

Detroit Casino Council rejects offer from casinos

Written by Administrator

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Greektown Casino Hotel in Detroit. (Photo: Kimberly P. Mitchell)

A group of labor unions rejected the latest economic proposal in contract negotiations Wednesday from Detroit's three casinos as labor talks that began in August intensified this week.

The Detroit Casino Council, which represents 6,000 workers at Greektown Casino, MGM Grand Detroit and MotorCity Casino, told its members Thursday that it was not satisfied with the latest offer and proposed a counteroffer, the council said in an [update on the Unite Here Local 24 website](#)

The council is a consortium of four labor unions that includes members of UAW Local 7777, Unite Here Local 24, Teamsters Local 372 and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 324.

The proposal included a base wage increase, a bonus and continuation of current health care plans without changes to the design of the plans, the casinos said in a joint statement posted on Web sites dedicated to updating employees on the labor talks.

The casino's had warned the unions less money would be available for wage increases if health care contributions were not increased or if there isn't an agreement on a plan that would lower health care costs.

Annemarie Strassel, a spokeswoman for Unite Here, said in an e-mailed statement late Thursday:

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"The tough issue on the table is who will pay for rising healthcare costs. Based on current proposals, the casinos want to shift more of those costs onto workers. Access to good health care is what makes these middle-class jobs. We want to make sure we reach a fair agreement that keeps health care affordable."

Exchanging, and rejecting, proposals in labor negotiations is common — especially as discussions get into later rounds of bargaining.

"The parties are negotiating in good faith and are committed to reaching an agreement that is beneficial for all," Jacci Woods, a spokeswoman for MotorCity, said in a statement.

Labor talks between the casinos and the labor unions are being watched carefully by Detroit's city leaders because of the tax revenue at stake for the city. Detroit's casinos are also a major draw for regional tourism.

Tension between the unions and the casinos has been high, and from the start, talks involved federal and state mediators. Last week, workers overwhelmingly voted in favor of authorizing the Detroit Casino Council to call a strike if negotiations break down. The Casino Council would need to notify casinos in advance of a strike.

While contract talks have been difficult, both the labor unions and all of the casinos say they are committed to reaching an agreement.

On Monday, discussions focused on scheduling, paid time off, leaves of absence and discipline, according to an [update posted on a website by Greektown Casino](#) . On Tuesday, negotiators for Detroit casinos and the Detroit Casino Council met in separate rooms.

"Late Wednesday, the union committee gave the employers an economic proposal addressing the needs of the membership," the council told its members Thursday, adding that it expects a response from the casinos Sunday night, when negotiations are scheduled to resume.

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Negotiations are also scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, with the continual involvement of state and local mediators.

Disagreements over how to pay for escalating health care costs are at the heart of the negotiations. The casino's expect that health care costs for the three casinos will increase by \$46 million, to almost \$262 million, over the term of the next four-year contract. The casino's told union workers that there will be very little money for wages or bonuses if the casino's health care costs are not reduced.

A consultant jointly hired by the casinos and the labor unions has proposed several alternatives that are designed to save money on health care without costing their members more money. Those options include switching to TeamCare, a union-backed, multi-employer Taft-Hartley plan that uses the Blue Cross network.

The labor unions have opposed any changes to the health care plan.

"Together, we are trying to address the challenges of increasing health care costs while working to build a strong future for this industry and the thousands of people in this region whose livelihoods depend on it," Sandra Poinsetta, vice president of Unite Here Local 24 and an employee at MGM Grand, said in a statement last week.

Contact Brent Snavely: 313-222-6512, bsnavely@freepress.com or on Twitter @BrentSnavely

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