

## Developers face lack of trust from communities

BY ASHLEY FORD  
BUSINESS REPORTER

What a surprise!

Developers in Canada are not trusted and that same distrust is found in the U.S. and the U.K., according to a survey conducted by Saint Consulting Group, which has offices in all three countries.

But the while the survey found remarkable similarities, such as opposition to large-scale developments, distrust in local politicians and fears the planning process is unfair, there were also some differences in thinking.

For instance, whereas property value is the primary concern of U.S. residents, it is the character of the community and the envi-

ronment that Canadians and Britons wish to preserve, the survey shows.

"I continually hear developers say they have a great project with community benefits, so why would local politicians vote it down?" says Paul Devlin, head of Saint Consulting in Canada.

"They vote it down because it is more politically expedient to stand with neighbours who passionately oppose a project because of traffic impact, real-estate values and environmental issues which underwrite the underlying fear of change," he said.

With NIMBYism — not in my back yard — rampant, developers in all three countries "need to change the way they do business,"

said Saint president Patrick Fox.

"They can no longer count on getting an application approved just because they think it is a good project with real community benefits," he said. "The planning process had morphed into a classic political campaign where the technical details are less important than stacking up the vote.

"To succeed, developers need to consult before they announce a project. They need to build coalitions, leverage community benefit and line up grassroots support."

The survey found that residents are becoming increasingly sophisticated and aggressive in their tactics against developers.

Other findings include:

■ Supermarket development in

Britain is aggressively opposed by 59 per cent of respondents compared with only 25 per cent in Canada and the U.S.

■ Private housing is the least-opposed land use in the U.S. and Canada at just six per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, compared with 30 per cent in the U.K.

■ Some 60 per cent of Canadian respondents say they distrust the planning process, compared to 78 per cent in the U.S. and 58 per cent of Britons.

■ Casinos, landfills and power plants are universally detested in all three countries — and while residents like big-box shopping centres, nobody wants them in their own back yards.

[aford@png.canwest.com](mailto:aford@png.canwest.com)