

Quarter-horse racing bets on DeBary location

By Rachael Jackson

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A quarter-horse racetrack proposed for DeBary would have an upscale hotel, a restaurant row and even space for a farmers market, developers said at a city workshop on Wednesday night.

It would also have a "card club" with 25 tables for poker -- something that council members have said could be a hard sell in DeBary.

Rumors about the track had swirled for more than a month, after developers submitted an application to the state. But before Wednesday, city leaders had been in the dark about what exactly they had in mind for 67 acres in the community off Interstate 4 in Volusia County.

City Council members said little after the presentation that painted the project, DeBary Downs, as a country-fair-style destination with an environmentally friendly design. Developers haven't yet applied for zoning changes they'll need for the project. They're also still waiting for the state to permit a new betting facility.

Mayor George Coleman said the presentation was different than he expected and said he would take a look once he receives a formal proposal, but Council member Lenny Marks said the project was unlikely to get the community's support. He said he had received more than 150 calls and e-mails, most of which opposed bringing gambling to the town.

"I just want to say that you opened up a hornet's nest," he said.

Michael Goldstein, the 25-year-old Fort Lauderdale man who submitted the application, said he and his team were simply planning to "wow" the council and community to win approval for the project.

While thoroughbred horses race in the state, there hasn't been a quarter-horse race in

Florida since the early 1990s. In the past year eight tracks for the sprinter horses have been proposed in the state, including in Ocala, Melbourne and Sumter County.

Observers say that's because state law changed last year to allow betting facilities to operate card rooms year-round, not just on race days.

Since permitting rules for quarter-horse racetracks are unusual -- they don't need to be 50 miles apart like other betting facilities -- the racetracks became very appealing.

Goldstein is related to Bernard Goldstein, chairman of Isle of Capri Casinos, which runs Pompano Park in South Florida, where horses also race.

A page of financial information in his application lists startup costs of \$8.7 million and projects \$8.2 million in revenue, most of which would come from 25 poker tables, in the first year of operation.

The state Department of Business and Professional Regulation, which issues permits for betting facilities, sent Goldstein a letter pointing out various deficiencies in the application, including failing to show how the project would be financed or that the land was available for use. On Wednesday, a Goldstein consultant said they were nearly finished filling in those gaps.

Goldstein has submitted two applications for quarter-horse racetracks. The second would be about 10 minutes from The Villages in Sumter County.

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