

Gambling commission officially approves Wynn casino in Everett - Metro

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 18 September 2014 02:16 -

Mohegan Sun lost the competition this week for the state's most lucrative casino license, but the Connecticut gambling giant did not go quietly, blasting the licensing process Wednesday as defective and unfair, and urging regulators to reconsider their choice of Wynn Resorts.

Mohegan Sun complained that Wynn was given more opportunities to address deficiencies in its proposal in the final day of deliberations. And Mohegan Sun offered to hire more employees at its proposed Revere casino at Suffolk Downs, to match Wynn's projections, if the Gaming Commission would reconsider.

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After noting the objection, state gambling commissioners went ahead Wednesday and formalized their choice of Wynn Resorts' proposed Everett casino as the winner of the Greater Boston license. It is unclear what recourse Mohegan Sun has. According to state law: "Applicants . . . shall not be entitled to any further review if denied by the commission." The commission's designation comes as a new Globe poll shows casino supporters expanding their advantage over opponents who back a proposed repeal of the state casino law. Voters will decide the issue in November. [Related picture](#) [Photos: Wynn proposal approved](#) [The proposed casino complex in Everett would be built on the Mystic River waterfront on the site of a former chemical plant.](#)

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The poll suggests that 55 percent of likely voters want to keep the 2011 law that legalized casinos in Massachusetts, while 36 percent favor repeal. The poll of 407 likely voters, conducted September 14-16, has a margin of error of 4.85 percent.

The poll numbers suggests a shift from a Globe poll in late August, in which casino supporters held a narrower lead, 51 percent to 42 percent.

Casino opponents have criticized the commission's decision to pick a winner before the November repeal referendum and have challenged casino executives to political debates.

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“We look forward to presenting our side to Massachusetts voters and trust the casino bosses won’t shy away from standing up for their industry and join us to debate the true costs and supposed benefits of casino gambling,” John Ribeiro, chairman of the Repeal the Casino Deal campaign, said in a statement.

With the state’s most lucrative casino license in hand, executives from Wynn Resorts said Wednesday that they were eager to begin the next phase of the project, including mending their rocky relationship with Mayor Martin J. Walsh of Boston.

“We can’t wait to get started,” Robert DeSalvio, Wynn senior vice president of development, said after signing a licensing agreement with the commission. “We’re so happy to be in the City of Everett with all their support.”

DeSalvio said that the company expects to open in 2017 and that the start of construction depends on how soon it can complete development permitting. He said the company has not yet decided whether it will join other companies selected to build casinos in Massachusetts in defending the casino law from repeal.

DeSalvio offered conciliatory words to Walsh, saying the company is eager to meet with the mayor.

Wynn was unable to negotiate a compensation agreement with Walsh, and the mayor has criticized the way the company handled the negotiations. Walsh refused to participate in arbitration with Wynn, as prescribed by state casino regulations, leaving the commission to decide how much compensation Wynn would pay the city.

Mohegan Sun’s objection was the only surprise to come out of Wednesday’s brief commission meeting and signing ceremony. The company lodged its objections in a four-page letter to the commission, e-mailed at 10 p.m. Tuesday, hours after the board voted 3 to 1 to back the Wynn project, according to the commission.

The commission’s acting chairman for the deliberations, James McHugh, said Wynn’s vision to

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build a \$1.6 billion gambling resort on a vacant plot of industrial land on the Mystic River would “spark redevelopment of a piece of waterfront . . . that has the potential to undergo real transformation.”

McHugh was the lone commissioner who did not vote for the Wynn project Tuesday.

Mohegan Sun, like Wynn, had its chance to address a potential weakness during the final deliberations, said McHugh. The casino company could have raised its objections much earlier, he said, during a hearing that went from about 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. “In my view, the objection at 10 [Tuesday] night comes . . . too late,” he said.

Spokespersons for Mohegan Sun did not return messages Wednesday, and it was not known how or whether the company would continue to contest its loss.

Walsh said Wednesday that Wynn representatives had reached out to his corporation counsel’s office and that he will be “sitting down with the Wynn people to see what the next step will be,” after he returns from a planned trip to Ireland.

The mayor said he harbors no ill will toward Wynn.

“I don’t know him; I’ve never met the man,” he said of company chairman Steve Wynn. “My concern has always been to make sure the people of Boston, the people of Charlestown, were taken care of.”

He said he wants to meet personally with Wynn. “That absolutely has to happen,” he said, noting that Wynn is the leader of a new industry moving into the region.

At the same time, Walsh did not rule out the possibility of taking legal action if talks are unproductive. “Nothing’s off the table,” he said.

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Walsh said there are still a lot of questions about the agreement between the commission and Wynn, in which the developer promised to contribute money toward a long-term plan to address traffic in Charlestown's Sullivan Square.

"We are still waiting, today, for the final results of the Gaming Commission," Walsh said. "We have a good idea what's in the document, but we want to read it and dissect and see where we go from here."

With the casino expected to draw millions of visitors a year, Walsh said, "that's a lot of traffic, a lot of wear and tear in the community of Charlestown, and we have to make sure that [we] protect them."

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