

Advocates, opponents meet in Brockton over casino

Written by Administrator
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BROCKTON — Supporters and opponents of a proposed \$677 million casino in Brockton made their final arguments to the five-member Massachusetts Gaming Commission Monday, one month before the panel is slated to decide the casino's fate.

In a lively hearing that drew some 200 people, City Councilor Anne Beauregard urged the commission to deny the license, saying the proposed site is too close to several schools, a public library, and a Veterans Administration Hospital.

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"It doesn't belong in this neighborhood," Beauregard said. "It's the wrong location." But councilor Jack Lally said a casino would give Brockton a badly needed economic jolt. "We need the jobs," he said. "The city needs the money a casino will bring." The casino would be built off Route 123 at the Brockton Fairgrounds. The company seeking the license, Mass Gaming & Entertainment, is a partnership of the Chicago-based developer Neil Bluhm and local businessman George Carney. The commission is required to consider the level of local support for a casino. In May, Brockton voters approved the project by a margin of just 143 votes. The decision is complicated by a rival plan from the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe, which received preference for the casino license reserved for Southeastern Massachusetts under the 2011 state casino law. Advertisement But the commission's commitment to the tribe wavered last year, when it appeared the tribe faced a lengthy delay in its efforts to have land in Taunton approved for a casino. As a result, the commission opened the license competition to outside bidders. Mass Gaming & Entertainment submitted the only bid. But as the commission moved ahead with its review, the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs approved reservation status for the Taunton land, clearing the way for a casino there. The tribe now plans to break ground in Taunton on April 5. In previous appearances at the commission, Bluhm called his casino as a safer bet, saying it could open by 2018 and be the state's first resort casino. Plans for the Brockton development call for 92,000 square feet of casino space, including 2,100 slot machines and 124 tables, and a 250-room hotel. It would create 1,800 permanent jobs and \$12 million in annual payments to the city, Mass Gaming & Entertainment says. Commission members did not comment on the casino on Monday. Stephen P. Crosby, chairman, said the panel will discuss the Brockton casino in public meetings during the last week of April. At Monday's meeting, Brockton resident Mark Oliver said he expected "a great honeymoon" if a casino opens, but said gambling is not the type of industry that will bring "long-term revitalization." But Carol Harris, a longtime resident, said Brockton "desperately needs some help." "We need a break in this city," she said. "We need something to revitalize the city."

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