

Written by Administrator  
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HERMITAGE – After the second round of state mini-casino license auctions, an economic development authority in Mercer County says chances are still looking good for bringing a casino to the area.

“We’ve been playing kind of a guessing game of when we think Mercer County will be one of the communities bid. We were thinking it would probably be the fifth or sixth auction, but you never know for sure – it could be the next one,” said Randy Seitz, president and CEO of Penn-Northwest Development Corp.

Last year, Pennsylvania adopted a mini-casino law, allowing gambling facilities with 300 to 750 slot machines and 40 table games or fewer. Standard casinos are allowed to have up to 5,000 slot machines and no more than 250 table games.

The second license was auctioned on Jan. 24 to Stadium LLC for \$40.1 million. The category-four casino will be located in Derry Township, Westmoreland County, according to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board.

The first casino license was auctioned to Penn National Gaming for \$50.1 million on Jan. 10. The company, which already operates the Hollywood Casino near Harrisburg and Hollywood Gaming at the Mahoning Valley Race Course in Austintown, Ohio, won the license to develop a casino in Yoe, York County.

Bidders specify a location and must build within a 15-mile radius of it if they are the winning, highest bidder.

Though Mercer County hasn’t been bid for yet, Seitz said the bidding process is hard to predict due to the casino owners’ business plans.

“Every one of the 10 major casinos in Pennsylvania has their own strategic plan, so why did the first company go after York County and the second after Westmoreland County? Maybe it’s to

keep competition out of their backyard, or possibly infringe on someone else's territory," Seitz said.

The bidding process requires the new casinos to be at least 25 miles from existing Pennsylvania casinos. The closest casinos to this area are in Erie and Pittsburgh.

At least one casino operator has shown interest in Mercer County. County representatives have suggested two sites as ideal places for a new casino – near the Grove City Premium Outlets and at the Shenango Valley Mall in Hermitage.

The outlet mall in Springfield Township has estimated yearly traffic of six million people, while Shenango Valley Mall could benefit from the addition of a casino after the departure last year of anchor stores Macy's and Sears.

Seitz said the departed anchor stores leaves ideal space for a mini-casino.

During a speech Tuesday at the Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce forecast breakfast, Seitz referred to outlet mall as one of Mercer County's top attractions and said the area could use another one.

"Wouldn't it be great if we could attract another destination location like a mini-casino," he said.

The licenses are being auctioned off every two weeks, with the next auction set for 10 a.m. Wednesday, according to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board.

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