

# They're off and running: Race track owners each to bid on gaming licenses

The owners of all four of the state's pari-mutuel race tracks will be among the bidders for the three commercial gaming licenses proposed by Gov. Deval Patrick earlier this week.

Raynham Park, Plainridge Racecourse in Plainville, Suffolk Downs in East Boston and Wonderland Greyhound Park in Revere all said they plan to bid for the 10-year licenses, estimated to go for at least USD 200 million.

The owners of all four tracks have long lobbied for slot machines at their facilities, failing at every turn. Their latest legislative bid went down to defeat with a 100-55 vote in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in March 2006.

The governor now is proposing three resort casinos, one each in Southeastern Massachusetts, western Massachusetts and metropolitan Boston. Legislative approval is necessary to implement the governor's plan.

Gov. Patrick again is rejecting the idea of slot machines at the race tracks, saying they are less effective than resort casinos in providing jobs and attracting tourists.

Undeterred, the track owners are lusting after the new carrot the governor is offering, even if it means they're now pitted against one another, forced to bid on individual licenses rather than lobbying for something that would benefit all of them.

„We finally have a governor who's in favor of expanded gaming in Massachusetts and we're going after it,“ said Gary Piontkowski, president of the Plainridge harness racing track.

„We will be whatever the Legislature wants us to be,“ Mr. Piontkowski said. „If they want us to be a race track with slots, that’s fine. If they want us to be a casino, that’s fine, too.

Mr. Piontkowski said he expects the House to endorse casino gambling, largely because legislators know their approval won’t be overridden by the governor.

„Last year we were confident we had 81 votes,“ he said, but Gov. Mitt Romney had indicated he would veto the legislation if it passed the House. „When it became clear there weren’t enough votes to override the veto, some people backed off.“

This time „we’ve got a governor who says he’s willing to sign. That could make a big difference.“

The Plainridge partners are experienced in gaming and have access to the necessary capital to develop a casino on the 91-acre site at the intersection of Route 1 and Interstate 495, Mr. Piontkowski said. „We’re prepared to go forward today.“

As is Raynham Park owner George Carney, who told the Enterprise of Brockton that he „positively“ will bid for a casino license.

„I was hoping he’d put in slots for the dog track,“ he said. „But in the event we’re not able to get that, we’ll put in an application for a casino at the dog track.“

Suffolk Downs, a horse-racing track in East Boston, „fits well into (the governor’s) vision for the future of gaming in the state,“ said Bill Mulrow, chairman of Suffolk’s board.

Boston Mayor Thomas Menino is touting Suffolk, which is owned by Richard Fields, an experienced developer who built the Seminole Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos in Tampa and Hollywood, Fla.

Wonderland Greyhound Park is less than two miles from Suffolk,

at the end of the MBTA's Blue Line in Revere. A track spokesman said Wonderland owners plan to bid for a casino license, even if it means competing with Suffolk Downs.