

Resin Cancels Golf Blueprint

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Golfers at the Le Meridien Moscow Country Club in Nakhabino. **Vladimir Filonov**

Acting Mayor Vladimir Resin on Monday canceled a decree signed by former Mayor Yury Luzhkov on developing golf in Moscow, a City Hall source told The Moscow Times.

The decision is unlikely to significantly affect the future development of golf in Moscow because the sport was included in a list of Olympic sports last year, and golf infrastructure has already started developing, said Nikolai Afanasyev, director of a Moscow golf school.

“If [the decree] has been cancelled, I’m of course disappointed to some extent,” he said, but added that new golf courses were likely to be built anyway.

“I don’t think there will be any fundamental changes. Everything will take its course,” he said.

Another City Hall source told Interfax that the decree would be replaced by a new program for building sports infrastructure in the capital through 2025, in accordance with the urban

planning code and the General Plan for Moscow's development.

Luzhkov signed the decree in 2006 to support building golf courses and clubs from 2007 through 2012.

City Hall planned to identify plots of land to build golf facilities and to use budget funds to create a blueprint of where to locate them. Investors would have financed construction and would have been selected via tenders, the source told Interfax.

The first "municipal" nine-hole golf course, whose construction was financed by City Hall, opened recently in the district of Kurkino, Afanasyev said.

He also said his school, which is funded by City Hall, was functioning successfully, with about 600 children attending classes for free.

But cancellation of the decree may affect plans by construction company Inteko, owned by Luzhkov's wife, Yelena Baturina, to build a golf club near Ulitsa Nizhniye Mnyovniki in western Moscow. Last year, the company acquired a 35-hectare plot to build the club, which may be designed by U.S. golf legend Jack Nicklaus.

Inteko intends to build a clubhouse and an 18-hole golf course on the territory. A company spokesman told Interfax last month that the design would be completed next spring.

The company has declined to comment on the size of its investment in the project.

Real estate consultants said many companies that plan to build golf clubs in Moscow or the surrounding Moscow region would not lose money by the cancellation of the decree.

"Such investors will be able to develop the land in other ways," said Natalya Kats, managing director of Usadba, an elite real estate agency.

She said developers would be able to start new, more profitable projects instead of the planned golf clubs.

"If an investor has an alternative, it would be more profitable to build a multi-functional complex, a mall or homes on the plot," she said, adding that such plots of land were a valuable asset.

The average plot size needed to build a golf course is 30 hectares. Market analysts value the plot of land acquired by Inteko at \$175 million to \$250 million, according to Vedomosti.

An Inteko spokesman told Vedomosti last month that the company had no plans to build any housing on the plot.

"There cannot be any housing on the property. Given the landscape, it's an optimal place to put a golf course," the spokesman said.

A company spokesperson was unavailable for comment Monday.

Kats said Russian golf courses are operational for less than half the year.

“Golf courses are not in high demand in a country where it rains or snows for nine months of the year,” Kats said.

There are currently only four golf clubs with 18-hole courses in the Moscow region: Nakhabino, Pestovo, Tseleevo and Agalarov Estate.

Both Baturina and Luzhkov have said they enjoy golfing. Inteko owns a golf course in Austria, Vedomosti reported.

Luzhkov was a consistent supporter of sports development. He said in 2006 that City Hall planned to build at least 10 golf courses in Moscow.

Earlier this year, he said that making Moscow an international finance center would be impossible without developing golf.

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