

Milford vote could change the game in the casino quest - Metro

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 19 November 2013 21:09 -

The outcome of Tuesday's casino vote in Milford will not only determine the fate of a \$1 billion Foxwoods-backed project off Interstate 495, but could dramatically affect the level of competition for the most lucrative gambling license in the state and set a final tone for an emerging industry that has taken its lumps in Massachusetts this year.

The last of 11 original gambling applicants faces the voters as casino proposals are on a statewide losing streak, reflecting polling that suggests most Massachusetts residents would like a shorter drive to a gambling resort, but not too short.

David Nunes, the Milford project's chief development officer, has spent five years trying to persuade the townspeople to embrace the economic benefits that a casino would provide: thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue.

"You have a group of people on the anti side who are literally opposed to change," Nunes said in an interview Monday. "This is an opportunity for Milford to put itself on the map with some of the other upscale communities in Massachusetts."

[Continue reading below](#)

Opponents in Milford have raised four concerns about the project: traffic, water resources, crime, and the effect on property values. Together they add up to an attack on the magnitude of the development.

"You don't put 7 million visitors a year in a community of 26,000 without a major impact on that town," said Steve Trettel, cochairman of the opposition group Casino-Free Milford.

As in many other communities across Massachusetts this year, supporters of the Milford casino proposal have vastly outspent opponents. The partnership behind the Milford proposal spent \$792,000 between April and the end of October, according to campaign finance documents. Casino-Free Milford raised \$23,770 for its campaign.

Milford vote could change the game in the casino quest - Metro

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 19 November 2013 21:09 -

But money has not consistently translated into votes for casino companies in Massachusetts.

On Nov. 5, East Boston residents, unpersuaded by an expensive campaign, voted down a \$1 billion Suffolk Downs casino proposal, the same day voters in the small Western Massachusetts town of Palmer narrowly defeated a casino resort proposal by Mohegan Sun.

In September, West Springfield trounced a Hard Rock International casino bid. A slot machine parlor proposal in Millbury never made it to the voters; the developer, Rush Street Gaming, withdrew before the vote, acknowledging a lack of support.

Five companies have won a referendum: Wynn Resorts in Everett, MGM in Springfield, Penn National Gaming in Plainville, Cordish Cos. in Leominster, and Raynham Park in Raynham. Penn, Cordish, and Raynham Park are seeking the state's sole slot parlor license, a comparably small development limited to 1,250 slot machines and no table games. Voters in Revere supported a Suffolk Downs project that would be located on its border with East Boston.

Ourway Realty, the original bidder at Plainridge, was bounced from the competition after state regulators conducting a background check discovered that a key member of the development team had taken more than \$1 million from the track's money room. State investigators also raised red flags in the vetting of former Suffolk Downs partner Caesars Entertainment. Suffolk Downs dropped the casino giant from the project in October, which probably hurt the project's chances in East Boston.

In legalizing casinos in 2011, lawmakers envisioned a vibrant competition, with wealthy developers trying to outdo each other with more compelling projects. But lawmakers also decided to give host communities a large degree of control, with each project required to be subjected to a binding vote.

"Part of the competition is getting approval through the referendum process," said Clyde Barrow, a casino expert at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. "That winnows out applicants, and that was part of the original intention."

Milford vote could change the game in the casino quest - Metro

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 19 November 2013 21:09 -

The contest for the single Western Massachusetts resort casino license is down to just one survivor, MGM Resorts, which won a July referendum in Springfield. The company has not yet passed a mandatory state background check. Mohegan Sun is trying to get back into the game with a recount in Palmer. The project failed by 93 votes.

In Greater Boston, which includes Milford, Wynn Resorts has won local approval from Everett for a casino resort on the Mystic River, but is still waiting on results of a background check. Suffolk Downs is trying to stay alive by moving its entire project over the city line into Revere.

This plan faces potential legal and logistical problems. Councilor Sal LaMattina, who represents East Boston on the City Council and favored the original Suffolk Downs plan, said Monday that he will oppose a Revere-only Suffolk Downs casino. "The neighborhood was always told if one community voted against it, they would not be able to go forward," LaMattina said.

Mayor-elect Marty Walsh has not weighed in on the track's plans to revamp its proposal and bypass the verdict of East Boston voters. "It's something I haven't taken a position on as of yet," Walsh said Monday. "I haven't sat down with Suffolk Downs either to discuss their ideas and future plans."

If the Foxwoods project, which has already cleared the background check, were also to fail, the prospects for a robust competition for the Greater Boston resort casino license could be severely diminished, though experts say that many of the benefits of competition have already been realized.

Each license has seen at least several suitors since January, "clearly forcing everybody to up the ante," even if a number of the bids did not survive, said Barrow. It would be difficult now for the surviving companies to back down from their pricey proposals, he said.

Fresh polling by the Western New England University Polling Institute shows why casino projects have such a mixed record of success in Massachusetts. Sixty-one percent of adults support the establishment of casinos in the state, and just 33 percent oppose it, similar to the results of polls in 2009 and 2010. However, just 42 percent say they would support a casino in their own community, while 55 percent are opposed.

Milford vote could change the game in the casino quest - Metro

Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 19 November 2013 21:09 -

The poll of 517 adults was conducted Nov. 5-11. The margin of error is 4.3 percent.

Voters seem to be making “a reasonable argument that people should be free to gamble, and that gambling is not always problematic, but we would prefer not to have those types of facilities in our towns,” said Peter Ubertaccio, a political scientist at Stonehill College.

Read more <http://news.google.com/news/url?sa=t&fd=R&usg=AFQjCNHVpqzIkVLQkyBTasNK-2DZv6RdGg&url=http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/11/19/milford/j3kM37anFvQ4EHxXiqKTJI/story.html>