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Smith submits drag strip plan

GAIL SMITH-ARRANTS

After starting work on a drag strip in September without Concord's permission, Bruton Smith has finally showed the city what he's planning.

Preliminary plans submitted to the city show the name of the dragway as "The Strip at Concord," a \$60 million venture across from Lowe's Motor Speedway.

In October, the city initially rejected the drag strip. That touched off a seven-week fight with Smith, who threatened to move the speedway out of Cabarrus County.

The city relented, and Smith, chairman of Speedway Motorsports Inc., now plans to proceed with the drag strip and also make \$200 million in improvements at the speedway, in exchange for \$80 million in government incentives.

The plans for the drag strip show pit areas, grandstands with box suites, and a control tower featuring glass-enclosed suites.

Smith declined comment Wednesday, but speedway officials expect to make an announcement about the drag strip later this month, said Scott Cooper, Lowe's Motor Speedway spokesperson.

There are no surprises on the drag strip plans, said Margaret Pearson, the city's director of development services.

"This is pretty much what Bruton said he was going to do," she said Wednesday.

Because of neighborhood concerns, a separate noise-abatement plan will be submitted to the city Friday or Monday, Pearson said.

The city also has asked to see a lighting plan for the drag strip, to see how the lights would affect neighboring residents.

The site plan shows two large water retention ponds near the end of the drag strip. The ponds will absorb stormwater runoff, Pearson said.

The facility also is expected to feature a water conservation measure, she said: waterless urinals.

After getting a staff review of the plans, the Concord Planning and Zoning Commission is scheduled to decide on Smith's request on Jan. 29.

In November, Smith said he had no doubt the drag strip would be open in time for a National Hot Rod Association race scheduled there for September.