

Moulin Rouge developers get council boost

Developers who want to build a resort at the site of the first racially integrated hotel-casino in Las Vegas got a big boost Wednesday from the City Council.

Now the people behind the proposed revival of the Moulin Rouge need a financial backer.

The Las Vegas City Council unanimously approved three items developers needed to proceed with plans for a resort they say would revive the spirit of the Moulin Rouge, a short-lived casino that in 1955 attracted the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., Pearl Bailey, Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra to the historically black and neglected neighborhoods near downtown.

„I think it is well overdue,“ said Sarann Knight Preddy, former owner of the Moulin Rouge site and the first black woman to hold a Nevada gaming license.

Preddy, who never managed to reopen the Moulin Rouge but did help get it listed on the National Register of Historic Places, vouched for the current owners of the site in front of the council.

She also said a gambling resort would infuse life and jobs into an area along Bonanza Road that has long suffered from crime, blight and urban decay.

„I’m embarrassed when I come down to Bonanza and Main Street,“ she said.

In addition to Preddy, about 50 people from the neighborhood around the Moulin Rouge site showed up in support of the proposal, many wearing black and red clothing and pins they said were the signature colors of the project.

„I’m almost jumping up and down but I can’t jump anymore,“ said Assemblyman Harvey Munford, D-Las Vegas, a former teacher and professional basketball player who represents the area in Carson City.

A few supporters jeered one man who spoke in opposition.

Roussan Joshua Collins, who described himself as an activist and street preacher, said, „We don’t need another casino in Las Vegas. If anything, we need more prayer and Bibles in our schools.“

City Councilman Ricki Barlow, who represents Ward 5, the home district for the Moulin Rouge, urged residents to support the project. He characterized critics as „haters.“

„Let the haters hate,“ Barlow said. „But we must be the visionaries.“

Officials from Moulin Rouge Development Corp. and Republic Urban Properties – the two companies behind the proposal – delivered brief summaries of the project to the council.

Michael Van Every, senior vice president of development for Republic, a company with a USD 4 billion urban property portfolio, said the approvals are crucial to attracting financial backing for a resort that could cost more than USD 500 million to create.

Van Every said the value of the approximately 17-acre site, enhanced by the city approval, would help ensure financing.

„We are in a very good position with the land,“ Van Every said.

The approvals make way for a project with as many as 1,727 rooms, a 72,596-square-foot casino and 381,734 square feet of commercial space. But Van Every said the project likely will be smaller.

Now that approvals are in place, Van Every, along with Moulin Rouge Development Corp. president and CEO Dale Scott, will seek financial backers and, if successful, building permits.

Mayor Oscar Goodman told the developers that the large crowd of supporters gathered in City Council chambers was an indication of how many people are counting on the project to bring much-needed jobs and life to the community.

„If you don't do what you are telling us you are going to do, you are going to disappoint an awful lot of good people,“ Goodman said.