

By MARK LESLIE

It is getting easier to procure financing for golf course projects, but the permitting process is generally longer, according to a survey of golf course architects in the United States.

In a *Golf Course News* poll of architects, more than nine out of 10 also said more environmental planning is being done before permits are sought.

Sixty-two percent of those surveyed said financing is found more easily today than in the past. Brian Curley, in fact,

Survey: Permitting more involved, say architects

responded: "Absolutely!" But 32 percent of the respondents disagreed, saying it is not easier to obtain, and 2 percent felt the situation is unchanged.

Sam Sakocius, president of golf course builder Sajo Construction, said, "It seems there are more sources for financing but those sources are more restrictive."

A full 92.5 percent of those responding said more environmental planning is be-

ing done before the permitting process begins. But despite this advance work, 64 percent reported that it is taking developers longer to get projects approved. Only 13 percent said permitting is being completed more quickly than in the past.

Roger Rulewich of the Golf Group in Bernardston, Mass., who has courses under construction or in planning in six states, balanced the two opinions, saying

the permitting process is "shorter but with more litigation."

Gary Linn of Robert Trent Jones II International in Palo Alto, Calif., credited reports and studies that are mandated by regulations with lengthening the process.

John Sanford of Jupiter, Fla., spoke for some who said the answer to the question depends entirely on the site and state.

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New take on the golf/real estate combo

By MARK LESLIE

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Mixing two everyday ideas, a pitch-and-putt golf course and multi-family apartment community, a small golf course operator here feels he has a prize possession — one that should "go national."

"I'm excited about the potential it has for the golf business," said Del Ratcliffe of his concept. "If we have a number of these all over the country, we'll attract a lot of people who have never picked up a club to play on them. It's simple, inexpensive and a great way to learn the game."

Ratcliffe Golf Services opened its Paradise Valley Par-3 here in November in conjunction with a 300-unit apartment complex built by Summit Properties, a local developer.

The has already proven extremely successful, said Ratcliffe, who also operates the 18-hole Sunset Hills and a practice range in the area. "We certainly feel it can be done on a very profitable basis."

Call it "a poor man's country club," he said.

While Paradise Valley and the Summit Green apartment community are under separate ownership, Ratcliffe said: "The ideal situation is to have a fully integrated project, with a single owner, where the par-3 becomes a simple amenity to the project. We want to fully integrate the concept to go to the semi-private golf community where you gain golf privileges when you become a tenant in the apartments."

"The concept is so good," he said, that it should be incorporated in developments around the country. "The golf course benefits from having a lot of people next door to it. The apartments can charge a higher rental and have a much more marketable product than the guy down the street. Most apartment complexes are updated with the better stoves or refrigerators — bells and whistles in the apartment. But the [competition] down the street can't refurbish

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

EPA deals blow to state permitting initiative

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Gov. Arne H. Carlson and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Commissioner Peder Larson have objected to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recent decision to halt an agreement that would allow states to adopt innovative permitting of environmental regulations.

The effect will be the *status quo*, often meaning long delays for golf courses and other projects.

On Feb. 26, Larson and five other state environmental agency commissioners sent a letter to EPA Administrator Carol Browner and Deputy Administrator Fred Hansen stating that members of the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) were shocked to learn that EPA had made a "unilateral decision" to immediately pull back from public review the draft "Joint EPA/State Agreement to Pursue Regulatory Innovation."

ECOS consists of environmental secretaries, directors and commissioners from 49 states and six territories. Larson is co-chairman of the ECOS Regulatory Innovation Work Group that, along with EPA, developed the draft agreement.

For ECOS members this means that months of hard work of the joint EPA/ECOS Work Group have come to a jolting halt.

"I am frustrated because just as the states and the EPA are about to find ways to streamline environmental regulation, the EPA gets cold feet," said Larson. "The EPA is imposing conditions to halt, or severely impair all future efforts to help business comply with environmental regulations while producing cleaner results in an economically feasible way."

When asked for his reaction to the EPA's recent decision, Carlson said: "It is my duty to the citizens of Minnesota to create the most

efficient system possible for achieving our environmental goals and ensure the best protection of public health and the environment for the least cost. However, the EPA's decision to impose conditions on all future efforts brings future uncertainty to a process that held great promise."

"ECOS members are disappointed that the EPA decided to

impose these unreasonable and counterproductive measures," said Larson. "We believe that the EPA's position shows a lack of commitment to meeting President Clinton's charge of reinventing environmental regulations. The EPA has said publicly that its goal is to apply common sense, flexibility and creativity to move past its one-size-fits-all mentality.

Clearly, the EPA's actions create great barriers to true innovation. I am very disappointed."

Larson said it is ironic that the draft agreement has fallen prey to the very problem the states hoped it would solve. Larson hoped the draft agreement would cause some improvement in the relationship between EPA and the states, which has been increasingly strained in the past few months.

"ECOS hoped that through the principles and process described in the draft agreement that EPA and the states could create a shared commitment to dealing openly with each other and being accountable for our actions," said Larson. "We are instead left with damaged trust and questions about EPA's commitment to working in partnership with states to create a better environmental system for our citizens."

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Architects survey

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Meanwhile, surveyed about whether the pipeline of new courses shows any signs of drying up, golf course builders agreed that it does not.

"All indications," explained Joe Niebur of Niebur Golf, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., "show 1997's construction activity remaining constant with the past year's."

Bill Kubly, president of Landscapes Unlimited Inc. in Lincoln, Neb., seconded that motion, saying, "If anything, the pace is picking up. We have never seen so much activity. There seems to be a lot of renovation work coming up as well."