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## Back in the saddle?

Plans to build a harness-racing track at the Navy Yard will be revisited at a community hearing Tuesday.

By [David Gambacorta](#)  
September 9, 2004

There's bad news for stadium-area residents who thought the possibility of another high-traffic venue was behind them.



The Pennsylvania State Harness Racing Commission will be in town Tuesday to discuss the revived idea of building a harness-racing track at the Philadelphia Naval Business Center.

A public hearing is set for 9 a.m. at the Holiday Inn, 10th Street and Packer Avenue.

Although the horses haven't left the gate yet, opposition to the plan is expected to be strong, said Shawn Jalosinski, executive director of the [Sports Complex Special Services District](#).

"We're talking about a huge quality-of-life issue here. This area is already congested from the Eagles and Phillies traffic. Adding a racing track would be ridiculous," Jalosinski said.

He contended the addition of a track would create a traffic nightmare, as visitors can only enter the former Navy Yard from South Broad Street.

This isn't the first time the topic of a South Philly racetrack has been broached.

In February 2003, members of the Philadelphia Trotters and Pacers Inc. -- including Sixers and Flyers chairman Ed Snider and Delaware River Port Authority chairman Manny Stamatakis -- reached a tentative agreement to build a racing track on an unused parcel of land in the former Navy Yard.

That deal, however, never came to fruition, due in large part to neighborhood opposition.

"Basically, we live here and they don't care. We resisted this before, and we'll give it our best shot again," said Stadium District member Judy Cerrone.

State Rep. Bill Keller -- who fought to win a large portion of the Navy Yard site for port use -- said the Philadelphia Trotters and Pacers Inc. are once again behind the racetrack proposal.

It was unclear at press time whether Stamatakis and Snider are still involved.

The Trotters and Pacers initially filed an application with the state racing commission to hold a community hearing in October 2002.

The commission required the corporation to hold public hearings to assess community impact before any deal could be reached.

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"Our residents want to get the word out that this is not going to be the place for a racing track or anything else," Jalosinski said.

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**Some neighbors worry** that the racing hearing will only be a precursor to additional meetings about the possibility of locating slot shops in or around the stadium area, especially since Gov. Ed Rendell signed a bill legalizing slot machines in June.

"There is great concern that eventually the conversation will turn to adding slot shops on Packer Avenue," Jalosinski said, "but that's not something we're prepared to let happen."

Although residents are concerned, odds are the state won't award racing or slot licenses to any sites in South Philly, said Gary Tuma, spokesperson for state Sen. Vincent Fumo, who played an integral role in getting the slot legislation passed.

With only one racing license available in the state, and only two slot licenses to be awarded in Philadelphia, the state has to pick locations that will maximize revenues, Tuma said. Since the area already has easy access to the Turf Club, a gambling venue at Seventh Street and Packer Avenue, as well as a racing track being developed in Chester, it's unlikely that South Philly will be the most desirable spot, he added.

"There are provisions in the law that the slots be placed strategically, in venues that we know will generate high revenues," Tuma explained. "I don't know if the Navy Yard fits that description.

"Additionally, the state racing commission is exploring locations throughout the state, and [Tuesday's meeting] is just one of many that they have set up."

Tuma noted that other hearings are scheduled with corporations seeking to build harness-racing tracks in Lawrence and Beaver Counties.

Still, Jalosinski and others in the stadium district feel they must let their voices be heard loud and clear to prevent any of these discussions -- however preliminary they might be -- from becoming serious.

Jalosinski said he expects all of the Stadium District representatives, as well as Rep. Keller, to come out in a show of support Tuesday.

In March, Rendell signed Keller's legislation conveying 47.2 acres of ground along the waterfront immediately south of the Packer Avenue Marine Terminal to the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority. The PRPA plans to use the property to develop a contiguous waterfront.

"The intent of the law is clear," Keller maintained. "The racing track simply does not fit in this area [because of the existing racetracks], and it's not the best use of the land that's available down there."

Investors keep trying to build at the Navy Yard because they don't have comparably sized alternatives, the legislator suggested.

"There's big money involved in this, and they want to try to force the track down there," he said.

Keller said he sympathizes with the concerns of residents who already have their fill of extra traffic.

"How much more can they take?" he posed. "On top of the sports teams, how can you ask them to accept something that would be open for business 365 days a year? Enough is enough."

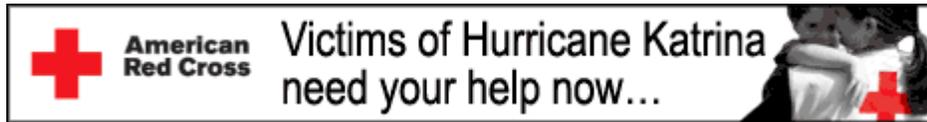
Although there is no timetable for the state to decide on the Trotters' request, Keller hopes the racing commission will quickly understand the impact the track would have on the neighborhood.

"What the Trotters and Pacers want to do is against the law, which is clearly defined," he said. "If it wasn't, I wouldn't have voted for the bill in the first place."

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