

Casino prep underway

Written by Administrator
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KENOSHA — Amid a new round of TV ads on the proposed Kenosha casino, those involved with the \$810 million project are laying the groundwork for its possible approval.

Part of that groundwork includes a plan to train workers for what officials say would be 3,000 new jobs at the facility, which would include a casino, hotel, spa and concert venue. Under an agreement, Gateway Technical College would be involved in training those workers.

State officials are still studying the project and negotiating with tribes. Gov. Scott Walker has until Feb. 19 to approve or veto the project, which would be constructed at the former Dairyland Greyhound Park site.

Planning ahead

Officials from the Menominee Tribe and Hard Rock International, which would operate the casino, recently announced an agreement for a “jobs training institute” with Gateway and the College of Menominee Nation, in Keshena on the Menominee reservation.

Gateway President Bryan Albrecht said the college would help train workers in fields such as information technology, security, hotel management and customer service.

“The types of positions you would find in any entertainment district,” Albrecht said.

Gateway already has many of those programs, so the jobs institute would involve customizing the programs for the casino’s purposes, Albrecht said.

It’s too early to say what exactly that would look like or cost. Typically, businesses pay the cost of training initiatives with Gateway, Albrecht said.

He also said it’s not out of the ordinary for the college to work with businesses that don’t have

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final approval for projects. Job training plans can take months to develop, he said, particularly with a large-scale project like the casino.

“We work with developers right from the beginning,” Albrecht said.

Gary Besaw, chairman of the Menominee-Kenosha Gaming Authority, said the agreement would help ensure workers are matched to appropriate positions and get the training they need to succeed.

“Like any smart business, we must plan ahead for the human resources needed to run an enterprise this huge,” Besaw said in a statement. “That takes a lot of planning and preparation so we are not caught flat-footed.”

In addition to the jobs institute, the project team launched a jobs website, www.hardrockhotels.com/kenosha.htm, that allows job-seekers to register and choose an area of employment they are interested in.

Michael Beightol, a spokesman for the casino project, said as of Thursday afternoon, Nov. 20, 1,748 people have registered through the site since it launched in September.

In addition to the casino jobs, officials say the project will create more than 7,000 jobs indirectly, such as construction work, jobs on the Menominee reservation and jobs providing services and goods to the Kenosha facility.

Casino still in limbo

The Ho-Chunk and Forest County Potawatomi tribes, which operate casinos elsewhere in the state, continue to adamantly oppose the Kenosha project.

“This is still a project that will be managed and developed by an out-of-state tribe who will take hundreds of millions of dollars out (of) Wisconsin and bring hundreds of millions to Florida,”

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Potawatomi spokesman George Ermert said in an email.

Hard Rock is owned by the Seminole tribe in Florida; exactly how much the company would receive from the Kenosha casino is unclear.

Walker has said a Kenosha casino could cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars due to compacts with the Potawatomi stipulating how the tribe would be reimbursed. The administration has been negotiating with tribes on how to offset potential losses and studying the economic impact of the proposed casino.

The Kenosha project team has met regularly with Walker administration officials over the past year, with possible amendments to compacts the most recent item of discussion, Beightol said.

Beightol said the team believes the compacts “provide a pathway” to address concerns from both tribes and is optimistic the casino will be approved.

“It’s been an ongoing discussion,” Beightol said. “And every day we creep closer to what the governor himself has said is his desired goal, and that is a win-win-win.”

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