

Sherman Hollow loses case

BY PETER BLAIS

A local Vermont environmental board has shot down the controversial Sherman Hollow golf resort, setting a precedent the developer believes could affect the industry nationwide.

"This could have a tremendous impact anywhere a new golf course is opposed," said Paul Truax, who spent five years and hundreds of thousands of dollars seeking approval for his Huntington, Vt. course. Truax said he will soon decide whether to appeal the decision back to state environmental agencies, file a lawsuit or drop the project.

"Ultimately, opponents of a course could come back to what happened here. Despite the best evidence we

could deliver that pesticides we used wouldn't pollute, they (District 4 Environmental Commission) turned us down. Developers elsewhere could do the same, but opponents could still argue 'Well look what they did in Vermont.'"

What the commissioners did was vote 2-to-1 against the proposed \$22 million project. The majority's primary objection, Truax said, was the use of the Pesticide Root Zone Model (PRZM) for predicting pesticide movement through the soil.

"Basically it came down to the pesticide issue and the board accepting the opposition's testimony, even though their witnesses said they'd hadn't dealt with PRZM," Truax said.

PRZM is a mathematical model that considers such things as turf and soil types, rainfall and pesticide application rates to determine the pesticides' potential to reach ground and surface water, explained Allen Crabtree, New England group manager for Normandeau Associates, which conducted the study.

The model is fairly new and has been used mainly in agriculture said Crabtree. It has rarely been utilized on golf courses, and never on a course in Vermont, he added. But it was considered a better method than soil columns or measuring wells, two other common pesticide measuring techniques.

In a soil column, water containing a

GOVERNMENT UPDATE

specific amount of pesticide is placed in the top of the column, percolates through and is measured for pesticides as it escapes through the bottom. An Essex Junction, Vt. course that used soil column analysis was approved earlier this year, Crabtree said. But it tested for only three pesticides. And there was no political opposition. Sherman Hollow anticipated using more than three types of pesticides and there was definitely opposition, he added.

Monitoring wells, like those used in the Cape Cod Study, measure golf

course pesticides found in local wells. But since there were no nearby golf courses at Sherman Hollow, monitoring wells were pointless, Crabtree explained.

Crabtree said opponents distrusted PRZM because it was just that, a model. To accurately predict the future, it depended on developers using only the chemicals they fed into the model.

"If pesticides were applied in the frequency and concentrations recommended, we determined there would be no migration or groundwater contamination," Crabtree said.

Opponents also argued that certain assumptions might be incorrect, like the presence of underground boulders that could speed migration. That's why Normandeau was "very conservative in our estimates," likely overestimating any potential pesticide migration, he said. "I thought we were very effective in rebutting their witnesses."

The Environmental Protection Agency and state environmental boards were supportive of the model's methodology and its findings, Crabtree said. "Unfortunately, the District Commission found otherwise," he said of the local panel, which consists of laymen rather than the environmental experts found at state and national levels, he added.

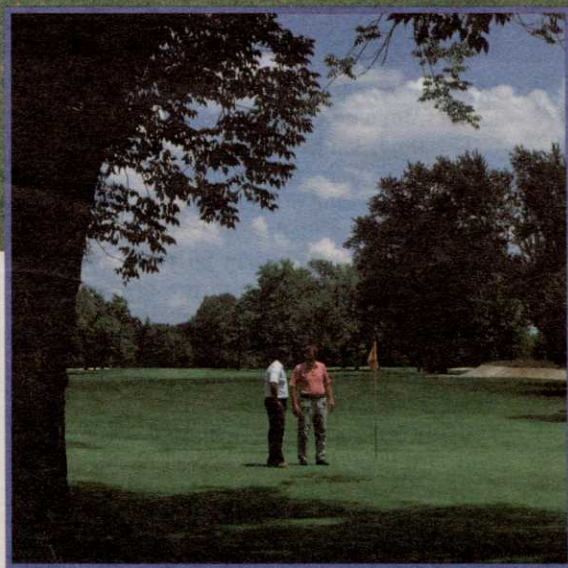
"The constant was the political opposition," said Crabtree. "No matter what we had proposed, they probably would have said it wouldn't work. I thought we made a strong case in favor of this course in this location. I had anticipated a favorable ruling. Frankly, I was stunned."

Added Truax: "It was one of two things. Either they (district commission) was incapable of evaluating the evidence we submitted or they chose to distort it. We had extensive information from the best experts in state-of-the-art technology. They choose to listen to the opposition witnesses, who said they were not versed in PRZM, but that it was inappropriate."

Truax believes some good could come of this ordeal if Act 250, the state's main developmental law, is modified or repealed.

"The Act 250 process has reached the point where it's being inappropriately used," he said. "It was used simply to stop development in this case, not to protect the environment, as it was intended. The district commission extended its power past what the legislature intended and made its own rules. Many people were unhappy and they are beginning to realize the act needs some attention. In essence, the board is overruling the agencies and trained experts."

As for the developers and the town of Huntington, which supported the jobs and tax money the project would have generated, Truax said: "I feel like we've been treated very unfairly. Other golf courses that use the same pesticides received permits over the past five years. Farmers and homeowners can use the same chemicals here with no problem. We've been through a lot of expense and turmoil. I think the board ignored the support of the community. I hope it doesn't cost us this project."



Randy Staton, CGCS (left) and Steve Frazier, CGCS of the Links Group studying the results of Regal Crown.

Regal Crown®



"Regal Crown Enhanced Roots Endure Dry Weather Better"

Randy Staton, CGCS, Superintendent at Hillcrest Country Club in Indianapolis, has been using Regal Crown for several years. Be it tees, fairways, or greens, Randy has seen Regal Crown give him healthier and more stress tolerant turf. Working with Links Group consultant Steve Frazier, CGCS, they discuss their ideas and successes on fine turf maintenance and the use of Regal Crown. The results have been there through the years, so Regal Crown is a part of Randy's program and Steve's recommendations, when it comes to a root growth stimulator.

Both men agree the larger and deeper root system with increased root mass from Regal Crown played a vital role in their being able to withstand the drought of 1988 with minimal water management.

REGAL CHEMICAL COMPANY

Home of RegalStar,™ now labeled for use on Bentgrass

P.O. Box 900 • Alpharetta, Georgia 30239 • Phone: (404) 475-4837 • Toll Free: (800) 621-5208

For free information circle #111