

BIA approves proposed Kenosha casino

Written by Administrator

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KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) - The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs has approved a Native American tribe's plan to build a casino at a former dog racing track near the Wisconsin-Illinois border, a tribe spokesman said Friday.

The Menominee Nation has been seeking permission for years to build a casino at the former Dairyland Greyhound Park, which has been closed since December 2009. The project has met strong opposition from the Forest County Potawatomi tribe, which owns an off-reservation casino about 40 miles north in Milwaukee.

Menominee tribal leaders defended their Kenosha casino proposal from what they expect to be a negative campaign.

"Wisconsin's economic future is far more important than an unfair monopoly for one tribe," Menominee Vice Chairwoman Lisa Waukau said at a news conference in Milwaukee Friday night.

In a statement, Jeff Crawford, Forest County Potawatomi Community attorney general, said the tribe remains opposed to the Kenosha casino proposal.

"We will likely protect our rights through litigation should it come to that," Crawford said.

Project spokesman Evan Zeppos told the Kenosha News that Menominee Nation tribal Chairman Craig Corn received written confirmation of the bureau's approval. That means the plan now goes to Republican Gov. Scott Walker, a former Milwaukee County executive who has said he'd like to see consensus among the sovereign tribal nations.

Walker issued a statement saying his administration will move forward with a 60-day comment period for the tribes. He said his administration will reach out to tribal representatives ahead of the comment period to make sure all tribes have a chance to weigh in.

An \$800 million proposal calls for the casino to be built in several phases, eventually including 3,100 slot machines, 75 blackjack tables, a 5,000-square-foot entertainment venue, a hotel, conference center and nearly 50,000 square feet of shopping space. The plans have been in the works since 2004, when more than half of Kenosha County voters voted for the project in a nonbinding referendum.

The Potawatomi tribe earned about \$368 million from its casino in 2011 and has estimated a Kenosha casino would cut its revenue by \$150 million a year.

The Menominee reservation is in Keshena, about 200 miles north of Kenosha and 160 miles north of Milwaukee.

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