

# StarTribune



## Speedway looking at Scott County

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A NASCAR-ready speedway that has been dangled before communities in the north metro for three years is now being proposed on the southern countryside instead, and it's getting a guarded response.

A presentation before public officials in Scott County last week in the presence of a large but quiet crowd drew mostly questions about its basics.

Without a lot of details, officials said, it was hard to know what to make of it other than to endorse the sentiment of County Board chair Tom Wolf: "Every time I see this project I think, 'Wow, it's enormous.'"

As for the crowd, one departing attendee called out to an acquaintance, "I hope it cuts my taxes!" And an attorney for landowners nearby said he assumes they're looking forward to enhanced property values. But not everyone who lives nearby is reacting cheerfully.

"How is this good for the residents of Elko New Market and New Market Township?" asked Amy Lewis, who moved in near the site not long ago in quest of rural serenity. "I need to be convinced because I just don't see that it will be."

Speaking for developer Jim Farnum, Elwyn Tinklenberg, former Gov. Jesse Ventura's transportation commissioner, spoke of benefits, including jobs and tax base. But he also told the assembled multitude, "There's a mountain of work ahead."

The main element in the project is a \$400 million private-sector investment, Tinklenberg said, without wanting to be more specific about the finances. He allowed that the public would be asked to pay for infrastructure.

There's no word yet on how high that tab could run. But a 2004 Seattle Post-Intelligencer analysis of the pros and cons of attracting major speedways found that state and local governments spent \$33 million just for road work in connection with the \$242 million Kansas Speedway project in 2001.

At Elko New Market, the developer envisions a seven-eighths of a mile oval banked track for 65,000 fans on the northwest corner of I-35W and County Road 2. The 400-acre site would also have a quarter-mile drag strip with seating for 35,000, a 500-plus-room hotel and conference and exhibition space. There would be on-site and satellite parking, and camping for recreational vehicles and motor homes.

Similar projects have produced hundreds of permanent jobs beyond those of construction itself, Tinklenberg said, and many would be full time and year-round.

The timeline calls for construction by the spring of 2013, he said, with operations beginning in 2014. Asked by Commissioner Joe Wagner whether the developers have commitments for enough land, he said, "We have contracts with a sufficient number of landowners to build it."

The intent is to attract NASCAR and Indy-style open-wheel events. NASCAR is on record as saying it's always exploring new venues. But the risks for all sides in any such project have been on display lately as construction suddenly was halted on a new Formula One circuit in the Austin, Texas, area amid a dispute with the sanctioning body, which is questioning whether financing is truly in place.

Tinklenberg's mention that outdoor concerts could be part of the package revived memories of a nasty battle in recent county history, which ended in a thumbs down on a proposed amphitheater near the Minnesota River.

Asked by an official why this proposal should fare any better here than in northern sites explored such as Big Lake and Lino Lakes, Tinklenberg mentioned that a much smaller track already exists in the vicinity. But Lewis' take was quite different.

"They might almost be up against more opposition because we know," she said. "A friend of mine lives 10 miles away and said, 'Are you kidding, I hear the track where I am now!' And this would be bigger!"

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