

## **With IndyCar race all but official, Balto. to begin fixing streets**

By Nicholas Sohr, *Daily Record*, May 5, 2010

The 2.4-mile loop for Baltimore's Indy Racing League event will start on Pratt Street and continue on Light, Conway, Howard, Camden and Russell streets before returning to Pratt.

City officials on Wednesday voted to add Baltimore to the Indy Racing League circuit, a deal that will lead to a year of paving projects followed by about six weeks of race-related construction on downtown streets.

The city's contract with Baltimore Racing Development Corp. requires the city to use a \$5 million federal grant and \$2.75 million borrowed against future state funding to fix streets, sidewalks, street signs and traffic signals along the race route, which will run around Camden Yards, the convention center and the Inner Harbor.

The race — the first is slated for a weekend in August 2011 — will start on Pratt Street and continue on Light, Conway, Howard, Camden and Russell streets before returning to Pratt.

Martyn Thake, the track's designer, said the city's street work will likely be completed in June 2011. Some portions of the 2.4-mile track will have to be repaved to accommodate the high speeds and tight turns. The half-mile stretch on Pratt will see speeds of 185 mph, said Thake, principal of Motorsports Consulting Services, which has designed courses across the country.

"There are some really good parts of the racetrack, and there are some really bad parts," he said of the road surfaces.

Construction of the course itself will begin shortly after the city completes its work. Grandstands and barriers will take about a month to set up before the race and two weeks to take down afterward, Thake said, adding that organizers anticipate closing individual lanes, not entire streets.

Race organizers in Long Beach, Calif., have wrestled with similar issues for the nearly four decades Indy cars have raced through their town. Jim Michaelian, president and CEO of the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach, said the original course included a section of Ocean Boulevard, a heavily trafficked street.

"It did tend to constrain some of the movement in those days. That's one of the reasons, but certainly not the only one, that we decided to move the location," he said.

Michaelian, whose company has also organized races in Colorado, Florida and New Jersey, said community outreach is the key.

“A lot of this is just tending to the details, informing the public what’s going to transpire, when it’s going to transpire and how to mitigate it,” he said.

Baltimore city officials, who have received letters of support from community groups around the race course, said the race’s price tag and impact on surrounding neighborhoods will be well worth it.

“The race will change the way the world sees Baltimore,” Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said while standing outside City Hall, behind a black and red race car like those used in the Indianapolis 500.

Rawlings-Blake and the four other members of the Board of Estimates approved the contract unanimously and without discussion.

Baltimore Racing Development President Jay Davidson said his group expects to have a deal with the racing league completed in two to three weeks, around the same time that city workers will begin work to prepare streets for the race.

“We’ve still got some work to do, but [Wednesday’s vote] was a major milestone for us,” Davidson said.

In a letter to the mayor dated May 3, IRL President Terry Angstadt outlined a similar time frame.

“I have every expectation that the IRL and BRD will finalize the sanction agreement in the next two weeks,” he wrote.

Baltimore would be the 18th event on the circuit that starts in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and has races in three other countries — the United States, Canada and Japan.

“You say ‘Wow, this is a world class racing series, so why can’t Baltimore be considered in the same breath as those cities?’” said Councilman William H. Cole IV.

Cole, whose district includes the race area, and other officials are quick to paint the race as a chance for Baltimore to repair an image that they say is too often based on television shows about crime, drugs and corruption.

ABC broadcasts five races, including the Indianapolis 500. The rest are televised on the cable channel Versus.

Officials also eagerly await the economic boon the event is expected to bring the city.

BRD will pay the city \$1.25 million in flat fees over the life of the contract, and the city will get a share of the revenues brought in by the race after its first year. BRD and the city will negotiate the city's share after analyzing revenues from the Aug. 2011 race.

BRD and the Baltimore Development Corp., the city's quasi-public development arm, expect the three-day racing event — Friday, Saturday and Sunday — to inject \$70 million in spending into the region, including \$6 million in direct tax revenue for the city. That includes \$12.77 million in hotel rooms, \$12 million for meals, \$20 million in retail sales and \$12 million to \$14 million spent to hold the race itself.

“Full hotels, full restaurants, full parking garages, that all means jobs,” Cole said. “Restaurants throughout neighborhoods of this city will make more during that weekend than they will in the months preceding the race. This is a shot in the arm for Baltimore.”

Those benefits will come, organizers say, from tapping into pockets of East Coast race fans starved for racing action close to home. They expect more than 100,000 attendees, with more than 60 percent traveling from outside of Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

“IndyCar racing has been trying to get into the mid-Atlantic for years, but we could never make it work,” said Thake, who said he worked on an unsuccessful effort to put a race in Philadelphia.

Thake said seeing the streets around the harbor and sports complex for the first time was like hitting the lottery.

“The first turn [from Pratt on to Light] in front of the harbor, it's just going to look so sexy on TV,” he said.