

Coquille bets on casino, expands holdings

Written by Administrator
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A quarter-mile of South Pacific Highway frontage in Medford is under the control of the Coquille tribe after it spent more than \$6 million over the past three years for properties around a proposed casino.

"We've always thought about hotels," said Brenda Meade, chairperson of the Coquille Indian Tribal Council. "We've thought about having a venue for a conference center."

Five lots totaling 2.36 acres just north of Charlotte Ann Road and south of Habitat for Humanity Rogue Valley were attained Dec. 12, 2018. The tribe, under the name Medford Commercial Properties II LLC and with a Mill Casino address, paid \$1.62 million, according to county records.

A 2.43-acre lot north of Lowry Lane was purchased for \$2.5 million on Nov. 21, 2018, by I-5 Landholdings LLC, which lists its address as 3201 Tremont Ave., in North Bend, the same address as the Coquille's Mill Casino, according to Jackson County records.

On Nov. 21, 2016, the tribe spent \$2.36 million to buy 3.6 acres on a property just south of Roxy Ann Lanes, the property on which the proposed casino would be built, by I-5 Landholdings LLC, which has the same address as the Mill Casino. The bowling alley remains open.

The agent for the properties is listed as Judy Metcalf, chief executive officer of Coquille Economic Development Council, the business arm of the tribe.

The tribe owns a 2.42-acre property that contains Roxy Ann Lanes, which it bought in 2012 for \$1.6 million as the site for the casino. The federal government, after seven years of review, has yet to determine whether the 2.42-acre property should be considered tribal land.

"We are still very frustrated waiting for land to be placed into trust," Meade said.

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Altogether, the tribe owns or controls about 45 acres of property around the proposed casino.

She said the tribe isn't able to make plans for the properties it has purchased until the federal government makes a decision on the 2.42-acre property.

Meade said she hopes the federal government will make its decision this year, noting that a new secretary of the Interior — David Bernhardt — was recently named to succeed Ryan Zinke in January.

The tribe heard in April 2018 that the federal government was going to fast track the application, Meade said.

Even if the federal government rejects the tribe's casino plans, Meade said the tribe will explore other options for the properties it's purchased in Medford.

In 2017, the federal Office of Indian Gaming said the tribe could have a casino if the property is [declared reservation land](#)

. The casino has been opposed by other tribes, by former

[Gov. John Kitzhaber](#)

, and by the Jackson County commissioners, the city of Medford and U.S. Sens.

[Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley](#)

The Coquille tribe wants to build a casino called Cedars at Bear Creek along Highway 99 in south Medford. Earlier plans called for the tribe to convert the current Roxy Ann Lanes bowling alley and the former site of Kim's restaurant into a casino with 650 video gambling machines, though not the card games available at other larger casinos in the state, such as Seven Feathers in Canyonville.

The tribe has a lease on almost 32 acres where the former Kim's Restaurant was located, a property that stretches from South Pacific to Interstate 5 and traverses Bear Creek where it borders U.S. Cellular Community Park.

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The tribe, under the name Medford Commercial Properties LLC, bought four lots south of Charlotte Ann totaling 2.3 acres for \$675,000 in August 2012.

“As they became available, we said, ‘Let’s add on,’” said Ray Doering, communications director for the Coquille Economic Development Council.

Doering said he disputed some of the dollar amounts the tribe is listed as paying on county records, but declined to provide any updated numbers.

“While we generally do not discuss the terms of our purchases, I can say that these were very complex transactions, and the dollar figure you came up with would not be at all accurate,” he stated in an email response.

Doering said the tribe has a commitment to the city of Medford even if the casino is not approved. He said the tribe thinks of the properties as a good investment in the community.

“They’re very strategic properties as far as we’re concerned,” he said.

He said when a master plan is completed, the details about what the tribe is considering would be revealed.

Despite the sizable investment, Doering said the tribe has no concrete plans for the properties until the federal government acts.

Councilor Kevin Stine said, “Personally, I’m not opposed to the idea of having a casino in Medford.”

He said he’d like to get more information from the tribe about its plans, noting the actual area for

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the casino is a small part of the overall acreage controlled by the tribe.

In the past, the council has been opposed to the casino, but since Stine joined the council in 2014, he has seen relatively little opposition to the casino being voiced, he said.

The decision-making for the tribal lands is in the hands of the federal government, not city officials, he said.

“The council has very little to do here,” he said.

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