

Mass. Ballot Question To Ban Casinos Fails

Written by Administrator
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After a protracted and public debate that stretched on for years, officials from MGM Springfield declared victory Tuesday after a ballot question to ban casinos in Massachusetts failed.

"Voters across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts today voiced their support of the 10,000 permanent job opportunities and significant economic benefits provided by the Gaming Act of 2011," said James J. Murren, MGM Resorts International Chairman and CEO. "MGM Resorts International would like to thank the thousands of volunteers and supporters who understood exactly what was at stake and worked so hard to bring this historic opportunity to realization for themselves and their neighbors ... we can now begin the work of rebuilding a great downtown, and igniting a renaissance in Western Massachusetts."

With the failure of the repeal movement, plans to build the proposed \$800 million MGM Springfield will move forward with construction likely starting in the spring of 2015, said MGM Springfield President Mike Mathis. The MGM Springfield project will be built on 14.5 acres of downtown Springfield.

"We will be active. You just may not see it in the first couple of months," Mathis said.

The casino is scheduled to open in summer 2017.

"The benefit of the site is we can be working across the whole site on parallel paths," Mathis said. "So, there is a lot of work to be done. There's a 850,000 square feet, about 3,500-space garage. That will come on line first because we want to be sure we turn those spaces back over to the downtown business district while we're building."

Since the Massachusetts legislature passed a law in 2011 allowing three resort casinos in different regions of the state, various companies have vied for one of the licenses. The three regions are Greater Boston, Western Massachusetts and the southeastern part of the state. Separately, the state is allowing one slots parlor. Both the Boston and Western Massachusetts casino options were chosen this year, along with the slots site. The southeastern casino is on a different timetable.

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A grassroots organization against gaming, Repeal the Casino Deal, spent the last days knocking on doors, calling voters and hosting rallies in urban areas, said the organization's spokesman, Stephen Eisele. Repeal the Casino Deal will now become a watchdog organization, Eisele said.

"We are going to be watching what the casinos are doing. We're going to be watching what the Massachusetts Gaming Commission does and making sure that they are living up to their promises, making sure that they're following the intent of the law, that the gambling commission is functioning in an open and transparent way. So, I think that we'll be some of the biggest watchdogs toward the implementation of this."

The Greater Boston licensee was designated in September. The Massachusetts Gaming Commission picked Wynn Resorts' \$1.6 billion proposal for Everett over Mohegan Sun Massachusetts' \$1.3 billion casino plan for Suffolk Downs in Revere.

Earlier this year, the commission decided to designate MGM Resorts International as the licensee for the Western Massachusetts region and Penn National Gaming was given a license to operate a slots parlor in Plainville, Mass.

On Monday, Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno held a rally on the steps of city hall that drew hundreds of supporters who waved signs urging people to vote "no" on the repeal.

MGM Resorts International Chairman and CEO Jim Murren spoke at the rally, saying he has verbally beat up his home state of Connecticut as he pushed for political support of MGM Springfield during the past three years.

"What I'm doing is trying to bring that money back into the Commonwealth," Murren said. "What I'm trying to do is create jobs for the Commonwealth."

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