

Slots commission pledges to be as open, transparent as possible

By LIAM FARRELL
Staff Writer

One of the most powerful commissions formed in recent state history has pledged to be as open and transparent as possible when awarding the five slot machine licenses authorized by voters.

The Videc Lottery Facility Commission met for the first time in Annapolis recently reviewing the logistics of its job and finalizing its eight-section, 150-page request for proposals on the slots licenses.

Although some bid information will remain confidential, a register of applicants — their names, specific proposed location and number of proposed machines — will be public information once bids are collected Feb. 2.

"We're going to have a very challenging responsibility ... but I know everybody is up to the task," said Donald C. Fry, the chairman of the commission and the chairman and chief executive officer of the Greater Baltimore Committee. "Our desire and intent is to be open and transparent."

The commission was created by the General Assembly in last year's special session and was set in motion by voters on Election Day. Three of the seven members were chosen by Gov. Martin O'Malley, with House Speaker Michael E. Busch, D-Annapolis, and Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., D-Calvert, selecting two each.

Robert R. Neall, a former Anne Arundel County delegate, senator and county executive, is the only local member of the commission.

The commission will consider the bids and award the five available licenses, including one in Anne Arundel County within two miles of Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

So far, Laurel Park is the only business that has publicly committed to bidding on the Anne Arundel license, setting aside \$45 million for the application and another \$30 million for the construction of a temporary slots facility if the racetrack wins the bid.

Outside of weighing the bids, the commission also can

change the number of machines at each location, as long as the total number of slots in Maryland does not exceed 15,000 and no single place has more than 4,750. At the moment, Anne Arundel is slated to have the most, with 4,750 machines.

The State Lottery Commission will conduct background and financial checks of potential slots licensees. Once fully in place, slots will be regulated, owned and leased by the lottery commission, which will host a pre-proposal conference Jan. 12 in Baltimore to answer questions from people interested in bidding.

The process probably will take six to eight months before licenses are ready to be awarded, said Buddy Roogow, the director of the lottery, and background checks will be an ongoing process.

"We're talking about every employee ... who may touch the floor, who may be a parking attendant, will eventually have to be cleared," he said. "There are always new employees."

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