

ST. PAUL — A group wanting to bring racing and a casino to the Iron Range has been given four years to buy property in Hibbing, assuming it can convince the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board that the idea is workable.

The board voted Wednesday

night to grant an option on 615 acres, mostly reclaimed mining land, in Hibbing.

But the effort is far from a sure bet.

The race track project, known as the Iron Range Racing Complex, would develop a motorsport and horse racing track. Supporters say the only way it would be successful is if it gains legislative approval to include a casino.

“It’s a long shot,” Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, said after the meeting.

Consultant John Fedo, a former Duluth mayor and Hibbing city administrator, said a bill should be introduced in the Legislature soon to allow a race track/casino.

Fedo said the state could reap up to \$60 million a year from the Hibbing track.

Rukavina said that with a large state budget deficit, this may be the time lawmakers approve a gambling option to bring in more money.

Fedo agreed. “We’re not sure, but we think the timing may be right,” he said.

The concept is to build a track that hosts snowmobile races in the winter and horse and motorized races in the summer. It would cost up to \$45 million to build and would produce up to

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Written by Administrator

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700 jobs, backers say.

Besides legislative approval for a race track/casino, which the state's other two horse tracks have tried in vain to get for years, the state Racing Commission would need to approve the horse track.

The track would replace the Hibbing Raceway at the old fairgrounds site.

Also Wednesday night, the board elected Rukavina its chairman, and Tony Sertich attended his first meeting as IRRRB commissioner. He resigned as a legislator to take the job, and his legislative replacement, Carly Melin, DFL-Hibbing, took her seat on the board Wednesday, her first full day as a representative.

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