

Written by Administrator
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With the prospect of a massive casino in Clark County looming closer than ever, county governments that had stepped back from serious negotiations are considering a step forward.

The U.S. Department of the Interior

[announced last week the Cowlitz Indian Tribe could take 152 acres near La Center into trust](#) , the last formal political hurdle for a long-planned casino resort.

Last week, Cowlitz Tribe chairman William Iyall said he believed the tribe's next step would be to start talks with Clark County governments and agencies.

"As a first order of business, we'll work with the local community to coordinate our planning and development with the available resources, utilities and such," Iyall said.

La Center hasn't reached any formal understanding with the tribe, and Clark County dissolved a memorandum of understanding with the tribe in 2009 because a state board ruled it had been adopted in 2004 without enough public comment.

The substance of that memorandum, however, is reflected in a 2007 tribal ordinance and in the environmental impact statement the tribe filed with its application.

Clark County Commissioner Marc Boldt said last week that those documents address many of the county's concerns, including housing and impacts on nearby cities, though others will have to be ironed out in future discussions.

"I think we have a pretty good working relationship," Boldt said. "They understood pretty well why we wanted to step back from the (memorandum of understanding) but the relationship is still there, and we'll go forward."

Boldt said he had lingering concerns that would have to be worked out, including payments to the Clark County Sheriff's Office for patrolling at the casino.

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"They always said they want to be a good community member, so I'll take it on their word," he said.

La Center, meanwhile, will determine its response in a meeting early this year.

"The main thing would be to make sure we open the lines of communication, have some good discussions with the tribe and see where they are," Mayor Jim Irish said.

Vancouver was an early opponent of the plan, filing a lawsuit challenging the tribe's gaming ordinance approved by the National Indian Gaming Commission in 2008. The challenge was dismissed, and the dismissal was reaffirmed in 2010.

Councilman Larry Smith, the city's mayor pro tem, said the council would likely discuss its options in a work session Monday or a week later.

He added that the landscape has changed since the city [vowed to fight the casino](#) in 2007 because of concerns over traffic and the effect gambling could have on the area. There are two new council members, and the economy has taken a major dive.

"The economy has sort of just flipped on us," he said. "There will be a lot of pressure to move this project along to create jobs in the community."

The Cowlitz Tribe said its plan would create 2,000 permanent jobs, plus as many as 4,500 during construction.

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