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YOUNGSTOWN

The developers of a proposed \$300 million complex in the Mahoning Valley with a horse racetrack, resort, golf course, stores and possibly a casino with slot machines haven't spoken with Gov. John Kasich.

They

also don't have a license to operate a racetrack.

Rob Nichols, Kasich's spokesman, told [The Vindicator](#) on Monday that the governor wants a comprehensive study done on gambling in Ohio before any decision can be made on allowing slot machines at racetracks.

"The governor recognizes it can bring in considerable revenue, but there are societal issues" that come with legalizing that form of gambling, Nichols said.

The state Legislature, at the request of then-Gov. Ted Strickland, a Democrat, voted in June 2009 to permit slot machines — called video lottery terminals, or VLTs — in the state's seven horse racetracks.

The state's share of the VLT revenue would have helped offset its budget deficit.

But an organization that said the governor and Legislature overstepped their constitutional

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authority filed a lawsuit to stop the process. The lawsuit still sits in the Ohio Supreme Court.

“It’s a complicated process,” said Rick Lertzman, chairman of the Mahoning Valley Development Group, the organization proposing the complex in the Valley.

He added that if Kasich, a Republican, permits VLTs at racetracks through the Ohio Lottery, they’ll be legal.

When asked if Kasich has “executive privilege” to legalize slots, Nichols said, “If that’s the case, Strickland would have done it.”

Even without VLTs, Lertzman said his company is ready to move forward with a hotel and racetrack that would take 18 months to complete.

Lertzman, a former business consultant, declined to disclose the location of the project but said his company owns 200 acres in the Valley that would house the complex.

He also declined to disclose the names of any investors except that Bradford Pressman, a retired podiatrist, is involved with the project. Most of the money would come from the other investors, Lertzman said.

Lertzman and Pressman will have a press conference at 11:30 a.m. today at Mr. Anthony’s in Boardman to discuss the project and its location.

Lertzman said his company has been in contact with the Ohio State Racing Commission, which oversees the state’s horse tracks, for the past two years.

“It seems like everything looks fine,” he said. “Right now, we meet all the regulations.”

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Officials with the commission couldn't be reached by [The Vindicator](#) on Monday. The office was closed because of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The commission hasn't granted a new horse racetrack license in at least 60 years, Lertzman noted.

State Reps. Robert F. Hagan of Youngstown, D-60th, and Ronald V. Gerberry of Austintown, D-59th, said the proposal sounds far-fetched.

Hagan said he thinks having a race track with slot machines: "is illegal and unconstitutional. ... I'm looking at it with a jaundice eye and as promises that can't be kept."

Gerberry said, "Who in their right mind has \$300 million without a [horse racing] license? Why in the world would the Ohio Racing Commission approve an eighth track when the other seven are going broke? It's doesn't make any sense. How gullible are we?"

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