

Motorsports park proposed at Horizon Center

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BY [JOHN HUOTARI](#) [COMMENT](#)



The Horizon Center off Highway 58 in west Oak Ridge is pictured above in this image published by the Oak Ridge Industrial Development Board. A motorsports park that could cost more than \$50 million and cover more than 300 acres has been proposed at Horizon Center in west Oak Ridge.

The Oak Ridge City Council is expected to consider a resolution expressing support for and interest in the project on Monday evening. The development of the test track and research facility could be on three lots at Horizon Center: parcels 5, 6, and 7. The project could include about 327 acres total.

If the resolution is approved Monday, it would be sent to the Oak Ridge Industrial Development Board. The project could then be reviewed by the IDB, which could consider whether to sell the property. The IDB has contacted Oak Ridge City Manager Mark Watson's office to determine City Council's interest in the project, according to the agenda for Monday's meeting.

H.E. Bittle III of Hardin Valley Land Partners told Oak Ridge officials in a February 2 letter that the planned motorsports park would have a road course “suitable for FIA (Federation Internationale de L’Automobile) sanctioned events, such as Formula E, Indy Car, IMSA, NASA, and other sanctioning bodies.”

Besides the race course, the motorsports park would have an amphitheater with a mix of permanent and lawn seating for more than 7,000 people, similar to the Ascend Amphitheater in Nashville, Bittle said.

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Other planned amenities, he said, include a karting track, paddock club, club house, restaurants, pro shop, garages, day and overnight lodging, meeting and conference space, a recreational vehicle park, and public facilities that would include walking trails and outdoor meeting spaces.

Bittle said the Oak Ridge motorsports park could take advantage of the expanding manufacturing base related to automobiles and the research being conducted at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee.

“The innovation center, jointly sponsored by Volkswagen, ORNL, and UT, that was [recently announced for Cherokee Farms](#) is just the most recent example of the plethora of research opportunities into electric vehicles, autonomous vehicles, carbon fiber, tires, etc., that an Oak Ridge motorsports park could support,” Bittle said. “The facility will be designed with the needs of a motorsports research park to attract companies to locate adjacent to the park.”

Bittle said there is an established community of motorsports enthusiasts who are usually affluent. They would use the park to “indulge their passion for motorsports and high-performance vehicles,” Bittle said.

“These individuals will pay fees to have access to the course and other racing-related amenities, which include garages, hospitality areas, and multiple forms of high-end lodging,” Bittle said. “There will also be weekend track rentals to out-of-town organizations who put on events. These events would draw hundreds of out-of-town drivers and their families for a weekend at the track. Additionally, the development would generate demand for business and corporate outings and retreats, which would support the need for meeting and conference spaces.”



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Monticello Motor Club of New York is pictured above in this image included in the Oak Ridge City Council agenda for Monday, Feb. 10, 2010.

Development plans include contracting with Tilke Engineers and Architects, the “preeminent race course designer in the world,” to design the course, Bittle said.

“The intent and long-range goal is to build a facility that can attract FIA and other motorsports organizing bodies to sanction race events at this location,” Bittle said. “As that effort gains traction, additional amenities and resources will need to be added and upgraded.”

Bittle said the park’s closeness to the [proposed Oak Ridge Airport](#) at Heritage Center, just a few miles away, would be “especially attractive” to customers who are accustomed to using private aircraft to attend motorsports events across the country.

“For racing participants, the ability to land at an airport two minutes from the motorsports park will often be a discriminating factor in their choice to come to Oak Ridge,” Bittle said. “For Oak Ridge, a substantial increase in the number of relatively affluent visitors will represent a sustained contribution to the city’s tax base.”

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Bittle said the project is early in the conceptual process, and developers “look forward to moving into the formal conceptual, design, and construction phases for the facilities.”

The project could be developed in stages, Bittle said.

Watson, the city manager, said there are similar private and public facilities throughout the country.

“With positive interest on the part of the City Council, this project will be returned to the IDB for review and, as approved by them, a sale of property and rights of refusal will also be considered by the IDB,” Watson said. “Due to the uniqueness of the project, the potential economic effects, and the activation of Horizon Center with a viable project, the IDB has been in contact with the city manager’s office to determine City Council interest to proceed.”

Some details about the proposed project were not immediately available Thursday night, including what other steps might still be necessary, what City Council members might think about the proposal, how long the project could take, how the motorsports park could affect the nearby Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement, and whether it would be allowed under covenants or deed restrictions at Horizon Center.

In a Wednesday memo to City Council, Watson said the City of Oak Ridge has been a partner in the re-industrialization of former U.S. Department of Energy property like Horizon Center since the 1990s. Horizon Center has only been partially developed, and it was transferred from the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee to the IDB in 2010, Watson said.

The Monday night Oak Ridge City Council meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the Oak Ridge Municipal Building Courtroom. You can see the agenda [here](#).

More information will be added as it becomes available.

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