

Nebraska lawmakers tackle plans for multiple casinos

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OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - Bellevue wants to get in the horse racing casino game, they have drawn up plans to build a facility in their city.

A horse track for up to 5,000 fans, a grandstand and clubhouse, and a multiple-purpose entertainment center for restaurants and concerts.

And eventually a casino.

A bill was introduced in the legislature to change some provisions in the Nebraska Racetrack Gaming Act. One proposed change would have prevented horse track casino operations from opening within 50 miles of another facility.

The racing commission would have until 2025 to study the plan.

"I thought the bill was kind of to stop Sarpy County from getting a horse track and casino it almost felt like to me that somebody was trying to legislate competition which is not really right in my opinion," said Bellevue Mayor Rusty Hike.

[Officials with Warhorse Casino are already working on big plans for a casino at the Horsemen's Park location in Omaha.](#)

"We're proposing to spend about \$250 million on the Omaha facility if there's one in Bellevue I think people understand it's going to have to be something smaller," said Lance Morgan, President and CEO of Ho-Chunk Inc.

[Bellevue Mayor Rusty Hike](#) hopes to use the horse track and casino to jump start economic growth south of town.

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Five or six years ago we looked at an entertainment district in that area and this really feeds into that vision we can put a water park next to it, hotels different recreational-type facilities,” said Hike.

Lance Morgan says their Warhorse Casino in Douglas and Lancaster counties are two of the six counties that voters approved to have casinos operating at Nebraska’s established horse tracks and adding more casinos is not what Nebraskans want.

“When Nebraskans voted on this they thought of this as a reasonable expansion nobody wanted a casino you know on every corner the six existing tracks is what were on people’s minds.”

Morgan says their work crews have actually started some work at their facilities in Lincoln and in Omaha.

“We have a plan to open temporary facilities both in Omaha and Lincoln and so in order to get that underway we had to get started, we actually thought we would start last fall or last summer even.”

Morgan says two casinos so close together, competing against each other would make it difficult to win back Nebraska gamblers who travel to Iowa to spend their money.

“There’s 750,000 living on this side of the river our 750,000 taking care of three casinos over there in my opinion so I think there’s room to add more entertainment venues here.”

“What you really need is one large champion to fight them and I think that’s what we proposed and the fact that we were here first I think is very telling.”

Both sides agree that eventually, the Nebraska State Racing Commission will make the decision on how many casinos will be allowed in Nebraska.

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