

# City Green Lights Baltimore Grand Prix

*WBAL-TV*

Grand Prix racing looks to be on its way to the Charm City.

The city's Board of Estimates has approved a 5-year agreement with Baltimore Racing Development, with the first race to be held in August 2011.

Drivers would race in a loop around downtown, passing by the Inner Harbor and Oriole Park at Camden Yards at speeds up to 185 mph.

The Indy Racing League is expected to sign a sanctioning agreement in the next two weeks.

City officials said the events could generate \$11 million in tax revenue during the five-year period. It could also create nearly 2,000 jobs, and generate \$250 million in spending.

Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said the street race will "change the way the world sees Baltimore," as a result of global exposure to millions of Indy Racing League fans.

As part of the agreement, Baltimore Racing Development (BRD) will share event revenues with the city and pay an annual event fee, along with spending \$12 to \$14 million on race preparations.

The idea that was backroom chatter just a year ago has become a reality thanks, in part, to City Councilman Bill Cole, D-11th District, who was first contacted by BRD. Cole said he didn't move forward until he had full support from all of the neighborhoods affected in his district.

"We're going to include the neighborhoods every step of the way, and we're going to make sure they benefit from this race in a very significant way," he said.

BRD and city officials are developing an event management plan to address construction, public safety, traffic and other issues.

"The Indy Race is a huge event for Baltimore," said Visit Baltimore President and CEO Tom Noonan. "People travel from around the world to attend and spend money in our hotels, restaurants, and attractions while they are here. The national media coverage alone is worth millions of dollars in free advertising for the city that will generate new awareness of Baltimore with convention planners and leisure travelers."

"With an estimate 150,000 fans over the course of three days, it's safe to say that at some point during the race, they will probably be hungry," said Melvin Thompson of the Restaurant Association of Maryland.

Professional track designer Martyn Thake said that the track layout is one of the best he's seen in his 20-year career.

"The first turn is going to be in the Inner Harbor. It's going to look so sexy on TV. And then to go to (Camden) Yards, which is the history -- this is an A-plus," he said.

Under terms of the agreement, the city must modify and improve certain streets and sidewalks and other transportation-related infrastructure to comply with the standards of the Indy Racing League.

The total estimated cost of improvements is about \$7.75 million in state grants that the city will have six years to pay back, city officials said.