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Governor Urges Horse Centers to Come Together

THREE PLANS: Hewitt Doesn't Think REQ Center Competes With Kittitas County, Enumclaw Arenas

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OLYMPIA - The proposed Regional Equestrian (REQ) Center outside Winlock may hit a snag with the Legislature by being lumped in with two other horse parks in the state.

But backers of the REQ Center say the three plans in Lewis County, Kittitas County and Enumclaw are different, and they think the more horse facilities that are in the state, the better.

On Monday, Gov. Chris Gregoire told reporters that she doesn't think the state can support all three equestrian centers in Washington.

"Again, I think people ought to come together. I don't think we can afford three rodeos. So maybe if we could come together and decide where do we want a rodeo, I think there is a capacity in the state that would very much enjoy it. I personally would enjoy it, but we sure can't afford three, and if we keep the conflict going among the three, the chances are we end up with nothing," said Gregoire, a Democrat.

THE REQ CENTER, which is expected to cost between \$55 million and \$80 million, is seeking the bonding capacity to fund two-thirds of the covered arena via a public facilities district. Private investors would cover the rest of the costs for the 7,000-seat arena, which, proponents say, could host large-scale rodeo and equestrian events as well as concerts.

The Washington State Horse Park has \$3.8 million in the state's capital budget to begin construction on 106 acres in Kittitas County for a 1,000-seat arena. The entire project is expected to cost \$15 million.

King County turned over its fairgrounds to the city of Enumclaw last summer, and city leaders hope to transform the facility into a horse park. The city is awaiting a feasibility study on the project.

LARRY HEWITT, project manager for the REQ Center, said the three facilities appeal to different markets. The REQ Center is the largest, he said, and has the broadest appeal for economic development by catering to

Three potential equestrian centers in Washington

REQ Center

Location: East of Winlock

Size: 7,000-seat indoor arena with 600 stalls, luxury suites and a learning center

Cost: \$55 million to \$80 million, two-thirds of that funded through state revenue bonds

Use: Year-round rodeos, conventions, concerts, smaller equestrian events

Washington State Horse Park

Location: Kittitas County

Size: 1,000-seat indoor arena on 106 acres, outdoor arenas, 400 stalls, connections to trail systems

Cost: \$3.8 million to begin construction, \$15 million to complete project, all state funds

Use: Large-scale outdoor events, including rodeo and equestrian

Enumclaw Horse Park

Location: Former King County

larger rodeos and concerts.

Fairgrounds site in Enumclaw

"I think the governor may have been mistaken in what she said," Hewitt said.

Size: 5,000 seats

House Bill 1164, which would create a public facilities district for the REQ Center, will be heard by the House Finance Committee today at 1:30 p.m.

The city received the land from King County last August with the idea of creating an equestrian theme. The city has commissioned a feasibility study and has no detailed plans yet.

Todd Tremin, president of the Washington State Horse Park Authority, said the group has been trying to get its project moving since 1990, when it was first envisioned at Lewis and Clark State Park near Toledo.

The \$3.8 million would pay for the transfer of land from the Suncadia Resort, said Tremin, who competed in equestrian events in the 1992 Summer Olympics.

He said he couldn't comment on Gregoire's statement because he hadn't heard it, but he did say he supports any effort to bring an equestrian facility to Washington.

"We certainly need something. This state is sorely lacking," Tremin said.

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