

Written by Administrator
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Maryland racing officials said Wednesday they plan to close the state's busiest racetrack next year and redevelop it after a vote in Anne Arundel County gave the go-ahead for a nearby slots casino.

The racing industry, in a state that is home to the

second leg of the Triple Crown and a 250-year tradition of horse racing, by next year could be whittled down to a single racing meet.

Tom Chuckas, president of the Maryland Jockey Club, which operates Laurel Park, said the track "couldn't compete" with the casino planned by Baltimore developer David Cordish.

Cordish holds Anne Arundel County's only slots license, and [Tuesday's county referendum vote](#) approved zoning for his site 10 miles up the Baltimore-Washington Parkway from Laurel.

"No racetrack in the county can survive and prosper with a gaming facility [that close]," Chuckas said.

Racing officials have lobbied for almost a decade to get slots at the state's racetracks after surrounding states' tracks began offering the machines.

"The whole genesis of this was for slots to save racing," said John Franzone, a member of the Maryland Racing Commission. "In West Virginia, Charles Town was basically closed, Delaware Park was closed. ... Now everyone raves about their product."

The jockey club plans to ask the racing commission at its November meeting to let it close Laurel after the fall meet ends in December, Chuckas said. He said Laurel would become an off-track betting facility and parent company MI Developments is looking at mixed-use development of the area, which touches the Prince George's County border.

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MID, a Canadian company, bought Maryland's racetracks out of bankruptcy this year.

The Bowie Training Center also would close, and the state's racing schedule would be reduced to 40 days at Pimlico Race Course, home of the Preakness Stakes.

This year, Baltimore's Pimlico hosted 20 racing days and generated total wagering of \$127 million, including the Preakness. Laurel's season last fall and this spring -- 112 scheduled racing days -- generated nearly \$267 million in wagers, including off-track betting.

Racing officials said Laurel's closure means the end of racing's year-round presence in Maryland, which in its heyday boasted six thoroughbred tracks.

"We won't be out of business because of Preakness," said Franzone. "So that's good for the operator -- it's not good for the industry."

Representatives from the Cordish Co. stayed quiet Wednesday, other than issuing a statement by President Joe Weinberg saying the casino is expected to [generate hundreds of millions of dollars](#) to fund state education and county services.

Steuart Pittman, president of the Maryland Horse Council, said Laurel's owner didn't have horse racing's interests at heart.

"This isn't a big surprise because when MID acquired the jockey club it said it was doing so because of the development potential of the land," he said. "There was no mention of horse racing."

lfarmer@washingtonexaminer.com

Laurel Park to close as Anne Arundel casino moves forward - Washington Examiner

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