

City Council approves legislative push to end greyhound racing in Iowa

By Tim Rohwer

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The possible end of live greyhound racing in Council Bluffs picked up support from the city council Monday evening.

“We want the Legislature to pass a bill to remove the requirement that Horseshoe (Casino) continue live greyhound racing,” said Councilman Al Ringgenberg. “If it’s not viable, they should not be required by the state to keep losing money.”

The council on a 4 to 0 vote – Councilwoman Melissa Head was absent – approved a resolution in support of the Legislature taking action this year to repeal any state law that requires live greyhound racing as a condition of obtaining or retaining a gaming license at land-based casinos, such as Horseshoe in Council Bluffs. The city’s dog track, Bluffs Run, is located on the casino grounds.

“This indicates the city council is in support to change that requirement,” Councilwoman Lynne Branigan said.

Fellow Councilwoman Sharon White said new development on those ground could generate more property taxes, which would benefit the city’s residents.

“We look forward to new development,” Ringgenberg added.

Bo Guidry, executive director of Harrah’s and Horseshoe casinos, recently said Horseshoe has had to provide up to \$10 million a year in subsidies to keep the track running.

According to a 2010 study on Iowa greyhound racing that Ringgenberg provided Monday evening, only 12 percent of revenues generated at Iowa dog tracks came from actual wagering with the rest coming from casino subsidies.

The track grounds could be converted to hotels, retailing, restaurants or other uses that would further enhance growth in that area along the busy Interstate 29/80 corridor, the council members said.

A memo of this resolution vote will be sent to leaders of the Iowa House and Senate – Council Bluffs lawmaker Mike Gronstal is the Senate Majority Leader – as well as all the local representatives there, said City Attorney Richard Wade.

What’s more, the city council in Dubuque, the only other city in Iowa to have a dog track, has also approved a similar resolution, Wade said.

“This is the first time Dubuque has gotten on board,” he said.