

Downtown team says all bets off

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Alarmed that a “summer jai-alai” and poker room has won state approval to open at 3030 Biscayne Blvd., directors of Miami’s Downtown Development Authority on Friday added their voices to growing protests by community leaders including auto magnate Norman Braman and developer Jorge Perez.

Ken Russell, authority chair and Miami commissioner, said he will soon introduce a resolution that any gambling within the authority’s boundaries would have to win a four-fifths vote of the city commission before proceeding. “That doesn’t mean it couldn’t happen; it creates a path, but it’s a high-bar path,” he said.

Gambling isn’t covered under the city’s Miami 21 zoning overhaul, he added, but now the State of Florida can issue permits, which it did this month to West Flagler Associates, owner of Magic City Casino in Miami and Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Racing & Poker in Bonita Springs.

While the Edgewater facility wouldn’t open right away and could only hold jai-alai games from May to November, community activists stepped into the fray early, saying any gambling use in Edgewater threatens the area’s evolution into a cultural and residential destination.

“We should support what you’re doing with this resolution,” said authority board member Alicia Cervera, managing partner of Cervera Real Estate. “We want a seat at the table.”

“Can we ask for a 5-0 vote?” queried authority board member Alan Ojeda, president of Rilea Development Group.

“The sense I’m getting is that we want to move forward confidently to oppose this,” Mr. Russell said.

“This is very important,” said Alvin West, authority treasurer and senior vice president/chief financial officer of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau.

“We don’t want it,” Mr. Ojeda summed up the group’s stance.