renewal backlog. I envisioned a merger of two significant processes such that one could inform the other, and the resulting byproduct could inform me—and the leadership of the college—for the foreseeable future, so our mission could continue at the highest level of quality.

Two months into my tenure, I invited both the master planning firm and the condition audit firm to campus for a half-day meeting. Both firms told me they had never participated in a meeting with this level of collaboration. Indeed, during the next several months, each firm asked me on numerous occasions about the other firm's progress. Each firm wanted to share their findings, and to also learn more about the other firm's findings. To suggest that both analyses were enriched by this collaboration is a great understatement.

Excerpt from the 2015 Ithaca College Master Plan document:

Building need as net asset value. Red buildings have the greatest need; green the least.



Collaboration



Examples of deferred renewal at Ithaca College. Clockwise from top left: A new mechanical system; a renovated dining hall; one of numerous roof replacement projects.

*“Ithaca College’s independent condition audit consultant found that the College’s facilities require \$175M in deferred maintenance over the next 10 years in order to address deficiencies. For the Master Plan, these shortcomings can be seen as opportunities to reconfigure and update South Hill for the 21st Century.”*

**OUTCOMES**

In May 2015, the Ithaca College Board of Trustees voted to accept the Campus Master Plan. The plan was intentionally crafted to be adaptive rather than prescriptive. Essentially, our plan enables the college leadership to select particular components on a progressive basis, rather than being bound to a prescribed set of building and renovation projects.

Most important, however, is the plan’s acknowledgment of a significant deferred renewal backlog. A slide from the audit firm’s report (below) is embedded in the plan to illustrate that our most needy buildings from a deferred renewal perspective are residence halls. The fact that Ithaca is a residential college makes this finding significant, and also enables informed decision making.

Essentially, merging the master planning and condition audit processes has permitted both a pursuit of the future and a resurrection of the historic past on our campus. Perspectives and data gleaned from both exercises will help the college’s

current and future leadership during the life of the current master plan.

In the two years since the Master Plan’s adoption, we have made significant progress on the deferred renewal front. In fact, the primary focus of activity—and capital funding—has been around the deferred renewal agenda. As we enter our third summer construction season since the plan’s approval, our buildings and infrastructure have been greatly improved. Roof replacements, upgrades/replacements of mechanical systems, window replacements, residence-hall bathroom renovations, the college’s emergency generator environment, concrete envelope system restorations, and other projects have resulted in noticeable positive impacts on campus.

While deferred renewal projects have been our primary focus, we have also pursued traditional master planning items. For example, several projects have enhanced indoor and outdoor gathering spaces, addressing two of the plan’s important goals: enhancing opportunities for social encounters and making the campus easier to use year around. Additional components of the plan are being reviewed and considered for implementation on a continual basis.

**BEST PRACTICE ADVICE**

We viewed the Ithaca College Master Planning exercise as an opportunity to include a systematic strategy to address the building and system flaws that typically go unnoticed by students, faculty, and staff. Our goal, therefore, was to highlight the aspects of the current campus that required improvement, so the college could continue to fulfill its mission. There are a number of positive byproducts of the plan that I hope will assist other colleges and universities to do the same. Some possible steps to consider are:



- **Include a comprehensive condition audit of your existing campus in your master planning effort:** I cannot envision a master planning process without a condition audit. Institutional leadership deserves to have a full and detailed understanding of the shortcomings and challenges of their existing campus as they consider and pursue master plans with exciting growth and improvement potential.
- **Involve the facilities team in the condition audit process:** The valued employees who respond to work requests and interact regularly with students, faculty, and staff in your campus buildings are the experts on where serious issues reside. Work order data is another obvious means to determine where your envelope, mechanical, and other systems are most at risk. It was with these perspectives in mind that I ensured that staff input and work order data were gathered and included in the analysis. *(Note: The advantage of involving your team in the building-by-building condition audit and resultant triaging processes, to determine which buildings and systems are addressed and at what intervals, cannot be overstated. Valuing the perspectives of these loyal, hard-working employees boosts their morale and provides a sense of empowerment that can truly benefit your facilities culture.)*

- **Value transparency and inclusion in the master planning process:** Periodic updates, town hall-type meetings to share early findings and gather feedback, surveys, meetings with cohort groups, etc., all serve to keep the campus community involved and informed throughout the process.
- **Ensure that your master plan is a “living document”:** Master plans are often met with a great deal of excitement by constituents on campus. However, these plans can sometimes fade into the background, compounded by other necessities such as strategic planning, budgetary challenges, and accreditation imperatives. It is my responsibility to ensure that our master plan is continually considered; therefore, each budget cycle I propose or suggest projects relating directly to the plan. Furthermore, I speak about deferred renewal needs and Master Plan components in periodic updates provided to trustees, departments, student groups, and others. This strategy has been successful so far.
- **Revisit and update your condition audit annually:** As a part of the initial audit, we triaged deferred renewal projects and produced a hierarchical project list. We have found that an annual review of the backlog results in important, ongoing adjustments to the list. Inevitably, some projects that were perceived to be urgently needed are able to be pushed further ahead. Conversely, a project originally believed to be years away can emerge as an immediate need. The annual review of the deferred renewal list, therefore, provides a reset of priorities, thereby increasing the success of the overall initiative.

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**TELL YOUR STORY**

I have spent considerable time since the Master Plan’s adoption informing the campus about its tenets and the implications and opportunities before us as it relates to the deferred renewal backlog. As a result, these important concepts are not simply a “facilities initiative.” Rather, campus cohorts see the pursuit of the plan—and of the deferred renewal backlog—as important and necessary initiatives for the college. It’s something we all own. §

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