Magna's plans for Dixon track progressing

Magna Entertainment Corp.'s plans for a state-of-the-art racetrack in tiny Dixon, California continue to move forward.

A series of outreach meetings in the community, located 55 miles northeast of the San Francisco Bay Area, has just concluded with generally favorable reviews and Magna has ironed out agreements with local labor organizations in preparation for a possible start of construction in approximately one year.

"A draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) should be ready by the last week in April," said Don Erickson, former mayor of the town and Magna's point man in Dixon. "That triggers a 30- to 60-day response period, so a final EIR should be ready by the end of September. We'd take the final proposal to the City Council in the first part of October."

Erickson said that if the plan was approved without any major changes, it would take approximately six months to get permits drawn and finalize agreements with contractors, meaning construction would start in the spring of 2006. He estimated that the first phase of the project, which includes the track, barns and all racetrack-related structures, would be completed in two years.

Dixon's director of economic development, Marshall Drack, said that if a Project Labor Agreement (PLA), a formal contract between a developer and a labor union, had been negotiated by Magna with local labor representatives, approval should not be an issue.

If the tone of the five outreach meetings, each attended by 125-200 people, is an indication, approval should not be an issue.

"When we first introduced this at a meeting in 2001," Erickson noted, "things got a bit rancorous. But as local citizens found out the details of the project, it's become much more acceptable."

Part of the education process for community leaders is a series of trips to Magna-operated facilities in other areas. City officials were set to tour Santa Anita Park over the weekend after visiting Golden Gate Fields in the Bay Area and Gulfstream Park and the Palm Meadows training facility in South Florida. An excursion...
Unions put priority on racetrack

By Melissa Murphy/Staff Writer
TheReporter.Com

The Dixon City Council was greeted by well over 100 area union workers at Monday night's hearing on the Dixon Downs racetrack proposal.

Occupancy in the Chamber was pushed to its 107-seat limit, leaving quite a few of the workers standing outside holding signs that read "Yes, Dixon Downs."

"This would be steady work for us," said Tony Shannon, a member of United Association Local 343 in Vallejo. "We like taking on new projects."

This was the fourth public hearing in front of the City Council intended to presage the council's decision on the Dixon Downs horse racetrack that Magna Entertainment Corp. is proposing.

Shannon currently is working with his union on the new addition to Genentech in Vacaville.

"Despite popular belief, we will use the facility after it's built," Shannon added. "They've really got me excited about it. I would love to experience the track once it's built."

Other unions like Napa/Solano County Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union also were represented Monday night.

Some have said that Dixon Downs will be a regional issue, meaning that other cities will be impacted. Harriet Steiner, city attorney for Davis, agreed.

Speaking on behalf of the city Steiner said, "Dixon and Davis have had a good working relationship that they hope will continue and grow."

The city of Davis, however, still isn't satisfied with some of the issues that a project as big as Dixon Downs may create.

Traffic is one of those issues.

"We believe that the project is a regional project," Steiner said. "Traffic issues are not adequately analyzed in the EIR."

Steiner said that Davis has recommended a parking structure, paid for by Magna, to alleviate parking that would happen at the shuttle stop that would transport people from Davis to Dixon Downs.

An impact on jobs is still a concern at Campbell Soup Company. Pedrick Road, which would be shared by it and the proposed track, is recognized in the environmental impact report as needing improvement.

Martha Gonzalez, a 30-year employee at the processing plant, is providing the main income for her family. She is concerned that the plant might disappear if the track proposal is approved. 'It's not just our jobs, it's the whole operation.'

Tonight the City Council will continue deliberations on Dixon Downs after a regular meeting in the Council Chamber, 600 East A. St.

The public hearing originally scheduled for Oct. 16 has been canceled.

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