

MILLSBORO -- Despite the setbacks experienced in last year's General Assembly, proponents of a Sussex County casino haven't given up yet.

The future of a proposed casino, which would join three others already operating in Kent and New Castle counties, was called into question

when a scheduled April vote on House Bill 194 was canceled at the last minute. In the wake of that blow, a 384,000-square-foot project planned for the Indian River Inlet was withdrawn from consideration this summer.

Rep. Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, who sponsored the legislation, said he's working to reintroduce an amended version of the bill now that the Legislature has reconvened.

"The reason I'm supporting new venues is the creation of jobs," he said. "We need the jobs it'll bring right now even more."

And with the opening of the new Ocean Downs casino near Berlin on Jan. 4, Schwartzkopf said there's an even greater impetus on the legislators to keep gambling dollars and vital jobs from crossing state lines.

He said the fact that four of the legislators who retired last year were all no votes gives some hope that the revised bill will garner more support.

"Every one of us (who) ran for election this year ran on a platform of creating jobs," he said.

"We're going to see which legislators are willing to stand up and create jobs."

Although the language of the new bill is still being drafted, Schwartzkopf said it would call for two additional casinos: one in Sussex County and another in the northern part of the state.

He said it would establish a body to review the casino proposals and choose the best one.

If the process goes smoothly, Schwartzkopf said groundbreaking and the creation of thousands of new jobs can happen by next year.

Currently, three proposals are at various points in the planning process. They include casino complexes in Delmar, Georgetown and Millsboro.

Preston Schell, developer of the Del Pointe Resort & Racino in Millsboro, said the project has been in a "holding pattern."

"We're in the same position we were six months to a year ago," he said. "Now, it's up to the Legislature."

If and when the Legislature gives approval to start, Schell said construction on the 370-acre casino complex could begin immediately.

A temporary structure could be erected in about three months, while construction of a more permanent structure would take between 12-15 months, he said.

Regardless of what happens, Schell said he believes a Sussex County casino is inevitable.

"Quite frankly, I'm not going anywhere," he said. "I'll probably always have a hat in the ring. It makes too much sense."

Legislator renews push for Sussex casino - Delmarva Daily Times

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