



**Industrial Development Board
of the City of Oak Ridge**
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Guest Column from Oak Ridge Industrial Development Board

Motorsports Park Project

The Oak Ridge Industrial Development Board (IDB) would like to present the public with some clarity and a timeline of events in respect of the proposed Motorsports Park Project.

The IDB Chairman, David Wilson, was presented a proposal to purchase approximately 327 acres of land in Horizon Center Industrial Park from developer H.E. Bittle, III with Hardin Valley Land Partners on February 6, 2020 for the purposes of building a motorsports park. Having limited information at that time, Mr. Wilson requested to have City Council review the proposed project and give an opinion on whether it would be appropriate for the IDB to move forward with investigating the opportunity. On February 10, 2020, City Council approved a resolution expressing its support and its interest in the further development of Horizon Center lots 5, 6, and 7 containing approximately 327 acres for development.

Once City Council conveyed interest in learning more about the proposed motorsports park project, Mr. Wilson convened an IDB Special Projects Committee meeting on February 13th and then a Special Called Board meeting February 19th, whereby the Board voted to allow the IDB Chairman to work with the Developer on the terms of any agreement to purchase land in Horizon Center.

The IDB Chairman has had ongoing conversations with the Developer since February 19th. The proposed purchase agreement is only an initial offer agreement; however, it is a legal document. The Agreement would outline conditions that must be met for the Developer to complete the purchase, and it also must include language that limits the liability of the City and protects its citizens. During this process, the IDB Chairman cannot discuss this information with either the IDB Board or the public, since he is dealing with a private entity with sensitive, proprietary information.

Once a final agreement to purchase the property has been settled upon, the IDB Chairman will then present it to the full Board for a vote on whether to accept it or not. Even if the Board votes to accept a purchase agreement from the Developer, there will be covenants within the Agreement that must be met in order for the property to be transferred. It could take 6 months to 1 year or more before it is known whether the project could move forward.

Over the past month, the IDB has received dozens of emails, phone calls, and other correspondence both in support of and in opposition to a motorsports park even though the project details have not yet been presented. Each of these emails has been shared with all IDB members. The IDB understands that many residents are concerned with track noise, traffic issues, as well as environmental concerns. The IDB will always consider the emails it has received, and we are busy conducting our own due diligence and continuing to research other similar projects throughout the United States. There has also been much speculation and concern as to the extent of our conversations with the Developer. Currently, there are no commitments or guarantees to anyone as to the purchase of property in Horizon Center.

At its March 2nd regular IDB meeting, the Board discussed the possibility of having a Special Called meeting once a purchase agreement was ready for Board consideration. It was decided to hold a Special Called meeting to allow the Developer to present his plan for the park, allow the Board to ask questions, and give the public an opportunity to comment. This Special meeting was ultimately scheduled for March 17th at the Chamber of Commerce and notices were posted publicly, emails distributed as per City policy, and emails were also sent to other interested parties beginning 3/11. Recognizing this to be a topic of great interest to the public, the IDB also asked the Oak Ridger to run the notice at least twice on 3/13 and 3/16. The IDB did not, however, anticipate how COVID-19 would quickly affect everyone's daily operations. The IDB had to conform twice with CDC recommendations for holding large public gatherings. The IDB first moved the meeting to the Oak Ridge High School Auditorium to provide adequate space between attendees along with providing any other precautionary measures to ensure a safe meeting environment. However, on Monday morning the IDB had to cancel the meeting after new CDC announcements to limit public meetings.

The IDB is comprised of 9 members elected by City Council; however, the IDB operates under the State statute known as the Industrial Development Corporation Act of Tennessee. The powers set forth in this statute allow the IDB to work with the City on tax abatements such as Payment in Lieu of Tax (PILoT) Agreements for individual businesses, Tax Increment Financing Agreements (TIFs) such as the Main Street Project, as well as issue Industrial Revenue Bonds. The IDB also has the power to acquire, own, lease, and sell properties for the purpose of promoting industry and developing trade by attracting manufacturing, industrial, and commercial enterprises to Oak Ridge in order to increase local employment and tax revenues.

Ownership of Horizon Center Industrial Park was transferred to the IDB from an affiliation of the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee (CROET) in March 2010. The IDB is a self-supporting, public entity that does not receive any funding from the City and does not operate on taxpayer dollars. Since taking ownership in 2010, the IDB has spent upwards of \$900,000 on the support and maintenance of Horizon Center.

The IDB looks forward to scheduling another meeting in the near future as public policy allows. In the meantime, the IDB Chairman will continue to work with the Developer on an Agreement to Purchase and continue to evaluate the impact of a motorsports park at Horizon Center. It is the responsibility of the IDB to evaluate the economic benefits of the proposed motorsports park and how it will impact all of the citizens of Oak Ridge. If the Project does move to fruition, initial estimates reveal that Oak Ridge City would immediately receive annual property taxes of approximately \$50,000 and approximately \$500,000 annually when the project is fully online. These tax revenues could be used toward schools, roads, and other needed City improvements.

In conclusion, I hope that some of the above information was helpful in understanding where we are currently on the motorsports park project. I also understand that Oak Ridgers would like to have more information. I will make you a promise. The IDB will not vote on this project until you have had an opportunity to hear and see the proposal presented by the Developer. However, any IDB meeting will depend on the COVID-19 restrictions and developments in the coming days. We ask that you allow us time to continue reviewing this project for the benefit of all Oak Ridgers. Currently, our most important concern is the health and well-being our community.

Thank you, and be safe.

Submitted by: David E. Wilson, Chairman of The Industrial Development Board of the City of Oak Ridge