

## Backers hope Del Pointe gets on track

Proposed Sussex resort developers looking for clearance to build casino

By Leah Burcat

Delaware State News MILLSBORO — As state legislators reconvene on Tuesday, 6,000 potential jobs in Sussex County hang in the balance.

The proposed Del Pointe Resort and Racino project in Millsboro is shovelready and could bring thousands of jobs into hurting Sussex County almost immediately, said Preston A. Schell, of Rehoboth Beach, one of the project's developers.

The only problem is the project needs a casino to be economically feasible.

While that did not seem like a problem just a month ago, when Gov. Jack A. Markell proposed increasing the number of casinos in the state, the tide has since turned.

After pressure from the state's three existing casinos, the governor's administration and the legislature has started leaning away from that proposal.

On April 6, compromise legislation was introduced that did away with the provision to increase the number of gaming venues within the state — and potentially also did away with Del Pointe's chance at existence.

Del Pointe would sit on 377 acres recently annexed into Millsboro. It would include a one-mile harness race track, a casino, a hotel, a convention center, a family resort hotel, an indoor water park, an indoor sports complex, a movie theater, restaurants, retail space and a paintball park.

It is projected to bring in about \$62 million a year, said Preston Schell.

That is especially important as Maryland casinos get up and running next year, he said.

Del Pointe's location could help keep a lot of business in the state — business that could easily travel to Ocean Downs near Ocean City, Md., he said.

And even more importantly, it would bring in jobs.

"This would bring in a significant number of jobs, in the hardest hit county, in the hardest hit industry (construction)," said Christopher Schell, who is also involved in the project.

According to a feasibility study done on the project, the project would bring in more than 6,000 construction jobs.

"We'll get to the point where we're waiting with shovels in hand," said Preston Schell.

But they may be waiting a long time.

Many legislators are opposed to the idea of expanding the number of casinos in the state.

"We'll be losing the same amount of jobs or more at another location," said House Minority Leader Rep. Richard C. Cathcart, R-Middletown, of the two Downstate casinos. "I'm not on board with expanding the locations at this point in time. I don't see the logic in it."

And even those state lawmakers in support of the Del Pointe project seem prepared to put it on the back burner in the name of compromise.

"We're overlooking 6,000 jobs. That's a heck of a compromise," said House Majority Leader Peter C. Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, after a meeting of the House Gaming and Pari-mutuels Committee on April 6.

"I am in support of the project, because of what this project will do for Sussex County," he said. "And what it means for revitalizing our community."

As of now, Del Pointe's only shot could be a favorable review from the Video and Sports Lottery Study Commission, assuming House Substitute 1 passes.

In the legislation House Substitute 1, a commission would be created to study the impacts of additional casinos. The commission's report is due to the General Assembly no later than April 1, 2010.

There has been talk around Legislative Hall that other legislation could be introduced that would clear the way for Del Pointe, but nothing been introduced.

"I'm hearing that there is another bill circulating out that there that would amend the existing law," said Rep. Schwartzkopf. "I'm not on it, but I have heard a rumor about that."

In the meantime, Del Pointe project developers are meeting with lawmakers — and waiting.

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