

I'm not one to say I told you so, but . . . Oh, who am I kidding?

A lot of people are freaking out in Springfield right now. They've pinned their hopes on a flashy casino in the city's moribund South End, to be run by gaming giant MGM. But after the big doings at Suffolk Downs lately, the dream appears set to slip away.

In case you missed it, the politically connected Suffolk Downs people, who looked like a shoo-in for one of the state's three casino licenses, [jettisoned Caesars Entertainment](#) from their \$1 billion project when it looked like the Massachusetts Gaming Commission was going to find Caesars unsuitable to hold a gambling license.

Why would this news in East Boston worry citizens 100 miles away? Because it means this state's commission is tougher than just about any other in the country. Caesars was nixed [because it had a licensing agreement](#) to use the name of a hotel whose part-owner had alleged ties to Russian mobsters. Caesars, which hasn't had a problem like this before, wasn't even going to be working with the guy.

If the commission could find Caesars unsuitable, then MGM has a big problem. In 2009, New Jersey officials [raised concerns](#) about MGM's operation in Macau, where the father of MGM partner Pansy Ho has alleged links to organized crime. Since then, MGM has reduced Ho's share in the Macau operation, and New Jersey is reconsidering. But as the Caesars shocker indicates, the bar is way high in Massachusetts.

Even though he had two casino companies vying for his affections, Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno rushed to the altar with MGM in the summer. I've been saying this was a bad idea [for some time](#). (There's the told ya.)

After Caesars was buried in Boston, panic ensued in Springfield. City Council president James Ferrera [sent a letter to the gaming commission](#). "How can MGM be replaced by another casino company if they fail suitability?" he wrote. "We all know of MGM's problems in Macau." Ferrera has been hearing from constituents and small business owners with their hearts set on the

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riches MGM and its marketing millions convinced them were inevitable. "If a casino doesn't come, how will Springfield survive?" Ferrera said on Friday. "Where is the next industry? Where are the next thousands of jobs?"

I'd argue that dream was bogus in the first place, given that casinos tend to divert money from local businesses. The idea that Springfield would become this glitzy destination was always ludicrous: It's a city casino, in a depressed city at that. Money wasn't going to flood in from Kansas and Krakow, but from locals who'd pour their money into slot machines instead of spending it somewhere else.

But OK, let's keep the dream alive for a bit. Say there's a miracle and MGM is found suitable to run a casino. And say Springfield beats out Palmer, where Mohegan Sun and partners are vying for the same license. And say MGM's paradise comes to pass and jobs are had and cash is flowing into the city.

Springfield still has a big problem: Connecticut. The casinos to our south are hurting. Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods are losing customers to hard times and growing competition from New York and Rhode Island.

Determined to replace the gambling revenue to which they've become addicted, Connecticut's legislature doubled down, approving Keno via a provision tucked into the state budget. And now they're talking about introducing slots parlors as well, including one at Windsor Locks, near Springfield.

The tribes that own Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods must agree to the slots parlors, in which they'd also be partners. The Mohegans would never do that if they had a casino in Palmer: Slots at Windsor Locks would eat into their clientele. But they could change their minds if they lost out to MGM in Springfield.

It's a risky game, this casino thing. Even when you think you're winning.

Read more <http://news.google.com/news/url?sa=t&fd=R&usg=AFQjCNHjhYapp2rkb>

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