

COLLINSVILLE - A spokesman for one of the state's largest horsemen's associations said Wednesday that he does not expect the Tulsa County fair board to change its mind about ending live horse racing at Fair Meadows Racetrack when it meets Thursday morning.

"The reason this meeting is taking place is so they can get political or legal cover because now it is on the agenda - the way it should have been in the first time," said Joe Lucas with the Thoroughbred Racing Association of Oklahoma. The fair board on Nov. 1 voted unanimously and without comment to approve a naming rights agreement with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. The agreement includes a provision that ends live horse racing at Fair Meadows. Without a license to hold live races, Fair Meadows will not receive the \$2 million a year it was receiving from the Creek, Osage and Cherokee tribes in lieu of having gaming machines.

At issue is whether the tribes are legally obligated to continue paying into a fund that went to the horse racing purses statewide. The purse fund averaged \$6.8 million a year between 2007 and 2011. The fair board will consider at its 9 a.m. Thursday meeting an amended version of the naming rights agreement dealing with which courts the parties can appeal to when legal disputes arise. County Commissioner and fair board Chairman Fred Perry said Wednesday that the public will have 30 minutes to comment on the live horse racing provision in the contract and another 30 minutes to comment on any aspect of the agreement. Lucas made his remarks to about 70 people gathered at the Collinsville Library on Wednesday. The meeting was organized by a grass-roots group called Equestrians United to Save Fair Meadows. The deck will be stacked against the horsemen at the fair board meeting Thursday, Lucas said, noting that Fair Meadows has already submitted a letter to the Oklahoma Horse Racing Commission relinquishing its gaming recipient license effective Dec. 1. Fair Meadows officials confirmed late Wednesday that the letter had been sent. The license is required for the racetrack to collect its \$2 million a year from the tribes. "If this meeting really means

anything, why did you have (Fair Meadows racing director) Ron Shotts already send in a letter to the commission telling them?" Lucas said. The horsemen's position is simple, Lucas said. "Just because Fair Meadows decided they are not going to do live racing, they (the tribes) still owe our part of the money," he said. Debbie Schauf, executive director of the Oklahoma Quarter Horse Racing Association, told those in attendance that she and Lucas plan to take their fight to the state Capitol next week. There, they will meet with Secretary of State Glenn Coffee, Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese and a representative from the governor's office, Schauf said. Schauf said the horsemen worked with Fair Meadows all year to help ensure that live horse racing remained in Tulsa and were never given any indication that it would be discontinued. "Then all of a sudden, overnight, we find out they haven't been negotiating in good faith because since last January or February they have been negotiating this deal to give this away," Schauf said. Lucas said Perry assured him in February that the fair board was not going to do anything to jeopardize the horsemen's purse fund. "He sat there at the table and told me that," Lucas said. "You can go on the record with that." Sam Hester, 81, has been running quarter horses at Fair Meadows since it opened. He said the way the fair board handled the live racing issue "stinks." "There was no input from the horsemen," he said. "The horsemen were blindsided. "There was no consideration of the commerce, not only to the state - there is money going to education." Breeder Randy Hill is one of the horsemen whose wallet will be affected by the fair board's decision. His wife is a trainer. "If Tulsa closes, we're looking to go to Minnesota and Iowa," he said. "And our payroll runs \$14,000 to \$15,000 a month, and the expenses we incur out of state we could be incurring here." Neither Perry nor any other fair board member attended Wednesday's meeting. Kenda Woodburn, who organized the meeting, said county commissioners had received email invitations. The invitations were not individually addressed

to each commissioner. Contacted after Wednesday's meeting, Perry said he did not mean to slight the group that organized the meeting and believed the notice to be part of a mass email. "We are going to be meeting with all of the horsemen tomorrow in a formal meeting in which they will be allowed to speak at length," Perry said. Fair board meeting The Tulsa County fair board will meet at 9 a.m. Thursday in the armory annex on the fairgrounds. Kevin Canfield 918-581-8313 kevin.canfield@tulsaworld.com SUBHEAD: They will get a chance to comment on Fair Meadows' closing at today's fair board meeting. Original Print Headline: Horsemen not optimistic