

THE REAL DEAL

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Developers vie for casino legislation

By Dan Weil

Experts say efforts to [bring gambling casinos](#) to Miami and Miami Beach face long odds of success.

The developers of downtown Miami's 25-acre Miami Worldcenter have formed a political committee to consider casino gambling, and the Fontainebleau of Miami Beach contributed \$30,000 to it.

Committee lawyers are drafting a state constitutional amendment to permit casinos that could be placed on the ballot in 2010.

The amendment would allow Las Vegas-style casino gambling at Worldcenter and the Fontainebleau. The amendment would have to be approved by 60 percent of Florida voters to become law.

"I don't think it would pass," says Jack Winston, a principal at Goodkin Consulting, a Miami real estate firm.

He notes that similar amendments failed three times: in 1978, 1986 and 1994. And those attempts only required 50 percent voter approval.

"The 60 percent requirement is the biggest hurdle," says Peter Zalewski, who heads Condo Vultures, a real estate consulting firm in Bal Harbour. "Trying to get 60 percent of people to agree to anything is tough."

South Florida voters might approve of casinos, he says. But convincing upstate voters, who played a major role in defeating the prior initiatives, will be difficult. Central and North Florida voters tend to be more conservative than those in the south.

In 2004, a proposal that allowed slot machines at pari-mutuels already in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties passed by only 93,000 votes.

Those two counties currently have seven pari-mutuels, where people can gamble on horse racing, dog racing and jai-alai. And the Seminole Tribe has a casino near Hollywood.

Some of the pari-mutuels have generated less revenue than expected, says Michael

Cannon, managing director of Miami consulting firm Integra Realty Resources. So success isn't guaranteed even if casinos do make it into Miami and Miami Beach.

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