

Horse park plan gets funding nod

BY KEVIN ABOUREZK

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An ambitious plan to build a \$50 million horse park in northeast Lincoln moved forward Thursday when a county advisory committee recommended contributing \$50,000 for planning.

The Lancaster County Visitors Promotion Committee made the recommendation after listening to representatives of 2015 Vision, a group of private business leaders.

The Lancaster County Board must approve the recommendation, which would be paid for with lodging tax collections.

"We've got to push it forward," said Nebco Chairman and CEO Jim Abel, a member of 2015 Vision. "We've got to go to the next step."

Proponents of the horse park — which would replace the horse track at State Fair Park and has a preliminary price tag of \$50 million — unveiled their plans in September 2008.

They call for combining 160 acres at the Lancaster Event Center south of Havelock Avenue near 84th Street with 200 acres owned by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln north of Havelock Avenue.

The horse park would feature a milelong track called Goldenrod Downs, as well as equestrian programs and equithrapy. It would serve as an alternative to the existing, shorter track at State Fair Park.

The park would have as many as 1,200 stalls for horses, as many as 2,000 camping spots, horse trails, a multipurpose equestrian center and other facilities to be shared among the project sponsors.

Restaurants, hotels and other commercial properties also could be built.

UNL plans to convert the fairgrounds to a research campus now that the State Fair has left for Grand Island.

Nebraska Horse Park would be a partnership between multiple groups, including 2015 Vision, UNL, Sunrise EquiTherapy, the Lancaster County Agricultural Society, which oversees the Lancaster Event Center, and the Nebraska Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association.

Abel said 2015 Vision has secured another \$50,000 from the horsemen's association for studying the site and market needs for the park. The group also has gotten funds from a private foundation, which Abel did not name.

2015 Vision is seeking \$250,000 for this next phase of planning.

"It's still planning, but it's getting more specific," said JoAnne Kissel, principal planner with The Clark Enersen Partners.

Kissel said the project's partners already have studied the need for state-of-the-art equestrian and equitherapy facilities. She said they have found the horse park is poised to take advantage of national and regional horse shows with its location and proximity to Interstate 80.

She said a major challenge has been getting those interested in the project to work together.

"Everybody's used to working independently," she said.

John Chapo, president and CEO of the Lincoln Children's Zoo and a Visitors Promotion Committee member, said the committee was demonstrating the county's support for the project by approving the \$50,000 contribution.

"The benefit is pretty significant," he said.

Jim Partington, executive director of the Nebraska Restaurant Association and a Visitors Promotion Committee member, asked who would pay for the horse park.

"There's some work to be done on that," Abel said.

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Timeline

Proponents of a proposed \$50 million horse park in northeast Lincoln released a preliminary timeline for the project, which would include a horse racing track and as many as 1,200 horse stalls.

Planning

- September to March: Equestrian consultant would help develop the plan, including programs, concept alternatives and estimated costs, and a final concept. A master planning team would conduct planning and engineering studies that would examine topography, traffic, hydrology, floodplains, drainage and wetlands.
- December to March: An economic consultant would help conduct a market analysis and feasibility study that would examine the economic impact of the horse park and funding possibilities.
- April to May: The master planning team would develop a summary that would include a project description, final site master plan, estimated costs, anticipated funding sources and implementation and phasing determinations.

Design and construction

- September 2012: Expected completion date for roads, parking, Equestrian Center and HBPA simulcast clubhouse.
- May 2013: Expected completion date for racetrack, grandstand, horse barns and

equestrian outdoor facilities.

No expected completion date has been set for a proposed Lancaster Event Center Coliseum/Fixed Seat Arena.

Source: The Clark Enersen Partners