

Unions, Detroit casinos make progress in contract talks

Written by Administrator

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Greektown Casino Hotel in Detroit, photographed on Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2013. Casino revenues are down this year. Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press(Photo: Detroit Free Press)

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The Detroit Casino Council and Detroit's three casinos said they are making progress towards a new labor agreement to replace a contract that expired Oct. 16 after months of difficult discussions.

Comments made this week by the labor unions and representatives of Greektown Casino, MGM Grand Detroit and MotorCity Casino are the among the most positive since talks began in August.

The negotiations have been closely watched by Detroit officials and community leaders because the casinos represent a top tourism draw for the city, employ thousands of workers and are the city's top source of tax revenue.

"After four days of meetings, the committee has made significant progress this week," the Detroit Casino Council said in an update to members on Thursday.

The council said it has made progress on health care, which has been the biggest sticking point. It added it has "reached tentative agreements on most of the other contract articles."

The progress comes about a week after the council rejected a proposal presented by the casinos.

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The Detroit Casino Council is a consortium of four labor unions that represents about 6,000 workers who are members of UAW Local 7777, Unite Here Local 24, Teamsters Local 372 and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 324.

The casinos issued equally positive statements.

"Negotiations are progressing, and though we face challenges, we believe we can address them together," Steve Zanella, president and chief operating officer of MGM Grand Detroit said in a statement provided to the Free Press.

Marc Whitefield, a spokesperson representing all three casinos, said in a statement that the most recent economic proposal from the unions is "a positive step toward contract resolution."

Whitefield said the casinos are studying health care programs with health-insurance carriers Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Health Alliance Plan.

"Such programs help to control costs without changing the design of the casinos' existing health-care plans," he said.

The casinos said they now need some time to review the latest proposal from the labor unions.

Negotiations are scheduled to resume on Dec. 1.

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