

## **OAS proposes Balzac racehorse stabling**

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Paul Frey, Olds Albertan

Olds Ag Society is looking to cash in on the controversial Balzac mega development by creating a training and boarding facility in Olds for race horses competing on the track there.

Approval was given last Wednesday morning by the municipal planning commission for the Olds Agricultural Society to proceed with a new riding arena and stables on the south side of the agricultural grounds.

The new facilities are in addition to what's already on the site.

OAS general manager Tami Gardner said the primary reason for the additional buildings will be to act as a training and boarding facility for horses which will race at the proposed Balzac track between April and June, before they go to the Northlands track in Edmonton for races later in the season.

Balzac's billion-dollar development is expected to include a casino, veterinarian college, a mall the size of West Edmonton Mall, convention centre and two racetracks - a one-mile thoroughbred track and a seven-furlong standardbred track.

Horse racing officials say the development will bring bigger purses, bigger races, and more experienced riders.

Work on the project has been stalled because a source to supply water to the development has not been finalized.

The United Horsemen of Alberta, which is building the racetrack and casino, announced last week it would not be able to host races during the 2008 season.

Horse Racing Alberta officials said they are starting to prepare for a "worst-case scenario, which would be a 2009 opening".

The proposed Olds facilities will provide additional revenue to the OAS, adding to the horses that are already stabled there in between May and October. The thoroughbreds will be stabled between November and March.

Gardner said the objective of stabling the thoroughbreds is to develop a relationship with Horse Racing Alberta.

Once the barns are completed, about up to 200 horses can be stabled at the new site.

One of the benefits of the project, she said, is it will eliminate the crossing of 54 Street, which often happens now for Olds Agricultural Society events.

"We're very excited about the opportunity to do this development," Gardner told commissioners.

She said a public meeting was held May 30 in which seven neighbouring residents identified traffic congestion on 54 Street and maintaining current trees on 54 Street as concerns.

Gardner said Harnois Industries approached the OAS last fall about putting the buildings up as additions to facilities already on the agricultural society grounds. Site preparation will be starting immediately, so that when the building materials arrive, they will be ready to assemble, she said.

The Ag. Society will be spending roughly \$1.25 million on both structures, representing a 10 - 20 per cent savings over a wood or steel frame building.

The barn will be approximately 24 metres by 116 metres (80 feet by 380 feet) while the riding arena is approximately 38 metres by 70 metres (125 feet by 230 feet) in size. OAS will be ready to handle horses by the time the Olds Fair and Rodeo takes place August 10.

"That is the wonderful thing about these type of structures in that the actual steel and fabric will arrive on our site on July 2 and we hope to have livestock in those barns for the fair on August 10, so they go up very quickly," she said.

Commissioner Warren Smith said he believes the project will be a benefit to the community.

"It's a wonderful addition to the equine facilities in our community. It should lessen the traffic going across 54th Street, because many of the equine events will be held on the south side," he said.