

Will casino waste go to Marysville? - Columbus Dispatch

Written by Administrator
Saturday, 22 January 2011 05:19 -

First, Penn National Gaming started looking into drilling wells that could provide enough water for its central Ohio casino.

Now, Franklin Township wants the ability to issue building permits, and Marysville is talking with someone interested in trucking at least 120,000 gallons a day of raw sewage to its treatment plant.

No one will say whether the latest developments indicate that

Penn National Gaming wants to build its casino in Franklin Township instead of having the site annexed into Columbus, but negotiations with the city are stalled. Columbus officials say that Penn National is trying to gain leverage in the annexation dispute.

Columbus has told Penn National that the city won't provide sewer and water service unless the 123-acre site along W. Broad Street near I-270 is annexed. The casino developer, after agreeing to move the project from its original Columbus location in the Arena District, has asked the city for as much as \$10million in incentives, but Columbus has balked at the request.

The annexation question has financial consequences: Columbus could make an estimated \$24 million in annual taxes with the casino in the city, but only \$16million if it doesn't annex. It's unclear how much Franklin Township would net if the casino site remained township land.

Marysville officials confirmed last night that they met Thursday with Edwin Hanson, who said he represented a client interested in doing business with the city's sewage-treatment plant. Hanson did not name his client, but he is project manager for the casino.

"The meeting was an exploration of the city's capabilities and capacity," said Marysville city administrator Jillian Froment.

Hanson told city officials that his client would initially have 120,000 gallons a day of raw sewage, but the volume would grow, Froment said. Hanson wanted to know how much sewage Marysville could handle from a customer that would truck it in.

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"We certainly have the capacity, and we're open to exploring any possibilities with any client," Froment said.

The \$108 million treatment plant, which opened in 2009, was built to accept 8million gallons of wastewater a day but has permits to take in 6million. Froment said the plant processes about 4million.

Froment said the meeting ended with the city essentially telling Hanson that if his client is interested in the terms, he should let officials know.

When asked whether Penn National is the unnamed client, company spokesman Bob Tenenbaum said Penn National is not commenting on anything related to sewer or water service while negotiating with Columbus. Hanson did not return a call seeking comment.

As for Franklin Township's efforts to start operating its building department, Columbus officials asked a state panel yesterday to put off a decision on whether it should be certified. The Ohio Board of Building Standards agreed to table the proposal.

"This application appears to be a way (for Penn National Gaming) to avoid submitting their building permit to Ohio and Columbus and to further delay annexation," said Mike Reese, chief of staff to Mayor Michael B. Coleman.

The Ohio Board of Building Standards must certify building departments for them to function. If the building department were approved and Penn National applied for a permit, Franklin Township could give Penn National the go-ahead to start construction of the casino.

Tenenbaum said his company hasn't been involved in the creation of the building department. He said Penn National hasn't approached anyone about building permits, and annexation

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negotiations with Columbus remain "static."

The casino would need sewer and water service to begin operating, but it's not necessary to have such service arranged before getting a building permit.

Township officials say Columbus is taking their request the wrong way.

"This is not about Penn National," township attorney Peter Griggs said. "If that property is annexed to the city of Columbus, our building department would still apply anyway."

Trustee Timothy Guyton said Franklin Township officials expect renewed growth in their region, in part because of the casino, and they want to be in a position to control and oversee that growth.

The trustees established a building department on Dec.28, agreeing to hire Asebrook & Co. to run it.

Columbus officials questioned whether the township knows what it is doing.

"It's a very large development that we need to make sure is done right," said Linda LaCloche, assistant director of the city's building department. "There are two entities here that already have the qualifications to take care of all the safety issues for such a large development - the state and the city."

If there is neither a township building department nor annexation of the site into Columbus, Penn National could apply for a building permit through the Ohio Department of Commerce,

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which also oversees the state Board of Building Standards.

Griggs said he has brought neighboring Prairie Township and another township before the Building Standards board with nearly identical applications. They were approved without delay.

Prairie Township has had great success with its program, which is what gave Franklin Township officials the idea, Griggs said. Franklin Township expects its budget to dwindle because of state cuts and the proposed elimination of the state's estate tax, so officials thought permit fees might be a nice source of revenue.

State board members replied that under state law, permit fees are meant to fund only the building department, so it couldn't really be a source of revenue.

They said they plan to spend more time reviewing this case, and they told Columbus that it needs to come up with statutory problems with the township's application - not policy complaints - to stop the certification.

"We're not here to look at annexation issues," board member Charles Ruma said. "I'm a little bit taken aback that we've been thrust into the middle of the annexation issue. This is not appropriate."

Dispatch reporter Doug Caruso contributed to this story.

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