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## Winlock Area Planned Site for Equestrian Center

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**County Government and Environment reporter**

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

A proposed 7,500-seat equestrian center will be located in the Winlock area if organizers can secure the necessary money, Winlock Mayor Cy Meyers and project manager Larry Hewitt announced Monday.

"They are welcome in Winlock," Meyers said in a telephone interview Monday afternoon.

Hewitt said his group does not have an exact location identified yet for a piece of land between 50 and 80 acres large that would potentially host national and international equestrian events.

The price is between \$55 million and \$80 million, and Hewitt said his investment group for the Regional Equestrian Center (REQ Center) is still pursuing both private and public funding.

"We are going to continue down both directions to assure we have both tools at our disposal," he said.

A bill in the Legislature, sponsored by Rep. Gary Alexander, R-Olympia, to create a public facilities district will have a hearing in the House Community, Trade and Economic Development Committee Wednesday at 8 a.m.

At the hearing, Hewitt said, he hopes to be able to announce an exact location for the REQ Center because he's still in final negotiations with land owners.

Melinda McCrady, spokeswoman for the majority House Democrats, said the caucus has yet to have a discussion on the bill, so House leaders don't know how many votes it may have.

However, early indications show bipartisan support. Gov. Chris Gregoire, a Democrat, has said she likes the concept of the equestrian center as a means to fill the economic hole in Lewis County created by the closure of the TransAlta coal mine last November. The public-facilities bill is co-sponsored by six Democrats, including Majority Leader Lynn Kessler of Hoquiam.

The emergence of the equestrian center is the latest development for the suddenly bustling South Lewis County city known for its giant egg in Vern Zander Park. Sovran Lewis LLC, a Lacey-based developer, has begun clearing away land east of town for an industrial park expected to be as big as 500 acres and constructed by Benaroya of Seattle. The Cardinal float glass manufacturing plant opened last year in the Evaline area a few miles north of Winlock. Finally,

the Rockmann Development Corporation is building 200 homes in the Grand Prairie subdivision outside of town to accommodate the expected growth.

Meyers said the city would extend water and sewer service to the equestrian park, and said he hopes improvements will be made to the nearby state Route 505 for the both the industrial park and the REQ Center.

"It's a very huge thing for Lewis County and for South Lewis County in particular," Meyers said.

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