Cliffs golf project could soon resume

Conservation group reaches deal on key issues; others have to agree

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Developer Jim Anthony said he expects to announce soon an agreement with conservation groups that would resolve environmental concerns related to a golf course development in northern Greenville County.

Anthony and Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, a Greenville-based conservation organization, said they had reached tentative agreement on key issues involving The Cliffs at Mountain Park.

Mountain Park, announced in 2006, is the largest Cliffs development, a 5,000-acre project in Greenville County with a Gary Player-designed golf course with lots for 1,500 homes. The golf course will stretch along the river between State 11 and U.S. 25.



SUZIE RIDDLE / Staff

While Upstate Forever has reached an agreement in principle with Anthony, "It's not a done deal right now," Wyche told *The Greenville News*. "Not all the conservation organizations have signed on."

In addition, the South Carolina Department of

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CLIFFS

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Health and Environmental Control and the state's Administrative Law Court, which is considering appeals of permit applications for the development, haven't reviewed and approved an agreement, Wyche said.

Still, he said, "I'm hopeful that we can have all this wrapped up by the end of the month."

"We have an agreement in principle," Anthony said. "There's some i's to dot and t's to cross."

"We're able to make some changes and maintain the integrity of the golf course and the quality of the golf course and work with our neighbors," he said. "We feel like it's a win-win."

With a final agreement, Anthony said he hopes to resume construction on the Mountain Park golf course in 30 to 45 days.

Anthony and Wyche said the developer's agreement with Upstate Forever calls for protective buffers along the North Saluda River, elimination of some golf cart bridges on the course and limits on use of river water for irrigation.

It also calls for Anthony's company, The Cliffs Communities, to support a fund to pay for watershed restoration after construction and a site for public access to the river for boating and fishing, Anthony and Wyche said.

Wyche said Upstate Forever won't continue opposing The Cliffs' plan to dispense wastewater in an area next to the golf course.

"We continue to believe that this is not a good site for a golf course, but several provisions in the proposed settlement — longer and wider buffers, fewer bridges, minimal channel alteration, and water withdrawal limits — will mean that the impacts of the course on the North Saluda will be substantially less than what they would have been under the original proposal," Wyche said.

The Cliffs originally applied for a permit to discharge wastewater into the Saluda, but later withdrew it.

The company then asked for a permit from DHEC to apply the treated wastewater in an area next to the golf course. Upstate Forever opposed that request because the group had serious questions about the suitability of the hillside area for handling wastewater, Wyche said.

The proposed settlement would allow The Cliffs to proceed with the application of wastewater in the area, he said.

"A settlement by definition means you don't get everything you want," Wyche said.

Representatives of other conservation groups couldn't be reached for comment.

A DHEC spokesman said the agency hasn't received details of the potential settlement.

The Mountain Park development's water-quality certification, stating that applicable effluent limits and water quality standards wouldn't be violated, was issued in May 2008, said Adam Myrick, a DHEC spokesman in Columbia.

The certification was appealed by Upstate Forever and other conservation groups. DHEC's board upheld the staff's decision to issue that permit and the case was appealed to the state's Administrative Law

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Court, where it is pending.

The separate land-application permit for treated wastewater also was appealed to the court.

After the project was proposed, conservationists said they met with Cliffs representatives to voice "serious concerns" and asked them to modify the approach.

Conservation groups said they aren't opposed to the Mountain Park project but are concerned about development activities and practices that threaten the environment, particularly in sensitive areas such as the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wanted Anthony to suspend plans for the golf course until the project's impact on the North Saluda and surrounding environment could be determined.

Anthony did suspend work on the golf course while he attempted to resolve the environmentalists' concerns.

In a recent interview with *The News*, Player said he understands the concerns and the conservation groups have been "quite tough" on the plans for Mountain Park.

He has a 13,000-acre ranch in South Africa, and Player said the use of fertilizers, misuse of water and soil erosion pose greater threats.

Wyche, who is a lawyer, said that after all sides agree to the settlement terms, a comprehensive written agreement will be signed and sent to the Administrative Law Court for its approval in a consent order.

He said his group expects DHEC to carefully monitor The Cliffs' operations and "we certainly intend to do so."