



## Survey: Public Distrust of Development in U.S., Great Britain and Canada is Rampant

By P. Michael Saint, CEO, The Saint Consulting Group  
Published Online 08/08/07

NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard) has taken off, and public opposition to large-scale development is rampant across the United States, Canada and Great Britain. A recent survey shows remarkably similar opposition to the development of large-scale projects, distrust in local politicians, and fears that the planning process is unfair. According to the survey, conducted by The Saint Consulting Group, the most significant overall finding was that respondents in each country are opposed to further development in their communities.

The Saint Index®, the first and only annual primary research tool that quantifies and tracks the politics of land use, show that 75 percent of Americans were suspicious of the relationship between elected officials and developers. In fact, the results demonstrated that out of the three countries surveyed, the United States harbors the greatest distrust for the planning process. While this dislike of development is increasing—with 68 percent of Americans opposing the development of big-box retail stores such as Wal-Mart in their area—there remains a strong interest in big-box shopping. Sixty-one percent of respondents stated that they enjoy big-box shopping, but are opposed to having such stores in their communities.

To overcome this dichotomy, developers and politicians alike must learn how to efficiently navigate the waters in battling the spread of NIMBYism.

There is a similar air of resentment for development in Canada. Three-fourths (75 percent) of respondents opposed new development. Concurrently, 87 percent of participants said that a candidate's position on growth is important when they are deciding whom they will support. Like Americans, Canadians are also distrustful of the potential relationship between developers and politicians. Three-fifths (60 percent) of those polled stated that the relationship between elected officials and developers makes the process unfair, and interestingly 1 in 4 strongly believe that the process was unfair. Canadians respondents assert that development in their area will potentially damage the character of their community, and more importantly harm the environment.

Across the board, residents are aggressively acting to protect their own real estate investments — though they often call it protecting 'community character.' In order to succeed, developers must take the time to understand the local politics.

The survey results also show that developers face the greatest opposition in Britain, in fact, 83 percent of respondents oppose new development in their communities. They view

development as harmful to the environment, with 16 percent citing a desire to protect green space and the environment as their chief reason for opposition. Surprisingly, respondents in Britain were the least wary of the relationship between developers and politicians. However, we believe the disparity seen in reasons for opposition is more than likely attributed to cultural differences among the three countries. Nearly three-fifths (58 percent) of respondents believed that the relationship between elected officials and developers makes the development process unfair.

In addition, 70 percent of respondents feel that a candidate's position on growth is important, and often dictates how they vote. Just over half, (51 percent) of Britons believe that the government should continue to prohibit out-of-town retail development. As Britons become more aggressive in their opposition to development, politicians and developers must create new and productive tactics to placate the fears of the general public and garner support.

With public opposition to development rampant in the United States, Britain and Canada, similarities and differences exist with regard to each nation's appetite for development. For example, large majorities in each of the countries agree that a politician's position on development is a key determinant in their chances for re-election. In each country, active opposition to development is much more prevalent than support. Respondents stated that property values, community character, traffic and environment are the most common reasons for opposing development. By contrast, respondents in the three countries did have divergent opinions on the development of one particular big-box entity — supermarkets.

In the United States and Canada, supermarkets face little opposition, 25 percent in each, but in Great Britain 59 percent of those polled were opposed to supermarket development. Given these results, it is evident that the time has come for developers to strategically and carefully change the way they do business.

The NIMBYism phenomenon is progressing, with no end in sight. Residents across the globe have united against development in their communities, for the sake of protecting the environment, their neighborhoods, and most importantly their values. Community members have grown increasingly sophisticated in their attacks against politicians and developers, recognizing that elected officials are unlikely to vote against their wishes. Developers must recognize the newfound influence residents hold over politicians, and create campaign strategies for their projects that will demonstrate sufficient public support to give officials the justification they need to defy the vocal NIMBYs and approve good development.

For further details, contact:

P. Michael Saint, CEO, The Saint Consulting Group  
[msaint@tscg.biz](mailto:msaint@tscg.biz)

[http://www.rebusinessonline.com/article\\_archive/08-08-07.shtml](http://www.rebusinessonline.com/article_archive/08-08-07.shtml)

# OPPOSITION TO DEVELOPMENT

