

## Board Backs Casinos in the Catskills, Near Albany and in Central New York

Written by Administrator  
Thursday, 18 December 2014 01:37 -

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Photo



Officials and protesters waited for the recommendations on casino licenses at the meeting of the Gaming Facility Location Board in Albany on Wednesday.

Credit

Patrick Dodson/The Daily Gazette, via Associated Press

ALBANY — One of Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) 's signature initiatives, the expansion of gambling in New York, took a major step forward on Wednesday, when a state board recommended the approval of Las Vegas-style resort casinos in the Catskills, near Albany and on the northern end of the Finger Lakes.

The resorts, which would include boutique hotels, spas, luxury restaurants, golf resorts and other amenities, are expected to provide thousands of jobs in distressed parts of the state and, according to one estimate, generate over \$300 million in new tax revenues.

But New York is entering an intensively competitive gambling industry in the Northeast with lagging returns that some analysts believe is close to saturated. The Gaming Facility Location Board seemed to take that into account by declining to recommend a fourth resort, as allowed by law, in part to give the other three a better chance of success. It also rejected six applications in Orange County, the region closest to New York City, in favor of a single resort in neighboring Sullivan County, to the north, citing the need for economic development.

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### Where to Expect Gambling

Casino plans accepted by the New York State Board.

Casino, 207-room hotel,

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restaurants and other amenities.

Projected cost: \$425 million

Developer: Wilmorite

### **2. Montreign Resort Casino**

Would include a 391-room hotel, golf course, restaurants and entertainment rooms.

Projected cost: \$630 million

Developer: Empire Resorts

Casino, 150-room hotel, restaurants

and a banquet hall

Projected cost:

\$300 million

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Developers:

Rush Street Gaming

and the Galesi Group

For advocates, the announcement on Wednesday was a cause for celebration, after years of intense lobbying for full-scale gambling as a salve for economic woes in the long-faded Catskills.

“For 50 years, the Sullivan County Catskills have sought gaming as a way to grow our tourism-based economy,” said State Senator John J. Bonacic, a Republican whose district includes much of the Catskills. “And now that moment is here.”

Several major developers — including Caesars Entertainment, Hard Rock and Mohegan Sun — were shut out, as were several more modest proposals; 16 applicants had sought casino licenses.

The winners include a \$630 million resort next to the old Concord Resort near Monticello, once the heart of the borscht belt. The casino, which would be built by Empire Resorts — tied to the Genting Group, a Malaysian conglomerate — would include a 391-room hotel, a golf course, restaurants and entertainment rooms, and sit next to a site where EPR Properties plans to build the Adelaar resort, with an indoor water park, an entertainment village, hiking trails and zip lines. Another winner was a \$300 million proposal, the Rivers Casino, on a 60-acre waterfront site in Schenectady, west of Albany. The third successful applicant was a \$425 million development, Lago Resort & Casino, complete with thousands of slot machines, a 1,700-seat theater and a 207-room hotel, in the Finger Lakes town of Tyre. The proposal overcame opposition from [a local group and several Amish families](#) .

With nearly 1,000 commercial and tribal casinos in 39 states, gambling halls are no longer an alluring novelty exclusive to Las Vegas and Atlantic City. In the Northeast, the nation’s most competitive market, dozens of casinos or slot parlors operate or are opening, in Delaware,

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Maryland, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island — and soon Massachusetts — as well as Atlantic City, where four of the city's 12 casinos [have closed this year](#). A fifth is [expected to turn out the lights](#) in the next few days. Connecticut's two tribal casinos, Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods, have also [fallen on hard times](#), stricken by overexpansion and layoffs.

New York is already home to five tribal casinos upstate and nine slot parlors at racetracks. Still, economists, analysts and some developers expect that casinos closer to New York City, and its 52 million annual visitors, could be successful, at least for a while.

Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, embarked on a plan [to legalize commercial casinos](#) shortly after he took office in 2011. And on Wednesday, before the state board's announcement, he again emphasized the economic benefits and played down the obstacles.

"The risk is all on the private sector and we have only upside," he said.

Perhaps the biggest winner in the casino sweepstakes was the Genting Group, which hired a small army of lobbyists and public relations personnel and was a major contributor to the Committee to Save New York, a now-defunct business coalition that supported Mr. Cuomo's first term agenda.

Photo



One of the proposals recommended by the board was for a \$630 million casino-resort on the grounds of the old Concord Resort near Monticello, once the heart of the borscht belt in the Catskills. Credit Niko J. Kallianiotis for The New York Times

Already a major casino operator in Asia and England, Genting owns the sole gambling hall in New York City, the Resorts World slot parlor at the Aqueduct racetrack in Queens, which is the highest grossing gambling operation in the United States. The family of the chairman of the Genting Group has a controlling stake in Empire Resorts.

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On Wednesday, two of the company's proposals in Orange County were rejected, but by winning the license for Montreign in the Catskills, Genting will have both the largest casino in New York and the one closest to New York City.

Kevin Law, the chairman of the location board, emphasized that the siting process had been free of outside interference, saying the decision had been influenced by many factors: economic effects, financing, community support and the so-called speed to market, or how fast they could open. Local casinos would also capture dollars now spent by New York gamblers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, Mr. Law said, echoing one of the governor's promises.

The casinos are expected to open in early 2017, if not sooner.

The recommended developers still must be approved by the State Gaming Commission and pass a background check by the State Police, and the projects must undergo environmental reviews.

Under state law, the new operators will have to pay a one-time licensing fee of \$20 million to \$70 million, depending on the location.

Location will also determine the tax rate on gambling revenues, from 37 percent to 45 percent for slot machines and 10 percent for table games. The bulk of the revenue, 80 percent, is earmarked for elementary and secondary education or property tax relief, with the remaining money split between municipal and county governments.

Despite the support of state voters, who easily [passed a 2013 referendum](#) legalizing commercial casinos, several proposals met fierce grass-roots resistance and lawsuits. Environmentalists had sued to stop a \$1.5 billion project near a state forest in Tuxedo, in Orange County, and Hasidic leaders in the same county sued to stop two others.

On Wednesday, opponents who had fought casinos celebrated the outcome.

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“I think we had a lot to do with it,” said Cara Benson, a spokeswoman for the group, Save East Greenbush, which opposed a casino just east of Albany. “Mr. Law came back and said to me, ‘We really listened to you and we really took your concerns into consideration.’ ”

At the Miss Monticello diner in Monticello, patrons said the Montreign casino in nearby Thompson would bring jobs and tourists. “You’re going to draw the people,” Ted Kocijanski, 80, said, “who still have the money to do that.”

### **Correction: December 17, 2014**

An earlier version of a headline that appeared on the home page with this article gave an incorrect location for one the the casinos approved by a New York State board. It is the Finger Lakes region, not Albany.

### **Correction: December 17, 2014**

Because of an editing error, an earlier version of this article erroneously stated that Empire Resorts, a casino developer, was part of the Genting Group. The family of the chairman of the Genting Group owns a controlling stake in Empire Resorts.

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