

[PALMER](#) — Having a casino in town is not expected to affect the local housing market or create a population boom, according to a socioeconomic impact summary from Communities Opportunities Group, a consultant for Mohegan Sun, which wants to build [a resort casino](#) in the area of the Massachusetts Turnpike interchange.

The town's consultant, RKG Associates of New Hampshire, which reviewed the report from Mohegan, generally agrees, saying most people will continue to live where they already reside and commute to the property.

The studies in their entirety can be found at the conclusion of this article.

Though the casino will require the town to hire more employees, the two consultants were not always in agreement as to how many. These additional costs will be addressed during host community agreement negotiations, and are expected to be borne by Mohegan Sun.

The Building Department, which presently has one employee, will need five additional contracted personnel, according to Mohegan's group, while RKG stated that even with contracted personnel, it needs at least one more full-time building inspector and a part-time clerk.

Though Mohegan's group said the project is expected to have little impact on the Palmer Fire Department, RKG said the department will need to become full-time with at least 15 employees. It presently is an on-call department with three full-timers.

Regarding the police, Mohegan's group said there could be a need for one additional officer per shift, for a total of five new officers. RKG stated that 14 new officers are needed, plus four additional dispatchers. The Police Department has 20 officers now.

Both consultants agreed that there is a need for another health inspector, but Mohegan's said it

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should be part-time, while RKG said it should be full-time. RKG also said the Public Works Department should have four additional employees. It also notes the "terrible condition" of the existing Public Works Department on Bridge Street and puts a new facility's cost at \$6.4 million. The highway division has seven employees, including the public works superintendent.

The town manager's office has released several impact studies that are being conducted as part of the host community agreement negotiation process.

The agreement is expected to be completed within a few weeks, according to Town Manager Charles T. Blanchard, and must be finalized before a referendum can be held in order for voters to weigh in on the project proposed for Thorndike Street (Route 32). It's possible a referendum may be held in September.

RKG concludes: "The Mohegan Sun Massachusetts resort will be a positive for the town of Palmer. However, with such a major project will come increased burdens on municipal government and on the infrastructure that serves residents.

"The (Host Community Agreement) provides the opportunity to mitigate negative impacts and to create a solid foundation for future growth. The social and economic impact analysis undertaken by (Communities Opportunities Group) for (Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority) identifies several potential areas of concern, but underestimates many of the true impacts that the project will have on the town."

The traffic analysis, by Vanasse & Associates of Andover, will be discussed at Monday's Town Council meeting at 7 p.m. at the Town Building by Mohegan's development coordinator, Paul I. Brody.

At-large Town Councilor Paul E. Burns said he has read all the studies and found them "reasonably comprehensive."

"The big thing to keep in mind is that the casino will bring an awful lot of enhancement to public safety and public services," Burns said.

While some residents have criticized how long the process is taking for the host community agreement to be released, Burns said, "We're actually doing the due diligence and trying to assess the impacts to ensure we understand the full impact." That information will only help the voters when it comes time for a vote, he said.

"Other communities haven't done this. I think it's important for the Massachusetts Gaming Commission to recognize Palmer has taken its time, and done overwhelming amounts of research," Burns said. "This will bring revenues and jobs to the region and I think the water park does bring that 'wow factor' that Commissioner Crosby is looking at."

In addition to a casino, the project [proposal includes retail shops and an aqua adventure water park](#). Mohegan is competing with MGM Resorts International in Springfield and Hard Rock International in West Springfield for the sole Western Massachusetts casino license.

Blanchard said some concerns have been voiced by officials regarding the statement that housing will not be affected given the large number of rental units in town.

RKG also noted that Mohegan's consultant provides "limited information on the existing social conditions of the town and does not acknowledge any social impacts on the town as a result of the project." RKG stated "the sudden development of a resort casino with thousands of employees and bringing in millions of visitors a year to the town will have a real, if undefined and unquantifiable, impact on the 'social fabric' of the community."

RKG notes the project is expected to create 3,156 full-time jobs between the \$1 billion casino, water park and retail complex, and agrees with Mohegan that there is sufficient capacity within the labor market regionally to fill the positions.

RKG said Mohegan's report underestimates the total taxable revenue of the casino, and instead believes that it could pay \$10 million to the town and \$750,000 to the fire district annually. It also suggests having the town go from a single tax rate to a split tax rate to capture more revenue. That would increase tax revenue to \$15 million.

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District 4 Town Councilor Donald Blais Jr. said he spent hours reading the studies.

“I’m glad they put it together. It was long overdue. We needed the information,” Blais said.

[Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority Palmer Socioeconomic Analysis](#) by [masslive](#)

[Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority Palmer Socioeconomic Analysis Executive Summary](#) by [masslive](#)

[RKG Associates Review of MTGA Palmer Socioeconomic Analysis](#) by [masslive](#)

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