

Hillbilly casino could free up vacant building

Former television actor Max Baer Jr. plans to build a Jethro Bodine's casino just outside Carson City using his character rights from „The Beverly Hillbillies.“

As a result, the vacant former Wal-Mart where his last project was shot down could finally find a tenant.

The Carson City Wal-Mart has been vacant more than four years since the retailer moved to a new location just across the Douglas County line in July 2002 and Baer bought the empty storefront in hopes of building a casino. His USD 54 million plans were scuttled in a dispute with the shopping center owners, who wouldn't allow the casino.

Baer is selling the former Wal-Mart to pursue the new resort project south of Topsy Lane on the east side of U.S. 395, where he hopes to include a 240-room hotel with a casino about the size of Boomtown.

„They've not only lost this project, but where I'm going there will be a lot of retail stores,“ Baer said. „It has cost Carson City millions in lost tax revenue.“

Baer blames the capital city's loss on Carson City Supervisor Shelly Aldean, who represented the shopping center's co-owner, Glenbrook Corp. Aldean worked with Baer when he proposed buying the Wal-Mart site, but could only get Glenbrook to agree to allow a casino if Baer signed a „put“ agreement, stating that he would buy out the J.C. Penney store at the center if his casino caused it financial harm.

„I told Max at the time that we couldn't tolerate the loss of another retailer from Carson City,“ Aldean said Friday. „Having lost revenue from Wal-Mart, we just couldn't lose any

more sales-tax dollars.“

Neither Baer nor Aldean would disclose the Wal-Mart buyer, but both said they were confident a new tenant would be found once the sale closes.

„With what I know about the gentleman (buying the store), he has good retail contacts,“ Aldean said. „I’m reasonably confident he will be able to fill that building with retailers.“

Baer is applying for approval from Douglas County for his hotel towers. At 69, he has been trying for nearly 20 years to put his television character’s name on a Northern Nevada casino, considering at times Stateline, Verdi, Reno and Carson City locations. Negotiations with Park Lane Mall in Reno fell apart in 1999, but in 2005 he was licensed for a slots-only casino in North Las Vegas called The Beverly Hillbillies Gambler Casino.

Casinos’ gaming taxes go to the state with the cities and counties getting licensing fees and related taxable revenues, so Aldean said it is best that Baer’s project goes to Douglas County and Carson City instead gets more retail, which brings more taxable revenue to the capital.

„In the end it will be a win-win for everyone,“ Aldean said. „In the long run, it will be more advantageous for Carson City to have that building filled with retail.“