

# Sports betting ruling brings attention back to the Atlantic City Race Course

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MAYS LANDING — Even though it has been closed since 2015, odds are someone could gamble on the Atlantic City Race Course property now that the U.S. Supreme Court has cleared the way for sports betting.

A multiuse facility with horse racing and sports betting included is an idea worth exploring, Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo said.

Whatever happens would need to happen fast, however, as under the regulations making their way through the state Legislature, the property has only two years to qualify to take sports bets.

The race course opened July 22, 1946, and closed in January 2015, a victim of horse racing's decline nationwide and the establishment of casino gambling in Atlantic City and neighboring states in recent decades.

A track that once saw magnificent animals racing to see who could cross the finish line first is now full of weeds and uneven, said Township Committeeman John Kurtz, who was last inside in the fall.

The park is as inhospitable to man as it is to horse.

The clubhouse is in poor condition, with leaks everywhere, and the building is not sound, Kurtz said. Pieces are falling off its exterior. The grandstand is in bad shape also.

“The building would need a major overhaul, or it would have to be demolished and start from the ground up,” Kurtz said.

Race course owner Greenwood ACRA — whose parent company also owns Parx Racing in Pennsylvania — did not respond to a request for comment.

An Assembly bill authorizing wagering at casinos and racetracks was introduced May 7.

The bill states “a former racetrack may qualify for a sports wagering permit under this section if it establishes to the satisfaction of the racing commission that it will commence the conduct of live horse racing under the regulation of the racing commission at the former racetrack site no later than July 1, 2020, for no less than 50 racing days, and meets all other requirements.”

As of Monday, the bill was still in the Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee.

State Sen. Chris Brown, R-Atlantic, hopes the ability to offer sports betting serves as an incentive to have something done with the property.

Monmouth Park Racetrack and its sports partner, William Hill U.S., have already set the example for what could be.

The 147-year-old racetrack opened a sports bar in 2013 that will serve as a temporary sports book until the two companies complete a reported \$5 million, Las Vegas-style facility.

“Permitting sports betting at the (Atlantic City Race) course will, hopefully, provide the financial opportunity needed for the owners to be able to fix up or sell an unused eyesore, so it can once again employ 400 people while attracting hundreds of visitors to our area,” Brown said in a statement.

Mazzeo, D-Atlantic, remembers his grandfather taking him to the racetrack to see the “sport of kings” live.

“The racetrack was built in the ’40s and thrived for decades,” Mazzeo said. “Horse racing became too slow for many, and casino gambling took off.”

Because the race course is such a huge parcel of property, 250 acres, Mazzeo believes it can be used any number of ways, including restaurants, shopping and sports fields.

“Continuing a pattern of diversifying our economy is key here,” Mazzeo said. “The multipurpose development could include a hotel, depending what type of development goes there.”

But the property is pretty run down and needs either a lot of restoration or possibly demolition, Mazzeo said.

“The cost would be high to bring it back to its glory days,” he said.