

# Orlando Sentinel

## After council vote, DeBary gambling project veers off track DeBary decides not to gamble on horse track, poker

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After a six-hour meeting before a crowd of more than 650, the DeBary City Council shot down a proposal for a horse track and poker room Saturday, ending months of speculation about whether gambling would come to this small city.

"I think it's too big of an operation to come in," Mayor George Coleman said after the 3-2 vote against the track. He said safety on the nearby roads was a major factor in his decision. Opposing council members also cited concerns about crime and whether the city had thoroughly reviewed the application.

Michael Goldstein, developer of the DeBary Town Center and Equestrian Park, which would have included a hotel, restaurants and shops, offered little comment.

"It's an unfortunate situation," he said.

The vote was met with loud cheers from a group of DeBary residents who have spent months working against the project. One of them sang a song in opposition during the public-hearing portion of the meeting. Others predicted prostitution, drugs and other social problems would have developed if the project were built. Most of them wore red. The track was arguably the most controversial issue in DeBary's history as a city.

"Gambling tears families apart," said DeBary resident Renee Young, one of the first to address the council. "I could be at the hospital right now because I'm having my first grandbaby, but I made sure I was here today to state how I feel."

Patricia Stevenson, who recently moved to DeBary, said she used to live in Pompano Beach, home of Pompano Park, which now includes a casino and harness racing and is operated by Isle of Capri Casinos. That company is chaired by Goldstein's grandfather.

"You will smell horse manure, you will hear emergency sirens that come along with accidents from the drunk drivers," Stevenson told the City Council. "You will no longer have our small, friendly town."

Some supporters chuckled when opponents made dire predictions about what will happen if the project is built.

Joe Luiz, a landscape contractor and city resident, said the city needed the project and its financial benefits. "We have to grow, or we're going to wither and die," he said.

The developer's team painted an idyllic picture of the project, mentioning Florida vernacular architecture, a rose garden and public art. Ty Harris, an attorney for Goldstein, said the project would have less impact

on traffic and the environment than a residential development that was already approved for the 67 acres at Dirksen Drive and U.S. Highway 17-92. The land is now a cow pasture.

"When you put these pieces and parts together, you just really have a very interesting, integrated environment that is going to be second to none," Harris said at the meeting.

Cecelia Bonifay, an attorney representing the Daytona Beach Kennel Club and Poker Room and a group of residents, said the development didn't fit the city's comprehensive plan and would have more serious impact than the developer let on. The kennel club, which would have faced competition if the project were built, funded an aggressive campaign against the project. Through a nonprofit group it set up called the Committee for Open Government, the club put up a billboard across from the project site, sent mailers out and helped residents organize.

After the vote, kennel club general manager Dan Francati said he thought his group's actions played a small part in the outcome.

While those in the crowd occasionally heckled speakers, the meeting was more civil than the last time the council attempted to take up the issue in November. That meeting was canceled when the Town Hall was overwhelmed with an estimated 600 people. Saturday's meeting was at the 100-acre River City Nature Park and offered seating for 1,000.

Council member Jack Lenzen said he supported the project because he opposed the current zoning, which he said could bring low-income housing to the city.

"The alternative is worse than what's being proposed," he said.