

Brandenburg, Hanafan would support repurposing Bluffs Run

By Tim Rohwer

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A Council Bluffs lawmaker said he would support closing the city's greyhound racetrack because it's no longer a viable business.

"There was a time they had people there, but there is no real demand for it anymore," Rep. Mark Brandenburg said. "It's not a viable venture anymore."

Greyhound racing in Iowa, including the Bluffs Run Greyhound Track at the Horseshoe casino, is subsidized by casino profits. Iowa lawmakers have rejected proposals the past three years to allow casinos to pay millions of dollars annually to the state treasury for the right to shut down their dog tracks.

Since the mid-1990s, Iowa law has allowed the Dubuque and Council Bluffs tracks to operate casinos, but only on the condition that casino profits subsidize dog racing, even though wagering on races has dwindled and crowds are sparse.

Brandenburg believes the lawmakers rejection stems from concerns of job losses. In his view, these workers could be reassigned inside the casino. Better yet, develop that land into something really viable, he said.

"If we could develop that, there could be more jobs. It might be different kinds of jobs, but it would help the economy,"

Brandenburg was quick to add he doesn't support expanded gaming should the dogs leave.

The greyhound racing industry is becoming dangerous for the dogs, according to a newly released report from a national greyhound protection organization.

Greyhounds suffered 175 injuries while racing at Iowa's two tracks – here and in Dubuque – between January 2011 and July of this year, the reports said. The Council Bluffs track recorded 106 injuries during that time. Approximately two-dozen dogs injured at the two tracks had to be euthanized as a result of their injuries.

Officials of Grey2K USA, the country's largest greyhound protection group, have called for Iowa to end dog racing because of these injuries.

Council Bluffs Mayor Tom Hanafan was surprised and upset when learning of the injuries.

“That’s too bad,” he said. “There were very few injuries early on. There used to be rules on how many times the dogs could run. It was set up to be humane.”

If that land can be more productive economically, then why not go for it, Hanafan said.

“To me, it makes sense that if it isn’t working now, let’s do something else.”

Iowa is one of seven states where greyhound tracks still operate.

The Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission regulates the state’s two greyhound tracks. The commission’s administrator, Brian Ohorilko, said he has not seen the Grey2K report, but said he monitors track veterinarian reports and he hasn’t noticed any significant increase or decrease in greyhound injuries.

“We take the welfare of the animals very seriously in both dog and horse racing,” Ohorilko said.

State veterinarians perform a pre-race exam to ensure that dogs are healthy for racing, and tracks are checked to make sure they are in good condition, which helps avert injuries, Ohorilko said.

–This report contains material from the Associated Press