

Tribe mulling plans for Aqueduct racino rival

By Howard Koplowitz
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If a casino is built at Belmont Park, it could undermine the operations of the upcoming Aqueduct racino project.

The Shinnecock Nation said it has received an offer to build a casino at Belmont Race Track in Nassau, which could put a dent into profits for the Aqueduct racino in Queens that is slated to open in late summer.

Beverly Jensen, a spokeswoman for the Southampton, L.I.-based tribe, said the Shinnecoeks have not made a final decision on where to build a casino.

The tribe gained federal recognition early last year, which makes it eligible to run a casino.

“We have not decided where to put a casino,” Jensen said, rejecting rumors that the Shinnecock were set on building a casino at Belmont in Elmont, L.I., on the other side of the border from Queens. “We haven’t selected a site yet. It’s been offered to us and we’ve looked at it and we’re making a decision.”

If the Shinnecoeks were to build a casino at Belmont, which is only 10 1/2 miles away from Aqueduct, it would surely take business away from Genting New York, the developer of the racino at the South Ozone Park track.

While the Shinnecoeks are undecided as to where to construct a casino, the tribe has ruled out building one near its reservation in Southampton because it believes the reservation is too small for a gaming parlor.

A Genting spokesman said the company had no comment.

A Belmont casino may be more attractive to southeast Queens residents since the Elmont

line has a Long Island Rail Road stop that easily connects it to the Jamaica LIRR station.

The racino at Aqueduct, called Resorts World New York, is expected to be up and running with 1,600 of 4,500 video lottery terminals by late summer.

In the early stages of awarding the VLT contract, the Shinnecock proposed their own plans for a casino at Aqueduct, but the project did not have the blessings of the area's elected officials.

State Assemblywoman Audrey Pheffer (D-Rockaway Beach) said the Shinnecock plan was "too ambitious" because it called for table games such as blackjack and roulette.

But the Aqueduct project can only legally have VLTs — a form of slot machines — and not table games.