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Arena talks progressing

Francis, Toldo-Rosati group trying to resolve outstanding issues

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Mayor Eddie Francis and the proponents of an arena development at Windsor Raceway say talks are moving forward.

Francis said he spoke with a member of the Rosati family Tuesday over recent news reports that suggested the two sides had different opinions about the \$38-million raceway proposal. They're planning to meet again today.

"Full steam ahead," is how Tony Rosati, co-owner of the Rosati group, described the Ice Track project.

Since early June, city administrators have held discussions with a partnership between the Rosati development family and the Toldo family, which owns Windsor Raceway.

The Toldo-Rosati group proposes a 6,500-seat, \$38-million arena and entertainment complex at the raceway. When the raceway plans were unveiled last week, the mayor responded by saying there were outstanding issues that needed to be vetted and it was far from a done deal.

That triggered a response by the proponents, who issued a news release Monday.

"We think it's a great project for the community," said Chris Kruba, the Project Ice Track team lawyer and official spokesman. He said an arena and Gretzky restaurant -- as proposed by the group -- along with the slots operation and racetrack will make the area a destination attraction.

"Our goal is to get in front of council to present a strong business case," Rosati said.

The mayor said discussions have to "happen within council chambers" and the early public release of the proposal hasn't helped matters. "You can't negotiate these matters in the media," Francis said. "There is a process."

The process involves the preparation of two reports by city administrators. One scenario would see the construction of a complex on the city's east side, with a main bowl and three ancillary ice pads to replace Adstoll and Riverside arenas, as well as a community centre. The estimated \$55 million cost would be covered by the city. The other scenario involves a main pad at the racetrack with a secondary pad for community use. The city's contribution would be at least \$15 million, but the building would be owned and operated by the private consortium.

The arena proposal that will be chosen will be the one with the best business case, Francis said.

"We're not going to rush to a judgment here. There has to be a solid business case."

MEETING DEFERRED

The arena issue was to be discussed at a special meeting of council Thursday, but it's been deferred because staff reports analyzing two proposals are not ready. Mayor Eddie Francis said he's not sure when the arena proposals will be debated by council, but it should be within the next few weeks.

Ran with fact box "Meeting Deferred" which has been appended to the story.

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