

Hurdles high for proposed DeBary horse track, poker room

By Bob Koslow

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DeBary -- Even if the state approves a quarter-horse racetrack with a poker room here, the City Council has to rezone the proposed site and that may be too big a hurdle.

"I am not for that at the present time," Mayor George Coleman said Tuesday. "We want to stay a small town and we don't need this. Yes, we might get some more tax money, but I think the people are willing to do without some things knowing where the money came from. The people are not ready for this."

City officials have not yet met with the Iowa-based real estate developer that applied in mid-March for state approval of the businesses on 67 acres at the southeast corner of U.S. 17-92 and Dirksen Drive.

However, representatives of Green Bridge Co., under the name DeBary Real Estate Holdings LLC, are scheduled to talk about their plan during a City Council workshop tonight at 6:30.

"There are so many rumors and misinformation that we want to make the presentation and explain what could be with some details," said Allison North Jones, a Tallahassee attorney who is serving as project spokesman. "All this hinges on the state approvals and taking steps with the city."

Property owner Steve Costa also is invited to the workshop at Florence K. Little Town Hall, 12 Colomba Road.

The property is zoned as a planned unit development with an approved development agreement for a grocery store, a mixed-use village, outparcels and a large multifamily housing area that would all surround a large lake/retention area.

The City Council would have to rezone for any use not specified in the development agreement, City Manager Maryann Courson said.

According to the application under review by the

Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, voters already approved parimutuel wagering in Volusia County, and a greyhound racetrack operates in Daytona Beach. Poker rooms and quarter-horse tracks are also permitted without additional approvals.

Green Bridge Co. intends to start building spectator stands for the horse track and complete the poker room soon after acquiring a certificate of occupancy, the application states. The track would be completed within the first season, and 40 races would be staged in the first year.

State law allows operation of a poker room on a horse track property that stages just a single race a year.

Yet Jones says the DeBary track won't sit idle. "It's expensive to build quarter-horse tracks. It's going to be used," she said.

The poker room will include 25 large tables and be open 12 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Revenue from the card room is projected at \$8 million a year. It would employ 105 people and maintain a \$2.5 million annual payroll. The city could realize tax revenue ranging from \$400,000 to \$600,000 the first year, Jones said.

Councilman Jack Lenzen said he thinks most city residents would not support the project as presented so far in the media. He is reserving judgment until after the presentation.

"It's only fair to the applicant," he said. "I have received some calls of support from DeBary residents."

A regular City Council meeting follows the workshop. Items on the agenda include canvas carport permits, a proposed rezoning of 329 acres for the Country Estates at River Bend subdivision, a fire protection special exception for Highbanks Marina and Camp Resort and discussion of the city manager.