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Smith breaks ground on Concord drag strip

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There was dirt shoveling but no mud slinging at a groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday for billionaire Bruton Smith's \$60 million drag strip across from Lowe's Motor Speedway.

In October, Smith was at odds with the city of Concord, which initially thwarted his drag strip plans, citing neighbors concern over noise and lack of information from Smith. But on Tuesday, Concord Mayor Scott Padgett and other local officials were on hand and smiling.

"Today we are truly beginning a new era in motorsports in Concord," said Padgett, who even displayed his drag strip alarm clock, which he said wakes him with revving noises.

The drag strip will help mitigate sound through its design, including walls and a grandstand that help block and absorb noise. Padgett said residents he has talked with are grateful that the city helped make sure noise abatement was part of the drag strip plans.

After the city initially rejected his plans, Smith threatened to move the whole speedway. Eventually, after being promised \$80 million in government incentives, mostly in road improvements, he agreed to build the drag strip and proceed with \$200 million in speedway renovations.

"We had a little bit of a tussle," Smith said. "Now just watch how fast it goes along."

Smith expects the drag strip to be finished in time for a National Hot Rod Association event Sept. 11-14. Local tourism officials estimate that event will bring \$9.8 million into the area's economy.

Beside The Dirt Track @ Lowe's Motor Speedway, the drag strip's track, pit areas and midways will cover 46.5 acres, part of a 125-acre site. For now, it's called The Dragway @ Lowe's Motor Speedway, although Smith is running a contest to rename it.

Grading continues at the drag strip site.

The first phase of speedway renovations is scheduled to start Thursday: the upgrading of 22,850 seats along the front stretch. Bleacher or concrete seats will be replaced with individual seats with backs.