

GOVERNMENT UPDATE

Task force wants tighter rein on development in Honolulu

A recent report by the Honolulu Department of Land Utilization calls for tighter scrutiny of golf course developments.

A city task force consisting of members of several agencies suggested the city develop tougher procedures, including public hearings, for developers.

With 40 courses in the planning or construction phase, the City Council is trying to develop a new policy on golf course con-

struction.

A major concern is irrigation water, estimated at 500,000 to 1 million gallons daily for an average course. The use of non-potable water or sewage effluent mixed with water has been suggested. But it isn't certain there is enough available.

The land utilization board is also concerned about new golf courses removing agricultural land.

Sherman Hollow fiasco continues

BY PETER BLAIS

The Sherman Hollow golf course continues its five-year trek through the Vermont regulatory system with little chance of receiving final approval to begin construction before spring, according to the developer.

What happens in the Green Mountain State could affect new golf course development nationwide.

"There's a District 4 Environmental Commission public hearing tonight and there's another scheduled Jan. 26," said Sherman Hollow, Inc. President Paul Truax, while preparing for the Dec. 6 meeting that would help decide the fate of his Huntington, Vt., project. "We'll probably need another in February. That means the earliest we could get approval is March or April... If that happened, we could probably open in the summer of 1992."

But that's a best-case scenario, conceded Truax, who has already spent \$2 million (well over the budgeted \$150,000) on the regulatory process. He pegs his carrying costs at another \$30,000 a month over the past five years. He calls the amount of lost revenue due to the delays "astronomical."

"We've lost five construction seasons already. I hope we don't lose another. But the opponents of this project are hoping it will drag through the summer," he said.

At issue is the proposed \$22-million development, featuring an 18-hole course, luxury condominiums, hotel, conference center, theater, sports center and chapel that would all be located next to the Sherman Hollow ski area.

The plan has danced back and forth between state and district boards since the district commission originally rejected it back in October 1987 because, it felt, developers couldn't ensure that no harm would be done to the environment. District commission fears involved possible pesticide contamination of ground water and the impact of logging activities while clearing the site.

The state board upheld that decision un-

'We've lost five construction seasons already.'

— Paul Truax

til, under heavy pressure from citizens of the financially strapped town of Huntington, it referred the issue back to the district commission last February. A survey revealed that 80 percent of the town's residents approved of the project.

In addition to the economic impact, Truax estimated the golf course complex would supply \$500,000 in annual property taxes, about half of Huntington's total tax collections.

The state board also outlined in February corrective steps developers must take to assure the project complied with regulations.

After six months of intensive study, developers submitted to the district board the results of hydro-geologic studies, aerial mapping, on-site five-foot contours, water-movement tests, and mathematical modeling to determine the fate of pesticides. Truax and his partners then asked for reconsideration of the proposal.

The first district public hearing was held Nov. 6. Truax said the state board had ruled in February that issues already considered positively, could not be re-examined at subsequent district meetings. But at the November hearing, Truax complained the district board allowed discussion of three items that had already been favorably received: the project's impact on town services, water conservation, and air quality resulting from pesticide spraying.

"It bothered me that the district could reopen something the state had ordered closed. It's time-consuming... The hearings are limited to three hours and the opposition spent as much time as possible getting answers to questions on issues that had already been approved," said Truax.

The Dec. 6 meeting also resolved less than hoped, with only two of the four expert witnesses hired by Sherman Hollow getting the opportunity to testify because of prolonged cross-examination by the opponents' lawyer, according to Truax.

Commissioners discussed the possibility of extending the Jan. 26 public hearing past the three-hour time limit in order to speed the process along.

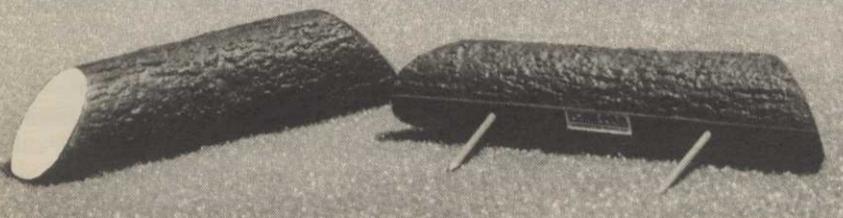
The delays have led to charges by Truax of political misuse of Act 250 (the state's main development control law) and an anti-development attitude that permeates all agencies of Gov. Madeline Kunin's administration.

"The system there will drive development right out of the state," said project architect Paul Ankrom of Florida. "The system can be encumbered by almost anyone."

"Here's Paul with a 1,200-acre site. He only wants to develop 200 acres and leave the rest natural. Most other states would jump at it. But other states are more regulated when it comes to development and can get answers for you faster. Decisions can be made quicker because people know what they're doing. You just don't get firm answers to questions up there (Vermont)."

Ankrom estimated that Truax's project would have taken six months to be approved in his native Florida. Truax might wish he'd taken his plans South when he first headed down Regulation Road five years ago.

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