

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 23 March 2014 05:03 -

The [Massachusetts Gaming Commission](#) voted Thursday to name the city of Everett as a surrounding community to Mohegan Sun’s \$1.3 billion resort casino proposed for Suffolk Downs in Revere, but denied Saugus’s request for the designation for the competing \$1 billion Wynn casino project planned in Everett.

The five-member panel limited the scope of Everett’s designation to the impact that traffic generated from the casino would have on Route 16, a state highway that cuts through Everett.

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“Traffic is most relevant to this designation,” Commissioner Enrique Zuniga said during a live Web broadcast of the panel’s meeting. Mohegan Sun and Wynn are locked in a high-stakes competition for the one license to operate a resort casino — with hotels, upscale shops, restaurants, and a 24-hour casino — available for Greater Boston. [Continue reading below](#)

The state’s gambling [law](#)

requires a developer to identify surrounding communities that would be most impacted by a casino project, and to negotiate an agreement to address local concerns.

But the law also allows a community not chosen as a surrounding community to seek the designation from the gambling commission.

Under the law, Mohegan and Everett now have 30 days to reach an agreement or head to arbitration. In separate statements, Everett and Mohegan Sun indicated they were ready for tough negotiations.

“I will continue to remain focused on the people of Everett and mitigating any and all impacts to our city by this development,” Everett Mayor Carlo de Maria Jr. said in a prepared statement. “We will continue to assess the true effects of a Mohegan facility on the city of Everett and encourage Mohegan Sun to begin negotiating with the city in good faith.”

Mitchell Etes, chief executive officer at Mohegan Sun, cited a “competitive dynamic” that will make for “uniquely challenging” negotiations.

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“We remain prepared to discuss the flow of traffic on Route 16 as directed by the commission, as well as the significant benefits Mohegan Sun will bring to the residents and businesses of Everett,” Etes said in the statement to the Globe.

The gambling commission rejected Saugus’s assertion that the town would be negatively impacted by an increase in traffic and business competition from the Wynn development, which would be about 4 miles away.

But consultants hired by the commission to evaluate the impact discounted the arguments. “We believe that Saugus’s concerns are not founded,” said Lyle Hall, managing director of HLT Advisory, a Toronto-based hospitality consulting firm. “We don’t feel there is any potential negative impact for the meals tax to Saugus.”

Commissioner Gayle Cameron noted the Everett casino could generate more business for Saugus restaurants. “Rather than decrease [of patrons] . . . they will see an increase. They will do better,” she said.

Saugus Town Manager Scott Crabtree did not return calls to the Globe seeking comment.

Everett and Saugus were among eight local communities that [applied](#) in January to the commission to be designated as a surrounding community to one or both casino projects.

But all the others withdrew their applications after reaching agreements on their own with developers. Wynn is still negotiating with Medford and Somerville on agreements

In January, Mohegan Sun [agreed](#) to pay \$3.7 million annually spread among seven communities — Cambridge, Chelsea, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Melrose, and Salem. The communities would receive annual payments and benefits, such as hiring preference for jobs and tourism promotion.

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Somerville reached an agreement with Mohegan last week that includes \$100,000 in annual payments, some to be set aside for city residents to train for jobs at the casino, Mayor Joseph Curtatone said.

Curtatone, a staunch gambling opponent who is leading a statewide effort to repeal the state's casino law, said the pact also includes a ban on Mohegan Sun from aggressive advertising and recruiting patrons.

"One of my major concerns was that there be no advertising or incentives to promote gambling in our city," Curtatone said in an interview Friday. "Mohegan has been very professional to work with, despite my position on gambling."

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