

Will Casino Plan End Aqueduct Horse Racing? - Metropolis

Written by Administrator
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By Eliot Brown



Philip Montgomery for The Wall Street Journal A push to bring a casino and convention center to the Aqueduct racetrack could mean the end of horse racing at the site.

As part of its plans to ultimately [build a full-service casino resort](#) at the Aqueduct racetrack — along with a [massive convention center](#) — gambling giant Genting has been in discussions with state officials to shut down horse racing at the site. In exchange, the company is offering to augment the racing facilities at nearby Belmont racetrack, according to people familiar with the discussions.

As part of the plan, Genting is seeking to redevelop portions of Belmont and “winterize” the track, allowing horses to safely race there in the winter. That could mean moving the grandstand, among other investments, the people said.

The idea is a long way off: Table gambling isn’t even allowed in New York state, and there is sure to be a fight as the governor and others [attempt to legalize it](#) . Nor has the Aqueduct been chosen as a site for a casino should gambling become legal, although it is considered an obvious top candidate.

Further, the New York Racing Association controls the leases on Aqueduct and Belmont, and a resolution would likely need to be negotiated. A NYRA spokesman declined to comment.

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But the idea has been battled around by the state for years; the administration of Gov. Eliot Spitzer considered closing Aqueduct. The horse-racing industry is state-subsidized, and Aqueduct is a mere seven miles from Belmont.

Christian Goode, Genting's chief financial officer for the Malaysian's company's operations in the U.S., acknowledged in an interview that the firm was considering the plan and called it "conceptual."

"We've clearly kicked the idea around of consolidating racing there — it makes a lot of sense," he said.

The thought of shutting down the Queens racetrack comes as Genting has revealed its plans to build what would be the country's largest convention center at the site, for which the company has a non-binding agreement with the state. The firm has built other convention centers as part of its casinos, and Genting was already contemplating a convention facility on the site should gambling be legalized. But it opted to first negotiate with the state a deal on the project, in part to drive public support, people familiar with the matter said.

Closing the Aqueduct racetrack, adjacent to Genting's existing slot machine center, would open significantly more land for development or other uses. The state-owned land would need to be bid out competitively, Goode said. He declined to say specific ideas he had for the site.

"There's a lot of things that site could be used for," he said. "We have a lot of ideas."

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