

CONDOMINIUM MARKET FACES COST vs STANDARDS BATTLE

Standards for apartment and condominium landscapes are rising today while more of the landscape decision-making is falling into the hands of cooperative and condominium associations. As landscape contractors sense the potential of this growing market, association boards are contemplating in-house maintenance programs. Since very few (less than 25 percent) of those responsible for landscape management belong to a landscape association, resolving the differences between contractor and association board will be on a case-by-case basis.

Rising landscape standards stem from increasing competition among apartments and condominiums. "Curb appeal" may draw a potential tenant to one development over another. All respondents in *Weeds Trees & Turf's* recent survey agreed residents are placing an increasing value on the landscape of apartments and condominiums. They also see the number of condominiums and apartments increasing greatly in the future.

Two thirds of the respondents reported the apartment/condominium staff performed some landscape services. To maintain an average of 16 acres the typical apartment/condo owned 2 riding mowers, 5 push mowers, 2 line trimmers, 2 spreaders, 1 tractor, 1 spray unit, and 2 chain saws. This machinery is operated by 3 full-time and 3 part-time personnel. The average chemical budget was \$2,800 and the average equipment budget was \$3,500. Most budget planning is done in October and November. More than a fifth of the respondents said there was no separate budget for landscaping.

Equipment buying is done primarily on an as needed basis. Chemical buying takes place pri-

marily in February through April.

Those apartment/condos with landscape staff tend to contract out chemical applications, concentrating efforts on mowing, flower and groundcover care, and trimming. Tree planting and seeding are the second most common functions performed by contractors for apartment/condos.

A fourth of the respondents purchase chemicals and seed supplies from local garden centers rather than specialized wholesale distributors. Equipment, however, is purchased largely from landscape equipment dealers.

More than a quarter of the respondents were owners of apartment buildings. Landscape responsibility falls chiefly in the hands of the building or maintenance supervisor. In the case of condominiums, members of the association board review landscape programs.

The contractor or the supervisor of the landscape staff tend to specify the work. The owner and the maintenance supervisor depend upon these people for setting guidelines and budgets.

Communication and tact in dealing with residents are the two most critical keys to successfully working for an apartment/condo. "The landscape staff has to work closely

with the residents and management, be conscientious and reliable," one apartment owner said. "The landscape has to show to the resident attention to trimming and detail."

On the other hand, management is leaning toward in-house landscape staff to lower costs and increase control, according to the survey. While standards are going up contractors' prices must increase to cover higher standards. One solution is to have apartment/condo staff take care of trimming, flower beds, and groundcovers, while the contractor performs mowing and chemical applications.

Metropolitan Insurance Co., owner of apartments in New York City, contracts all the work out to avoid labor relations problems with the union. At the same time, Metropolitan supervisors direct the contract staff.

Landscape supervisors of apartments and condominiums should join associations to help work out some of the potential differences between costs and expectations. The number of apartment/condo units will rise in the 80's as will the landscape standards. Associations are the best way to work out necessary compromises. **WTT**

TABLE I
Who Performs Landscape Services

Service	by Apartment/Condo	by Contractor
mowing	60%	40%
trimming turf	66%	34%
fertilize turf	50%	50%
turf weed control	55%	45%
turf insect control	55%	45%
tree spraying	80%	20%
tree trimming	75%	25%
groundcover/flower care	90%	10%
tree planting	66%	34%
turf seeding	66%	34%
turf aerifying	70%	30%